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“YOU DONE LOST YO’ MIND AIN’T NO SUCH THANG AS AAVE”: EXPLORING AFRICAN AMERICAN RESISTANCE TO AAVE

by

TIFFANY MARQUISE JONES

Under the Direction of Dr. Mary B. Zeigler

ABSTRACT

John Rickford (1990) states that “80%-90% of African Americans speak some form of Black English”, also known as “Ebonics” or “African American Vernacular English” (AAVE). In 1996, when the Oakland School Board proposed its resolution designating Ebonics as their students’ primary language, many African Americans outright rejected the School Board’s reference and description of their language (Smitherman, 2000, 150). Among them were Baby boomers (1940-1960s), who participated in the debates, and the Generation X’ers, (1960s-1980s), who were informed by the debates. A recent interview of members from both groups show that there is continued skepticism regarding the legitimacy of Ebonics as a language. Their resistance offers much to learn about intergroup relations and conflict. This research explores these components of group identity by examining the in-group language responses to the question of whether Ebonics, AAVE, or Black English is a language.

INDEX WORDS: In-group resistance, Group Identity, Intergroup relations, Ethnic Identity, African American Vernacular English, Ebonics, Black English, language attitudes

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2008

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EXPLORING AFRICAN AMERICAN RESISTANCE TO AAVE

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Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2008

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family. This is for my grandmother ("Mudear") who constantly reminded me how privileged I was to receive a higher education. She was not allotted the same opportunities as I have been, but is truly one of the most brilliant women I know. Mudear, you encourage me to go all the way!

This is for my Aunt Gwen, who often provided me with a hearty breakfast that I would have never received otherwise. Gwen, this may seem small or even negligible to you. But, I will have you know that this "small" contribution was often the fuel I needed when I was running on empty, both nutritionally and emotionally.

This is for my Mother, who has always let me know that I was not in this alone. This process has often brought me to tears, and she was always there to wipe them away. Mama, your support is limitless. Your love and encouragement always gives me that extra boost to reach higher than I ever believe I can.

This is for my closest friends and colleagues who prayed for me and put up with my absenteeism and hysterics throughout this entire process. I am truly blessed to have so many coaches, cheerleaders, counselors, and mentors in my life. Though I can't name you all, your names are permanently etched in my heart, which is filled with nothing but love and gratitude for all of you.

The completion of this effort is truly a blessing. I thank God for the discipline, motivation, and my earthly angels to help me see this through. I love you all!!!

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I would like to acknowledge my committee for jumping into a gruesome process. I realize that you took a chance on me as I pushed to accomplish the "impossible". Despite the fact that many would have ran in the opposite direction, you said "yes" to my plea to serve as my readers. I am so thankful you did!

Last but not least, I would also like to acknowledge the great thinkers who have come before me, blazing a trail for young, Black female scholars like myself. Knowing that I am part of such a great tradition is such an honor. I realize the responsibility I take on as I join the ranks of some awesome scholars who continue push to for language and cultural diversity in and outside academe. I take pride in knowing that I follow such brilliance, and I only pray that my scholarship will reflect what I have learned from you all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background & Context of study

As a Masters student of Rhetoric and Composition with a focus in Composition Theory and Pedagogy, it has been my goal to acquire a foundation of knowledge that would prepare me to develop my own pedagogical practices. Thus, decisions about my coursework were made with this goal in mind. For example, classes such as Composition Theory and Composition Pedagogy were chosen on the basis that they were said to prepare future teachers of first-year composition. However, it was not until my last semester of coursework that I realized my breadth of knowledge was severely lacking a key understanding of language, specifically language variations. Because language study was not required for my program, I had not even known about such concepts as language acquisition, language variation, or cultural vernaculars. So, when I started to hear reference to the concept of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), I was completely dumbfounded. As a African American woman, I found it quite disturbing to hear others speak about a term that was said to describe my language and have no knowledge of the concept. Also, after hearing several students' version of AAVE, I found myself with both conflict—because at the time I did not agree that it was an actual language—and curiosity. In order to combat this conflict and explore this curiosity, I decided to register for a course that would accomplish this task. Therefore, I took what is called the Modern Grammar course as fulfillment of my last elective for my MA.

The Modern Grammar course designed to offer a comprehensive look at the English language, included its history. The class also provided a broad introduction to language acquisition and variation. When the class finally reached the subject of AAVE, I faced my skepticism by immersing myself with knowledge of the subject. Originally, my pursuits in understanding this complex subject were based on the need to prove or disprove my skepticism about AAVE. However, the more I learned about the origin and linguistic attributes of the language, the more I was able to embrace the concept. Needless to say, obtaining this newfound knowledge not only dispelled my skepticism but fueled a new research interest. In fact, I was so energized and eager about this subject-matter that I immediately wanted to discuss this interest with other friends and colleagues. What I found most interesting was that others who had not received any formal training in language study, and particularly of interest to me were those of Black ethnicity, shared my original skepticism. I had heard everything from "there is no such thing as AAVE" to "only poor folks speak that slang stuff." This reaction immediately angered me. It wasn't until I remembered that I too held the same attitudes toward the language that I was able to take an objective interest in their resistance. Instead of trying to convince my cohorts otherwise, I decided to use their reaction as basis of this study, which will be guided by the following questions:

- What is African American Vernacular English?
- Where did it come from? How has it evolved?
- Who accepts the language? Who does not?
- If 80%-90% of African Americans speak AAVE, why is there such resistance to the language?
- How does this resistance affect intergroup relations within the African American speech community?

Basically, I am using my own experience as a former skeptic of AAVE as a research opportunity to explore African American resistance to the language. In-group resistance offers much to learn about language attitudes as well as about intergroup relations and conflict. By examining the in-group responses to the question of whether Ebonics, AAVE, or Black English is a language, this study hopes to offer new understandings of in-group dynamics within the African American language community.

Origin of African American Vernacular English

The term we, as scholars of language, have come to know as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), has gone through several transitions since its first appearance in the late 60's and early 70's. Scholars such as J.L Dillard (1973), John Baugh (1983, 2000), John Rickford and Russell Rickford (2000), and Geneva Smitherman (1977, 2000) have all embraced the challenge of defining, interpreting and/or explaining these terms: Black Talk, Black English, Ebonics, or African American Vernacular English. However, what has proven to be an uphill battle for these saviors of the language is educating a nation of skeptics that seek to label it as nothing more than "bad grammar". In fact, most people that have an opinion of what African American English is or "what it ain't" aren't usually knowledgeable of the working definitions and/or grammar rules that linguistically characterize this form of speech as a language. So, what is African American Vernacular English and where did it come from? In order to fully understand this complex topic, it is best to first trace the history of the language from its origins

dating back to Slavery and then follow its evolution to the present. For the sake of this study, I will adhere to the most recent acceptable title, African American Vernacular English, in referencing this form of speech. However, in tracing the history of the language, I will acknowledge each additional labeling (i.e. Black Talk, Black English, and Ebonics) which must not be confused as a different subject.

While the origins of African American Vernacular English is a source of debate, most scholars link its beginnings to the language mixing that occurred among the slaves brought to America. According to J.L. Dillard (1973), it was quite common for slave traders to favor particular tribes and areas; thus, the languages spoken by the slaves did not immediately vanish. In fact, these slaves tried to preserve their cultural ties to Africa by insisting on speaking in their mother-tongues. However, Dillard acknowledges that eventually "they all found themselves in a situation in which they had to learn an auxiliary language in a hurry in order to establish communication in the heterogeneous groups into which they were thrown" (74). This need for quick communication made a perfect situation for creating a pidgin language, which is defined as a "simplified variety of the socially dominant language (in this case English)" that "shows strong grammatical influences from the languages of the socially subordinate speakers who bear the primary burden of linguistic accommodation and play the central role in creating it" (Rickford & Rickford, *Spoken Soul*, 132). The pidgin was created out of necessity, so that communication was possible both among the slaves and the slave owners as well as between the slaves themselves.

The pidgin language adapted by these African slaves became the lingua franca, or language for wider communication. Eventually the language was transferred to the next generation of slaves, who acquired the pidgin as their first language. When this acquisition occurred, the pidgin became what is known as a Creole language (Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk*, 32). As the slave trade continued to flourish, importing numerous slaves straight from Africa to the American Colonies, the Black population increased dramatically. Whites, who were becoming outnumbered, distanced themselves from the slave community. Thus, language was no longer acquired through interaction with their white masters; instead slaves were introduced to English by other slaves. The Creole language, then, became the dominant means of communication and eventually a tool for cultural distinction. John Rickford and Russell Rickford (2000) attribute the continued presence of the Creole as means for slaves to differentiate themselves from their oppressors. They state that "no slave who had had his ears nailed to a post and severed from his head would have wanted to speak exactly like his persecutors, no matter how many hours he had worked alongside them in the fields" (135). In other words, the Black English vernacular became for the slaves a source of establishing their own collective, cultural identity.

While over the years the language has evolved, making it so that Black English and White English is not as dissimilar as it once was, forms of the original Black speech are still in existence today (Smitherman, 1997, 10). Throughout the history of the language, Black English has endured a process of "decreolization", where the language has transformed into a "more American and less African" form (11). However, as it became the trend for Blacks, especially abolitionists, to prove themselves equal to their White adversaries, the ability to speak Standard American English also became a necessity.

This ability to speak "proper English" has functioned as a means of survival and prosperity, allowing Blacks the chance to operate within American society. Blacks who spoke Standard or "acceptable" English, became distinguishable from their counterparts who remained constants in speaking the Black English Vernacular. As a result, a rift developed within the African American community. Today Blacks are charged with dealing with a conflicted sense of identity in which speaking a particular vernacular can mean acceptance in one community and rejection by another. Scholars now have been trying to determine ways of acknowledging that Blacks, in general, still speak very differently from what Standard American English requires. Gaining acceptance of African American Vernacular English as a recognizable and credible language has been half the battle. And, the rest has been in how to accommodate those students whose primary language is AAVE.

The Black Experience and the Struggle with Identity

Part of the Black experience in the U.S. includes the struggle of establishing an acceptable identity that fits within folds of society. Because societal norms are dictated by the majority or those in power— the majority being White Americans in this case— Blacks have had to assume behaviors that identify with the dominant group. In many cases, this assimilation has been equated as a survival technique, both literally and metaphorically. Survival in colonial times literally meant the difference between life and death, while today its means attaining economic success.

Sniderman and Piazza (2002), scholars of racial identity and attitudes, explore how solidarity is achieved in a particular ethnic group. They pose the idea that "identification with the in-group encourages rejection of the out-group" (105). In other words unity is possible if

there are shared common goals, interests, beliefs, etc. by those considered part of the shared group. If this notion is plausible, then it would be fair to propose that identification with individuals in the out-group may encourage rejection of those in the in-group. If an individual seeks acceptance in some form or another by members of a different community, then it is highly likely that they may have to distance themselves from their ideals not acceptable to that community. In more extreme cases, an individual may even dissociate themselves from their original group. Still, how is this idea relevant in understanding Black resistance to African American Vernacular?

Smitherman (1977) indicates that during the days of slavery, many slaves were able to escape, buy their freedom, or were even released by the slave owners themselves. For these liberated individuals freedom did not mean living a burden-free existence. In fact, freedom came with a whole new set of problems. Smitherman writes, "An important mark of the free person of color, and thus a survival necessity…was linguistic competence in White English" (13). Essentially, those who did not master the "acceptable" form of English were quickly labeled as a runaway, which meant facing harsh punishment or even death. Even then in colonial times, there is a clear distinction between "good" and "bad" English, or Black and White speech. This distinction also meant that Blacks were divided into those who could and could not speak the language of their oppressors.

Usually, those who were able to master "White English" were individuals that had closer proximity to the White community than those who spoke the stigmatized plantation language. This notion alludes to the infamous separation between the house Negro and the field Negro. Though these particular categorizations are not as prevalent today, this distinction is still present

in some form. Now, the division exists between "the Afristocrasy" (Dyson, 2005) and "ghetto folk" or "Uncle Tom's" and the "ignut nigguhs" (Smitherman, 2000). No matter what phrasing is used to classify these two groups, it is clear that there is a conflict between the Black middle-class and the urban poor.

Nevertheless, regardless of how a person chooses to distinguish himself, it's clear that both groups are undeniably linked together. As Shelby (2005) explains, a collection of individuals bonded together either by race, class, gender, or ethnicity assumes a group identity. Therefore, "fellow members are treated as if they were an extension of the self, so that one feels pride when a member of the group does something praiseworthy or shame when a fellow member does something embarrassing, almost as if one had done the deed oneself (68). Now more than ever, language serves as a key indicator of social status. Thus, being linked with any form of speech labeled as "bad", "wrong", "substandard" or "lazy"— or labeled as part of those who speak in such a manner— could be detrimental, creating a struggle for both a positive self-concept and group identity. This struggle has created a situation for people within the Black community to either reject, question, or judge parts of their own culture.

Methodology

Historical Research

Dillard, Smitherman, Baugh, and Rickford have all contributed to the body of knowledge that has helped legitimize African American Vernacular English. In terms of their methods for approaching this task, all of these scholars used historical and discourse analysis methods in order to connect the structures of AAVE to the West African languages— languages also noted to be used by Slaves in the U.S. Using historical data has given credence to their argument,

allowing these scholars to revise the common thinking that labeled AAVE as “bad English”. Their accounts of the language has solidified that African Americans do, indeed, have their own systematic language.

This study acknowledges the groundwork performed by the aforementioned scholars as the foundation for what is to be accomplished with this research. Thus, this study also revisits history, particularly events that have influenced or affected Black language, identity, and education (i.e. Brown vs. Board of Education, Civil Rights Movement, the birth of Hip Hop). These events establish contexts for the two generational groups (Black Baby Boomers and Black Gen-X’ers) targeted in this study. This study also uses historical information in order to trace the evolution of language attitudes prevalent during the rearing and education of both groups.

While out-group attitudes is considered and used for contextual purposes, the main focus of this research is to examine in-group prejudice towards AAVE. In accordance with this intention, this study uses The Ebonics Resolution, which later became known as the Ebonics Debate, as a “historical marker” for in-group prejudice and resistance to the language. The reactions of the in-group respondents who participated in the debate will be used as a benchmark, allowing a comparison to the reactions of the in-group respondents employed during this study. Having a current establishment of in-group knowledge, use, and attitudes towards AAVE will help measure the progression of in-group bias since the late 90’s, the period of the Ebonics Debates.

Speech Community and Social Network Analysis

Wray and Bloomer posit that "speakers often, consciously or unconsciously, use language to convey their social identity", thus having similar speech patterns can also help "groups to seem distinctive when compared to others" (2006, 96). In other words, language can be used to identify members within a particular speech community, also known as "social networks". While this concept has been borrowed from the social science field, sociolinguistic scholars have consistently used research social network analysis in order to study how language defines community. According to Ben-Rafael, "the closer the individual's ties with his or her local community, the more he or she uses the local vernacular" (1994, 28). This research seeks to study members of the African American speech who outright reject the language. Analyzing in-group members' participation in this social network as well as their knowledge, use, and attitudes towards the "local vernacular" will allow for analysis of how communal ties have been redefined within that speech community.

In order to identify language attitudes of in-group members, the study collects and examines qualitative data gathered through interviews and surveys. Particularly, this research focuses on two groups: the Black middle class from both the Baby Boomer generation and their descendents, Generation X. By learning how one generation is (mis)educated about AAVE, this study is able to draw parallels between the educational practices used for both generations. Comparison of both generations' historical and educational contexts allows for exploration of the development of their language attitudes.

This research has been limited to individuals within the Black middle class because members of this group have been most likely to reject the language in question, AAVE (Fought, 2006). The Baby Boomer population was educated in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, when educational reform for African Americans was a high priority. However, during this time there was also an abundance of racist ideology that may have permeated the mentalities of this generational group. Understanding how this group was (mis)educated and possibly how these attitudes were still prevalent during the education of the proceeding generational group, helps highlight negative teaching practices that should be avoided in the future. The goal, of course, becomes avoiding the perpetuation of in-group prejudice towards AAVE by members of the generations to come.

Advocacy Research

Overall, each of the acknowledged texts serving as a foundation for this study all seem to share one agenda: to promote change in the acceptance and treatment of cultural vernaculars in academe. Basically, scholars of these texts took on the role of advocate with a specific focus in prompting action from scholars and educators alike. As John Creswell (2003) notes, advocacy research is "focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in media, in language, in work procedures" and, most importantly, in "the relationships of power in educational settings" (11). An alternative method with similar measures is what Mary Sue MacNealy (1999), an empirical research scholar, labels as action research. Again, the goal is to achieve change.

This study joins in this cause to develop new ways of understanding in-group prejudice, ethnic identity, and, particularly, African American identity. These concepts, especially in reference to the African American community, have often been studied in ways that promote the idea that African American language and identity can be defined in simple terms. This research advocates continued study of African American language and identity but in ways that broadens these subjects and accommodates them both as multifaceted concepts. Helping to generate a new understanding of these concepts will hopefully alleviate further marginalization of AAVE by members of the out-group and by in-group members as well.

Contribution to the Field

While much of the current scholarship on AAVE makes some reference to in-group bias, most of the references are developed out of examination of the Ebonics resolution. The 1996 Ebonics Debate is notably the biggest and most recent public display of black resistance to AAVE; however, it has been over a decade since the occurrence of this event. Have in-group attitudes towards AAVE changed since then? If not, why not? What factors contribute to the perpetuation of these negative attitudes by members of the in-group? While there may not be one concrete answer, exploring these questions in a current context will help update the understanding of African American resistance towards AAVE. Now, in 2008, it is important to see how far attitudes have come so that scholars can determine the next steps for the future.

In terms of language variations, AAVE is just one of the many dialects that have experienced marginalization and stigmatization by members of the out-group (i.e. Jamaican Creole, Scottish dialect, and languages of Indigenous Peoples). It is likely that issues with in-group prejudice and conflict also exist within these groups as result of negative language attitudes. Understanding

how intergroup conflict operates in one ethnic or minority group offers insight into dealing with other language varieties as well. Thus, this research also hopes to add to the growing body of knowledge that further promotes acceptance of all cultural and ethnic dialects.

Chapter 2: Interdisciplinary Contributions to Group Identity Studies

Group Identity

Understanding group identity and membership has long been an interdisciplinary interest among scholars, as seen by the extensive amount of research dedicated to this concept. Merely the purpose of establishing a definitive definition for the concept of group identity has generated an abundance of scholarship. The definition of group identity varies depending on the context of its application. These contexts have ranged from politics (Herring, Jankowski, and Brown, 1999); religion (Lazerwitz and Bernard, 1970); ethnicity (Davis 1999); or race (Bonnet, 1980; Broman, Neighbors and Jackson, 1988; Dyson 2006). Having such a broad range of contexts and applications makes it impossible to trace the concept of group identity without taking an interdisciplinary perspective. For the purposes of this study, the fields that provide the most relevant applications include social psychology, social anthropology, sociology and sociolinguistics. All of these fields in some way have sectors of its scholarship that is concerned with understanding group relations.

Group Dynamics within Social Psychology Studies

The field of social psychology began to flourish as a result of World War II, both in Europe—during post-war reconstruction— and in the United States— as science research escalated with the creation of the atom bomb (Allport, 1985). During this time, the sciences became vested in understanding social and group phenomena. Events like the Great Depression

of the 1930's, the attempted genocide of the Jews, and other "wartime activities such as…studying domestic attitudes" and "developing international relations all required refining as well as inventing new concepts and research tools" (Moscovici and Markova, 2006: 29). As a result of these tragedies, the social sciences, particularly social psychology, were presented with the opportunity and responsibility for explaining such occurrences.

According to Moscovici and Markova (2006), American social psychology led the field with its post-war scholarship that investigated returning soldiers' social experiences upon readjusting into everyday life, seen in such works as *The American Solider* by Samuel Stouffer (1949). Another factor for the advancement of social psychology in the States is the migration of European scholars and researchers (Moscovici and Markova, 2006, 31). One of the most influential imports was that of Kurt Lewin, who spawned research in what is known as group dynamics. His work, "An Experimental Study of the Effect of Democratic and Authoritarian Group Atmospheres," (1940) was "the undertaking, from a field-theoretical approach, [that] sought to experiment with the social processes of group living (Sahakian, 1982, 309). Lewin generated a new field dedicated to group dynamics, including research conducted on small groups (Reichert 1970).

Lewin's development of group dynamics quickly expanded, starting with his pupil and successor, Leon Festinger. Lewin developed influential research experiments that tested levels of commitment and "group cohesiveness" (1951). His work "Interpersonal communication in Small Groups" was based on his experimentation with small group communication. In these experiments, he explored the relationship between group communication and their compulsion

toward uniformity and homogeneity. He found that in situations where uniformity and homogeneity was high communication was often dictated by those with the most extreme viewpoints. His work not only incorporated groundbreaking use of group manipulation, but the concept of "group cohesiveness" led to other influential works that furthered the discussion of group dynamics.

Inspired by the political debacle surrounding the Bay of Pigs, Irving Janis's performed landmark studies on "groupthink", which is defined as "a strong psychological drive for consensus within insular, cohesive decision-making groups such that disagreement is suppressed and the decision process becomes defective" (Abelson and Levi, 1985). He established that groups with high cohesiveness are more than likely to demonstrate the groupthink mentality. His goal was to bring awareness of the affects that social phenomena has on the decision-making processes as well as the "collective actions" of leadership has on their followers. Janis's work left its imprint on the social psychology field, initiating an array of studies on new theories and concepts, including social group identity (Turner, 1987 and 1999), intergroup relations (Tafjel, 1981; Abrams and Hoggs, 1988; Reicher 2004), and group norms (Hogg, 2000).

Group Consciousness within Social Anthropology Studies

Social Anthropology is another field concerned with man's formation of social groups (Holy, 346). While group study was becoming an integral part of social psychology, social anthropologists were simultaneously exploring their own notions of group identity. Richard

Adams (1951) drew connections between the concept of group consciousness—also identified as the "feeling of communal interest"— and notions of "ethnocentrism"— described as the idea that one's own culture is superior to another (598). In his work "Enthocentrisim and Ingroup Consciousness", he notes how daily means of socialization and enculturation, where one learns rules of functioning within a given culture, simultaneously provides a means of comparison to measure other cultures against. While Adams acknowledges that these norms are necessary and help forge a group identity, he notes their encouragement of ethnocentric thinking (599). In other words, one does not learn that a particular way of living is right without also learning that a certain way of living is wrong.

Speech Communities within Linguistic Anthropology Studies

Moving from the idea of group studies as solely a socialization phenomenon—as do the social psychology and social anthropology fields— Linguistic Anthropology emerged as a subfield and started to make inquiries about the language(s) of groups. As a field inherently concerned with the culture of man— and language being a cultural marker (Bloch, 1991, 184)— it is understandable why anthropologists have become interested in the relationship between identity formation of groups and their linguistic practices. Because it is inherently imbedded in the field of Anthropology, Linguistic Anthropology has human socialization as its first concern. However, according to Duranti (1997) what set it apart as its own distinct field is the use of language as a lens to analyze social and group interactions of humans. The main purpose of this

form of research is "to look at a group of people's daily dealings with one another from the point of view of the communication they exchange and the communicative resources they employ" (82). In other words, linguistic approaches have been applied to the subject-matter of anthropology (4).

In terms of studies on group identity or behavior, Linguistic Anthropology has delved into the exploration of "speech communities", specifically the language and/or variations spoken by them (Duranti, 72). Marcyliena Morgan (2000) notes that linguistic anthropology uses the term "speech community" to refer "to speakers who participate in interactions based on social and cultural norms and values that are regulated, represented, and re-created through discursive practices." Through examination of distinct speech communities, linguistics scholars have shown how language can be used as a protector of ethnic identity or as a signal of one's individual status (Kroskity, 1993; Woolard, 1989).

Kroskity's *Language, History, and Identity: Ethnolinguistic Studies of the Arizona Tewa is* a layering of ethnography, discourse analysis, and historical study where he explores the languages practiced within the Tewa speech community. Kroskity informs that the Tewa speech community has three languages choices to use at their discretion: Tewa, Hopi, and English. Having these language choices allows the Tewa to interact with other tribes and discourse communities. However, they are able to establish and maintain their own unique group identity by speaking the Tewa language. Woolard's Double *Talk: Bilingualism and the Politics of Ethnicity in Catalonia* focuses on Catalan, which is deemed as a "minority language" in Spain. This text explores the causes of conflict among ethnic groups through examination of cultural and linguistic practices used to express their situation. Both Kroskity and Woolard's work

demonstrate a goal that is shared between Linguistic Anthropology and Sociolinguistics: to have a "socially minded linguistics" (Duranti, 83).

Ethnic Identity in Sociology Studies

Unlike the fields of Social Psychology and Social Anthropology, who concentrates heavily on the individual's formation of identity, the creators of sociology distinguished themselves by focusing mostly on groups. They believed that "neither social order nor social change could be understood adequately on the basis of individualistic assumptions" (Hechter, 15). However, sociologists did not completely ignore the importance of the individual; instead, they devoted attention to the reciprocal relationship between individual identity and group identity, especially within ethnic communities (Driedger, 1976 and Verkuyten 1991). For example, Driedger highlights how "the differing historical and cultural experiences of seven ethnic groups" within Winnipeg, a town in Western Canada, "is associated with variations in the dimensions of ethnic group self-identity" (131). Verkuyten, on the other hand, looks at group formation of ethnic minority groups within the Netherlands. He focuses on the impact that individual members' "self-definition" has on group preference and behavior. These studies highlight the importance of understanding of how the "self" functions and impacts the group.

Social Networks within Sociolinguistics Studies

According to Coupland and Jaworski (1997), Sociolinguistics is "the study of language in its social contexts and the study of social life through linguistics" (1). Like other sub-fields of linguistics, Sociolinguistics concerns itself with language; its main focus is geared toward understanding the influence language has on social interactions, the establishment of relationships, and depicting the role or identity of the speaker (Wray and Bloomer, 2006).

Sociolinguistics, though relatively younger than the fields of Psychology, Anthropology and Sociology, has managed to spawn several sub-fields (i.e. studies in variation, dialectology, etc.). In terms of its contribution to group identity studies, the field uses "social network analysis"— a concept borrowed from the social sciences— in order to monitor how language is used and altered by individuals in specific within specific groups[1] and (Wray and Bloomer, 96).

The study of social networks— also defined as "speech communities"— has become a large part of Sociolinguistic's focus since the beginning of the field in the 1960's (Wray and Bloomer, 2006; Wardhaugh, 2006). One of the earliest examples of this type of research within Sociolinguistics was done by Labov (1966). He investigated the linguistic practices of the New York City speech community "within the social context of the community in which it is spoken" (1). Labov's study is credited as being "far more ethnographic in nature" than previous studies of linguistics (Wray and Bloomer, 97). His explanation of language as an indicator of someone's place within the social strata moved language study beyond the focus of the individual in isolation from its social surroundings. Also, Labov's focus on the whole of New York City as one group reveals the potential for range in diversity and quantity when defining a single speech community. His depiction was unlike that of his cohorts Chomsky (1965) and Lyons (1970), who both perpetuated notions of homogeneity and simplicity (Wardhaugh, 2006). Instead, Labov set the groundwork for social network analysis of complex speech community groups.

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[1] For sociolinguists, groups are defined as having as least two members, with maximum limit for group members. Membership is not static and can be based on variety of connections, including political, religious, cultural, and, of course, social (Wardhaugh, 2006).

Group Solidarity and Conflict

While much can be observed in viewing each field's distinct macro-level interpretation and representation of group studies, the subject of group identity is multi-faceted in itself. For example, the scope also includes the following concepts: group solidarity (Piazza and Sniderman, 2002; Herring, Jankowski, and Brown, 1999) and in-group resistance (Mufwene, 2001). Group solidarity refers to the influence of group interests— in terms of loyalty and obligation— that exist amongst group members (Hechter, 1987). Group conflict, however, refers to the discrimination that occurs within a group (intra-group conflict) or amongst in-group members (inter-group conflict). These concepts, though embedded within the subject of group identity, are emerging as their own separate subject-areas.

Douglas D. Heckathorn and Judith E. Rosenstein, provides four common practices of solidarity analyses common to the scholars of the social sciences, particularly Homans (1950) and Fararo and Doreian (1998):

> Analyses can focus on the affective bonds that unite members of solidary groups; the norms defining group obligations; the collectively oriented activity patterns characteristic of these group, especially a preponderance of prosocial behavior; and the interaction patterns in which ties within the group are denser than ties across groups (38).

Because each of these categories offers a distinctive approach for handling and/or defining solidarity, it is likely to see converging and often conflicting perspectives on the subject (38). For example, *In Pro-black Doesn't Mean Anti-white: The Structure of African-American Group Identity*, Herring et al. explores group solidarity within the African-American community. They

argue that feelings of the in-group do not automatically imply negative feelings toward the out-group. On the other hand, Piazza and Sniderman's research of what they coin as "Black solidarity," exhibits the perspective that in-group identification promotes rejection of the out-group (105). These studies are representative of the wide array of scholarship present on inter-group conflict.

What is not so prevalent is scholarship that focuses solely on intra-group conflict, especially within African American ethnic and speech community. Salikoko Mufwene's (1999) is one study available that deals with in-group language attitudes. His research involves a series of interviews that captures both Blacks and Whites' responses to questions about AAVE. He uses their responses as comparative data for measuring the knowledge and attitudes of both in-group and out-group members. Dyson (2005) focuses on elitist attitudes from the Black middle class that chooses to blame the urban poor for negative depictions of Black culture. Both scholars' work portrays just some of the in-group prejudice that exists in the African American community. However, as this study reveals the continuity of African American resistance to AAVE, there is much to contribute in the studies of intra-group conflict and African American group identity.

Chapter 3: Ebonics Resolution: A Historical Marker for Resistance

While African American Vernacular English, or AAVE, has obviously been present since Slavery, it did not gain much notice by the general population until the mid 1990's. On December 18th, 1996, educators in the Oakland school district made an announcement that

brought this language into the public forum.[2] The announcement unveiled the school board's resolution, which designated Ebonics as the primary language of their students that would be used as a means to transition its speakers into Standard American English (Smitherman, 2000, 150). What appeared to be a much needed solution and a triumph for advocates of the language actually brought forth much controversy from scholars and non-scholars alike.

The term *Ebonics* was coined in 1973 at a conference entitled "Cognitive and Language Development of the Black Child" by psychologist Robert Williams. There, Williams urged attendees to "define what we speak" and "give a clear definition of our language" (qtd in Baugh, 2000). He wanted a label that would not only classify Black English as a legitimate language but would recognize its ethnic roots as well. Thus, he combined the words "ebony", meaning black, and "phonics", referring to the study of sounds and language, to forge the term *Ebonics*. The concept of Ebonics is by definition no different than its predecessors (Colored English, Negro English, or Black English), except that it completely distinguishes itself from the English language. Still, the idea was to maintain the fact that African Americans have their own language. Also, Ebonics differentiated itself from previous labels in that it avoided any classification that made use of outdated and offensive terminology (Baugh, 2). Despite careful construction of the word and definition of Ebonics, everyone was not pleased. As a matter of fact, the Ebonics resolution is one of the most debated topics in recent American History.

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[2] While the original resolution was announced December 18, 1996, many revisions were made before the final version was passed (Perry and Delpit, 1998). The revisions changed the reference to African American English as a language to the speech African Americans used in their community. The revisions were presented to the Oakland school board January 12, 1997 (146). After the revisions were made, the Task Force on Educating African American Students released their recommendations for meeting the desired outcome of the final revised proposal. Their recommendations were adopted January 21, 1997 (151).

What is clear from The Oakland Resolution is that the Oakland School Board acknowledged a problem with its student body— not necessarily with the students per se but with their level of educational achievement. According to Theresa Perry (1998), "African-American children accounted for 80 percent of the school system's suspensions and 71 percent of the students classified as having special needs." In terms of their grades, Oakland's African American student population averaged a grade of D+ (Perry and Delpit, 3). While this problem was not one unique from other school systems across the country, Oakland made a unique decision to accept the scholarship of linguists stating that Black Language, or Ebonics, is a legitimate language and the primary means of communication for their students. Thus, they believed that using Black Language as a vehicle for transitioning into the standard dialect would improve their students' capabilities to succeed in the classroom.

While this decision largely impacted the students' in Oakland schools, this resolution also meant a new education for teachers as well. In order to prepare teachers for implementing the goals of the Oakland Resolution, the school board had to "address the teachers' knowledge gap about Black Language" and, more importantly, "begin the process of changing their attitudes about the language" (Perry, "I'on Know", 4). The school board acknowledged this obstacle was inevitable and necessary in order to ensure the success of its policies. What was unexpected was the media firestorm that took place and, particularly, the negative responses from members of the Black community.

When the Ebonics debate was forced into the limelight, it spread beyond the linguistic community and into the homes of everyday citizens. Most of these people were completely uninformed about the definition and history of the subject at hand. In other words, people who had expressed blatant disregard for the idea of Black language, in many cases, had not been introduced to the concept before Oakland announced its resolution (Baugh, *Black Ebonics*, 27). Furthermore, what made matters worse was that the opinions that were formulated by those newly acquainted with Ebonics were based on misrepresentations presented by the equally uninformed media. The press, who was in idiomatic terms "having a field day" with this issue, presented the Oakland board's resolution as the goal to teach Ebonics to its students or use it for classroom instruction (Rickford, Spoken Soul, 188). Actually, the real objective was to acknowledge the students' mother-tongue as a means to bridge them into using Standard American English.

Many of those who adamantly spoke out against Ebonics perpetuated negative stereotypes that further stigmatized that language. In many cases, Ebonics was written off as a substandard form of speech denoted mostly as "bad grammar". In fact, this belief crossed racial boundaries; Many Blacks as well as Whites argued that it was a lazy form of English, which was inherently incorrect and spoken by the uneducated. Others identified the speech as slang, or hip-hop language (Shores, 105). Regardless of race or ethnicity, there was strong resentment against the language from both out-group and in-group members. Because out-group prejudice is expected, it is widely examined by scholarship. In-group prejudice, on the other hand, while unexpected is not necessarily unusual, especially in dealing with a marginalized language and community; however, it is a segment of scholarship that has not received nearly as much focus.

In-Group Resistance toward AAVE

Among the in-group respondents who adamantly expressed their disdain for Ebonics were those who believed it to be counterproductive in the struggle to equalize Blacks with Whites. Several respectable, publicized African Americans spoke out against AAVE; most notably quoted were Maya Angelou, Jesse Jackson, and. Kweisi Mfume (then NAACP president). Among the three, the most gut-wrenching response was that of Reverend Jesse Jackson who called the Ebonics resolution "an unacceptable surrender, borderlining on disgrace" (Rickford & Rickford, 5). Another memorable response was stated by then University of California's regent, Ward Connerly. Connerly, who had also successfully campaigned to end affirmative action within his institution— an idea not welcomed by Jackson— made the following comment on the subject-matter:

> These are not kids who came from Africa last year…These are kids that have had every opportunity to acclimate themselves to American society, and they gotten themselves into this trap of speaking this language— this slang, really that people can't understand. Now we're going to legitimize it" (qtd. in Rickford & Rickford, 5).

Interestingly, Connerly, who prior to the Ebonics debate had possessed a viewpoint contrary to Jackson's, now aligned with him. These two individuals once had totally different approaches to handling minority circumstances, particularly that of Blacks, found themselves sharing the same views towards the idea of a Black language.

Many Blacks in the general public also followed suit, denouncing the idea of Ebonics as insulting, disastrous, and embarrassing (Rickford, 2000, 6). What is so intriguing about the opposition from the Black community is that many of those who spoke out against Ebonics—

specifically regarding those in the public forum— used some form of the language as a means to portray Black culture. For example, Bill Cosby, who has also been seen condemning the language of Black urban youth, displayed many forms of African American speech in his popular cartoon series, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (Dyson, 2005, 8). Maya Angelou, whose poetry has been strategically laced with examples of AAVE, had also denounced its usage. Theresa Perry's (1997) response to these negative responses encapsulates this paradox:

> *How is it that long-time civil rights organizations and activists ended up on the same side of the barricade with their traditional and current adversaries? How did it happen that Jesse Jackson, Kwesi Mfume, and Maya Angelou joined with William Bennett, George Will, Rush Limbaugh, and Pete Wilson to take aim at the Oakland decision? Why did folks who love the language, use it exquisitely, and whose personal and political power is in no small measure tied to their use of Black language, register ambivalence or outright rejection of the board's call for the recognition of the legitimacy of Black Language and its suggestion that it be used to help African-American children become fluent readers and writers?* (5).

Furthermore, what does this say about the unity within the Black community? And, what does this suggest about Black identity, the Black experience, and how Blacks respond to pressure to conform and assimilate? These are, indeed, legitimate questions that deserve additional inquiry.

Chapter 4: Contextualizing Two Generations of the In-Group

In terms of group classification, looking at the in-group respondents who rejected Ebonics, it's obvious that they are all from the same ethnic group: African American. As a result of their ethnic classification, most would also place these individuals in the same speech

community. Their responses to the Ebonics Resolution and their attitudes toward Black Language suggest otherwise; these individuals challenged the notion that 80-85% of African Americans speak— or believe they speak— AAVE.

Out-group resistance is always seen and expected; thus, it is a subject constantly explored by language and culture scholars. In-group resistance, on the other hand, has not been as heavily scrutinized. Lanehart (1996) asserts that "language can be a means of solidarity, resistance, and identity within a culture or social group" (24). In order to explore this notion, this study sought out several in-group members who were asked to share their knowledge and opinions of Black English/Ebonics/AAVE. This study particularly focuses on two generations: the Baby Boom generation and Generation-X.

Both Black Baby Boomers— who were mostly middle-aged around the time of the debates— and Black Gen-X'ers— who were mostly still in the midst of their secondary or post-secondary education— also developed their own opinions about the Ebonics Resolution. Similar to the Black leaders, authors and political figures that publicly rejected AAVE, the announcement of the Ebonics Resolution served as their first introduction to the idea of Black Language. Their responses to AAVE can help trace how attitudes have progressed since the late 1990's. Thus, this study will delve into the language used by both African American generational groups used to respond to questions about AAVE— the goal being that their responses will reveal how language use and attitudes influence group identity within the African American speech community.

Who are the Baby Boomers?

While defining a generation can be, and has been, a very difficult task, several scholars (Jones, 1980; Light, 1988) recognize Baby Boomers as one of the most influential generations in U.S. history. As Coward, et al. states, "It is, above all, the biggest, richest, and best-educated generation America has ever produced" (1). Their name alone gives credence to that fact that this generation is first of all memorable for their contribution to the world's population. Because the Baby Boom generation both follows and proceeds generations that caused a decline in the birthrate, their numbers achieve a "permanent moving bulge in the population" also described by demographers as a "pig in a python" (Jones, 1980). Starting from 1946 and ending with the year 1964, the Baby Boom generated approximately 75 million "boomers" (Light, 1988). However, their size alone does not explain why this generation is considered to be one of the most distinctive and significant parts of U.S. history.

While the Baby Boomers are recognized to be one of the most diverse generations in U.S. history— in terms of race, pedigree, social status, and wealth— what they do share in cultural and historical phenomena binds them in a much less superficial way. Light asserts this bond in the following statement:

> They grew up as the first standardized generation, drawn together by the history around them, the intimacy of the television, and the crowding that came from the sheer onslaught of the other baby boomers. They shared the great economic expectations of the 1950's

> and the fears that came with Sputnik and the down of the nuclear era. They shared the hopes of John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, and the disillusionment that came with the assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate, and the resignations (Light, 10).

In short, the Baby Boom generation has witnessed some of America's most brilliant and troubled times.

While this study fully gives credence to holistic descriptions of Baby Boomers— descriptions that portray a generalized depiction of this group — is it safe to assume that these perspectives do not fully acknowledge the unique experiences of African Americans within this group? What cannot be ignored is the fact that the Baby Boomers' most formative years occurred during a period of racial separation, desegregation, and integration. Thus, African American Baby Boomers undoubtedly differ— in terms of experience and perspectives— from fellow White Boomers. Because this study is focused on the language and identity of African Americans, it is necessary to highlight the particular historical and cultural context of Black Baby Boomers.

Historical Context of Black Baby Boomers

The African American experience has often times included the struggle to find and define an acceptable identity. Part of that struggle is visible in the various name changes Blacks have experienced over time. Zeigler (1996) acknowledges that this business of name-changing reveals that Blacks had "found themselves see-sawing from the European to the African to some innocuous middle-ground in search of the 'appropriate' name" (4). Smitherman (1994) accounts for these name changes by ascribing them to four intervals of time. Black Baby Boomers fall

within two of these intervals: 1) one period that took place during the years 1808-1966 and 2) another period that is defined as 1966- to the present (4). The changes reflected during these two segments of history reveal much about the identity negotiation of Black Boomers (Zeigler, 3).

The phase that spans the years 1808-1966, which Smitherman defines as the 3rd period, is deemed the longest of the four intervals. During this time, Blacks endured the most changes, in terms of naming and identity formation, then in any other time period. The first of these changes occurred when Blacks began capitalizing the "N" in Negro. Later, this designation gave way to "Afro-American", which was later replaced by the descriptor "Black". These changes are, of course, a reflection of the political and social climate of that time, and it was during this time that Blacks were beginning to take control in defining their nomenclature— a practice that was once forced upon them by their oppressors.

The change reflected in this time period was not only seen in the labeling of African Americans but also the language use and attitudes of this group as well. In fact, it was during this time frame that the "decreolization" process occurred. Blacks— as they were appropriately called toward the end of this period— began adopting the standard dialect in order to either establish more of an "American" persona or distinguish communication that occurred with outsiders from what occurred within their own community. Not sure if they should want to be a part of "America" or establish their own, separate existence, Blacks began demonstrating what Smitherman calls the "push-pull" effect (5). At the close of this time period, however, they were convinced that literacy needed to be acquired as an element of survival. This notion was further encouraged by the events leading to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which legally gave Blacks the right to vote. Before this act was passed, a lack of education often meant the difference between participating in and being excluded from governmental policies (Adair, 1984).

Because this time period takes place during the Baby Boomers's early years, it may be argued that these events occurred much too early to have a significant impact on this group. However, the eldest of Baby Boomers had been in existence at least 20 years by 1966. The youngest of this generation, though they may not have witnessed these events firsthand, was reared in a society still acclimating to the political and social changes influenced by the events of this time period. Thus, Baby Boomer's perspectives were formed as these changes were still underway.

Discussion of the subsequent time period defined by Smitherman, 1966 to the present, will be geared more toward the next generation, Generation X. However, the 1960's and 70's were extremely influential years for the Baby Boomers as well. Starting in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, this interval was both a season of change for Americans, particularly for members within the African American community.

Beginning with the 1960's, Blacks began actively pursuing equal treatment and opportunities by law, especially in regards to their education. This pursuit sprang from the results of the historic Brown v. Board of Education decision (1954), which declared "separate but equal" [3]as unconstitutional. The result of that decision as well as the pursuits of the 1960's led to a period of integration. However, desegregation is what actually took place, and this often times occurred by force (Adair, 1984). Desegregation and Integration scholar, Alvis Adair, poses that while these pursuits were intended for and seen as promising for the Black community, they actually resulted in "Black's freedom to give up control of their own educational institutions;

[3]The allotment for "separate but equal" facilities was upheld as a constitutional practice by the Plessy v. Ferguson Decision of 1896 (Adair, 28).

only to be thrust almost totally back into the hands of non-Blacks" (32). Desegregation meant that historically all-Black schools were to be restructured along with all-White schools. Where Blacks were once deemed responsible for their own educational system, the new "integrated" school system allowed for Whites to assume majority of control of the entire system. The education of Blacks was now to be a concern of those who weren't familiar with the historical and cultural experiences of Black America.

Whether or not desegregation was truly beneficial to the Black community is a subject of much debate. Mostly the success of desegregation, or lack thereof, is measured by the level of resistance demonstrated by Whites or the methods used to accomplish the merge (Beaumont, 1996). In other words, schools that experienced integration by force— and accompanied by acts of harassment toward Black students— weren't considered as "successful" as the merges that were less antagonistic. Still, in the most receptive instances of desegregation, Blacks became more in touch with their "minority" status; they were seen as "outsiders" or "intruders" and taught that visibility of their culture was unacceptable (Adair, 123). Because desegregation was commonly met with resistance from White America, it goes without saying that many of the Black students involved suffered from unequal treatment in the classroom.

Adair acknowledges that Black students' behavior and, more importantly, language was often seen as sub-par or intolerable. Thus, they were often graded and disciplined more harshly than Whites students (121). Before the Brown vs. Board decision, Blacks were taught by other Black teachers who had experience with Black English (Richardson, 1996). Once desegregation was instituted, this was no longer the case. Prompted to digest cultural norms of the dominant group, including what they considered to be "appropriate" speech, Blacks weren't encouraged to

believe that their language was a legitimate one. In fact, the governing mentality believed that encouraging Black students to master "white speech" would grant them a one-way ticket to upward mobility (Smitherman, 1972, 123). Teachers (both Black and White) had no idea how to address the linguistic differences that existed between the two races. Smitherman addresses this problem in her discussion of her motivation behind the work "English Teacher, Why You Be Doing The Thangs You Don't Do":

> A major problem in this mis-education of Black Language speakers is the education of English professionals (at the Bachelor's as well as the Ph.D. level). Most are trained in literature and have insufficient knowledge about language and language diversity. Thus, they hold some of the same myths and misconceptions about languages and dialects –and Ebonics – that we find among the lay public. That was the situation when "English Teacher" was published back in 1972 (120).

By the time Baby Boomers were entering and exiting their elementary and high school years, study of Black English was still mostly studied by White scholars. Many of their works that had been published by the time of segregation was not particularly welcoming toward this linguistic variety.

One of the earliest studies on AAVE— or "Negro English" as he called it— was done by J.A. Harrison (1884). He compared the form of speech to "baby talk", which clearly operated on the assumption that Blacks were inferior to Whites (Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk*, 73). Though he tried to encourage acknowledgement that AAVE was, indeed, distinct, such a condescending explanation overshadowed the point. H.L. Mencken (1962) labeled Black speech as "the worst English in the world". Black English scholar John Baugh (2000) identifies several references that have been used by other out-group scholars to denote AAVE, thereby showing their lack of

acceptance for the language. Words such as “unacceptable”, “wrong”, “bad”, “incorrect” and “improper” are noted on the list of terms (97). While these descriptions can certainly be seen as less harsh than references such as “foolish” and “silly”, the affect of its connotation is just the same. With these insensitive expressions floating around, it is quite obvious why this form of speech had been stigmatized and why so many African Americans were encouraged to distance themselves from it.

When Black scholars began to take control over the definition and study of their language, they were facing an uphill battle of overturning years of scholarship with a biased point of view. So while Baby Boomers were to be the generation first prone to believe that education was a right and not a privilege (Jones, 1980; Light, 1988), Black Baby Boomers were not privileged to receive *equal* education opportunities—if such a thing truly exists— without years of struggle. What they did receive was the belief that education, no matter if it was provided within a partial system, was the way to survive in White America; it was the marker of status. With this belief, Black Baby Boomers made new strides in higher education. According to Smitherman (1999), “years 1960-80 produced 80 percent of all the African American doctorates in our entire history in North American” and thus, “we have witnessed a burgeoning Black middle class without parallel or precedence in the Black Experience.” This new class of African Americans would later play a huge role in defining language for their speech community. However, the effects of their perspective of Black speech will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. But, how did their children, Black members of Generation X, compare to the efforts and achievements of Black Baby Boomers? How did Baby Boomers’ beliefs about education, language, and the Black Experience, help define their cohorts? Answering these questions can help determine how Black language and identity has been molded

and sculpted as the culture shifted between these two generations.

Who is Generation X?

Most would agree that the time of X-ers began around 1967, the year birth rates began to decline, and ended in 1976, when the birth rate began to incline again (Ortner, 1998; Bennet, Craig, and Rademacher, 1997). However, as with any defined generation, demographers and scholars debate the accuracy of these dates. Sherry B. Ortner notes that the most recent and accepted descriptions have revised the Gen- X the time period so that it accounts for those born between the years 1961 to 1981 (Howe and Strauss, 1993). Adding the extra 11 years means that the "X" population is much larger than originally recorded. Still, their numbers are not able to compete with the "boom" of their predecessors. Despite Generation X's decrease in birthrate, they managed to contribute largely to the earth's population. In the early 90's, they accounted for 50 million of the world's young adults, making them a new target for marketing companies. Unlike their predecessors, however, marketers have more trouble pinning the commonalties of the X-ers. Instead of trying to classify the mindset of this generation, scholars tend to measure Gen-X attitudes by comparing them to the Boom generation (Bennet, Craig, and Rademacher, 11).

Historical Context of Generation X

X-ers have been described as almost the antithesis of the Baby Boom generation. Boomers were considered to be the biggest and brightest generation, while X-ers have been termed the "lost generation". Howe and Strauss (1991) explain that this labeling was used as a metaphor for what Boomers describe as "America's loss of purpose, disappointment with institutions, despair over the culture, and fear for the future" (qtd by Bennett, Craig, and

Rademacher, 1997). Part of this "fear" spawns from what Brandweek (2008) describes as a financially unstable existence far greater than that of their parents. Not only does this generation have to prepare for life without social security, but it is also said to have a higher incurrence of debt. This is, of course, "thanks to flat wages and their late entry into an overinflated real estate market" (Brandweek). If nothing else, it is definitely agreed upon that Generation-X'ers face a less than stellar economy, far more distressing than that of their parents (Gozzi, 1995; Bennet, Craig, and Rademacher, 1997; Brandweek 2008).

In terms of the experience for Black X-ers, they witnessed another change in culture and definition of their identity. In the 1980's, there was a resurgence of cultural pride. Keeping with the "I'm Black and I'm Proud" movement of the 1960's and resulting from new interests in African American history, Blacks acquired a new name: African American. The name change and reconnection to African culture was also followed by a resurrection of the older vernacular of Black English (Zeigler, 1996). Linguists had originally predicted that Black English would continue to de-creolize throughout the 60's and 70's (Smitherman, 1998); however, what actually took place was a process of re-creolization (Zeigler, 1996). Zeigler notes that this re-creolization is similar to a group's need to create a covert form of communication, which often happens as a defense mechanism against oppression (7). For X-ers, this re-creolization further reveals their intentions of reuniting with their African heritage. Also, much like their predecessors, they too dealt with a new wave of societal oppression (high unemployment, economic distress, and Baby Boomer's dismissive attitudes of X-ers).

Scholar Raymond Gozzi Jr. (1995), an admitted "observer of language", shares his observation of the Gen-X shift in language use:

> X'ers do not read nearly as much as Boomers did. They have had television available to them all their lives, while many Boomers can remember life without television. As a result, many intelligent X'ers can't spell adequately, and even those who spell well are caught by homophones in words that sound alike but are spelled differently. Correcting college essays, I am constantly encountering such mistakes, because computer spell checkers miss them…This experience is evidence to me that we are moving away from a pre-dominated culture and back toward an oral culture.

X-ers did, in fact, embrace a new oral culture, which they defined as Hip Hop; however, this new form of creative expression was not always welcomed or appreciated by outsiders or their predecessors.

As with their predecessors, African American X-ers sought to distinguish themselves by establishing their own identity. And, with it came an establishment of cultural freedom and expression. One product of this freedom was the creation of Hip Hop, which appeared during the 1970's. However, it wasn't until Sugar Hill Gang's song "Rapper's Delight" appeared in 1981 that the Hip Hop Nation took form. Populated predominantly by Blacks, this nation used the "Black oral tradition of tonal semantics, narrativizing, signification/signifying, the dozens/playing the dozens, Africanized syntax, and other communicative practices"

representative of Black culture (Smitherman, 1997). According to Marcyliena Morgan (2001), many Gen-X'ers used Hip Hop to voice their frustrations about the societal conditions of the "Regan-Bush era and its promotion of the social and civic abandonment of urban schools and communities in the U.S." (187).

Linguistically, Hip Hop made a big impact on Black language, specifically those who were part of the X-generation. Black language had become fairly homogeneous during the time of Baby Boomers education. But, X-ers witnessed a shift in language as Hip Hop prompted "speech community formations and a drive to distinguish and articulate linguistic characteristics to represent major cities and regions on the East and West Coasts" (Morgan, 188). Black language lost its uniformity as it shaped and transformed to suit the culture of the areas where it thrived.

In many ways, Hip Hop's impacted Black culture in the 80's in the same way the Civil Rights movement had during the 50's, 60's, and 70's (Morgan, 189). Many Black Middle class members, especially Baby Boomers who experienced the changes of the Civil Rights Era, do not agree that Hip Hop provides a positive cultural contribution. Despite Hip Hop's innate connection to previous cultural movements orchestrated by African Americans as well as the linguistic and oral traditions of their African forefathers, the Black middle class was not supportive of this art form (Gladney, 1995). As the language of Gen-X'ers started to re-creolize and accommodate influence from Hip Hop culture, education of African Americans followed suit with its own changes.

In the 1990's, African Americans Gen-X'ers began "facing a language of instruction even more drastically different from their own language than was the case in their parents' day" (Smitherman 1998). As a result, Black students suffered, resulting in lower grades and test

scores[4] than that of their white counterparts. However, this was "nuthin' new" as Baby Boomers experienced the same drop in stats. What was different about Gen-Xers' and Baby Boomers' educational struggle is that educators of the 90's started to question old approaches to language instruction. They abandoned the assimilationist approach taught to Baby Boomers. Over the last few decades, African Americans have been acknowledged to have their own culture and thus their own learning style (Richardson, 1996). Thus, linguists and other scholars began fighting for "Student's Rights to Their Own Language" (CCCC, 1974), as seen with the Ebonics Resolution.

Overall, both African American Baby Boomers and Gen-X'ers have witnessed their fair share of historical, political, and cultural changes. While each generation's experience does not mirror the other, they have both been equally influenced by the events relevant to their time period. These events have, in turn, impacted their understanding of who they are within the larger folds of American society. As a result, both Black Boomers and Gen-X'ers have forged their own understandings of Black culture, language, and identity. Their interpretations are worth noting as they offer new considerations for studying intra-group bias and conflict.

[4] According to Oakland Superintendent of Schools Carolyn Getridge, her African American students had an average grade of a C- and more than half of them had to repeat the same. Even worse, was the fact that less than 20% of the Black students who made it to the 12th grade went on to graduate high school (Perry and Delpit, 1998). This is just one report of scores made during the 1990's.

Chapter 5 Vive La Resistance: Baby Boomers and Gen-X'ers Sound Off

Introduction of the In-Group Respondents

It would be an understatement to say that both generation groups have witnessed historical events and movements that have influenced Black culture, particularly their aspects of language and identity. Each group has responded to the political, historical, and economic climate of their time, imprinting their own experience on the language and defining their identities. When the Ebonics Resolution made its way into the public forum, African American groups responded, some very adamant about their dislike of the labeling and depiction of Black language. Their responses were heavily documented in the media and studied in academics. But, how much has African American sentiment toward AAVE changed since the Ebonics Debate of the late 1990's?

Over a decade later, this study questions several in-group respondents from the Baby Boom generation and Generation- X about the concept of Black Language. While the term *Ebonics* is still often used to refer to Black language, these in-group members have been asked to respond to one of the latest designations of language, *AAVE*. The goal of this questioning is to both determine each member's knowledge of AAVE as well as to document their attitudes toward the language. This study examines their responses as a means as of exploring in-group prejudice towards the language.

Similar to the in-group members who rejected Ebonics during the ’90’s, these respondents are members of the African American speech community and part of the Black middle-class. In terms of geographic location, all six respondents currently reside in metropolitan Atlanta. So, while each individual matriculated from various locations, their existing residence is located in close contact with members of their speech community— they all live in pre-dominantly Black neighborhoods— and socio-economic group (see Table 1). Aside from their obvious similarities in ethnicity, socio-economic status, and geographic location, the in-group respondents from both the Baby Boom generation and Generation-X also share the following: 1) they all witnessed the Ebonics Debates of 90’s and, most importantly, and 2) they all distance themselves from AAVE.

Table 1: Demographical Information of In-Group Respondents

Generation-X Respondents	**Gen-X’er #1**	**Gen-X’er #2**	**Gen-X’er #3**
Description of Childhood Environment	Split childhood between diverse military installations and army bases and a rural town split between White and Black residents	Metro-Atlanta; Southern middle-class suburb; wealthy Black community	Multi-cultural suburb outside of Toronto
Education Experience	Highest Degree: Associates	Highest Degree: Bachelors	Highest Degree: Bachelors
Baby Boom Respondents	**Baby Boomer #1**	**Baby Boomer #2**	**Baby Boomer #3**
Description of Childhood Environment	Predominantly Black, low-income, neighborhood in metro Atlanta	Predominantly Black, low-income, neighborhood in metro Atlanta	Predominantly Black, low-income area in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida;
Education Experience	Highest Degree: Associates	2 ½ years of college	2 years of college

Essential to understanding this study's analysis of these respondents is clear acknowledgement that they are all placed in the African American speech community, despite their obvious disconnect from the language in question. How is this so if they reject their own language? According to Gumperz (1971), a speech community is not a homogenous unit; instead, there is an existence of linguistic differences among speech community members (qtd. in Ben-Rafael, 19). What defines a speech community is their social norms, particularly the frequency of their social interactions within that group (Kroskity, 39). Of course, there may be a significant amount of contact with other social groups and communities, which can create confusion in determining which interaction counts most. Kroskity addresses this confusion by showing that the Arizona Tewa speech community has frequent interaction with the neighboring Hopi, whose language they also share. However, he distinguishes the Tewa community by operating under the premise established by Gumperz, who clarifies frequent interaction as a "means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use" (Kroskity, 40). In other words, the language of speech community is distinct from other means of communication used in out-group interactions.

The Baby Boomers and Gen-X'ers within the African American speech community are by no means exempt from having frequent contact with out-group members, especially those within the middle-class socio-economic group. These interactions have likely influenced their perceptions of Black language. Thus, understanding the differing language perceptions of these individuals can help trace in-group attitudes since the Ebonics debates as well as show how language attitudes affect group cohesion. The questions asked of both groups (see appendix A) focus on examining each groups' knowledge, use and attitudes of AAVE.

Analysis of the Reponses

Knowledge of AAVE

Several questions asked of both generation groups were used to establish a baseline of their understanding of Black English, Ebonics or AAVE. In terms of their knowledge of AAVE, both groups show a variance in experience with the language. Members of the Baby Boom generation (see Table 2) have never heard of the term "African American Vernacular English". However, each one acknowledged that all had heard of the concepts "Black English" and

"Ebonics". On the other hand, members of X-generation (see Table 3) have at least heard of the language referred to as AAVE. This, if nothing else, is testament to the time frame of each group's education experience. Baby Boomers were educated when Black English was prevalently used to describe their language. AAVE, of course, appeared much later.

Still, their ability to recognize the appellation(s) attributed to the language does not reveal their true understanding of the language, such as its origins, linguistic structures, etc. When asked to provide a definition of the language— based on their own comprehension— majority of the respondents identified it as either slang, broken, or not proper English. None of the respondents agreed that AAVE is as a legitimate language. Despite dismissing the legitimization of the language, X'er #1's response demonstrates an understanding that people of all ethnicity imprint their culture and experience on the language, forming what she calls a "relaxed English". But further inquiry into her responses reveals multi-levels of disapproval, particularly in the following statement:

> I think it's something somebody made up so they can have something to study. It's just the pattern in which Black people talk. Somebody took our slang and made it an "African American Vernacular English". They tried to say it's like it's an official language or something. Crap (see Appendix B).

Her response reveals her discontentment with the idea that it has become a subject of study. In this instance, her negative attitude isn't aimed toward the language itself, but the linguists and scholars who have placed the language under a microscope. Also, her description of AAVE, as well as the definitions given by the other respondents, shows that their knowledge is limited to perceptions and hearsay not from a formal education of the language. Having such a weak foundation obviously impacts the way someone perceives and interprets language variation. Therefore, knowledge seems to be crucial component in avoiding such a negative perception.

Use of AAVE

For inquiry into their use of the language, the respondents answered based on their impressions of the language, which for them was centered mostly on level of education and socio-economic status. Intriguingly, only one member of both generation groups, Baby Boomer #1, acknowledges Black English as part of her linguistic practices. In fact, she notes that she *could* speak Black English when and if the location permits. This acknowledgement of the ability to speak by choice insinuates an understanding of its rhetorical appeal. Her ability to choose reveals her innate understanding that the environment often determines language. This assertion is further explained by Giles' theory of speech accommodation which posits that language is not static. Because language is an expression of "values, attitudes, and intentions towards others", one will "accommodate" their language" based on their circumstances and

surroundings (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 322). For Baby Boomer #1, she explains that her work environment is predominantly White and professional; therefore, she opts not to use Black English in that particular environment.

However, all of the other interview participants suggest that they are not speakers of AAVE. Without having an accurate understanding of the language, they are able to use their perceptions of AAVE speakers— at least who they believe to be speakers of the language— to determine that they are not members of this group. Using location, education, socio-economic status, and age as determinants, they categorize speakers of AAVE and distance themselves from that group.

Gen-X'er #2 establishes location in a much broader sense than the other in-group respondents (see Appendix B), insinuating the idea that there is difference between regional varieties (i.e. Black English on the West coast differs from the language on the East coast). This is expected seeing as though the Gen-X population was reared when Hip Hop culture encourages regional pride and linguistic distinction. Several of the other respondents' interpretation of AAVE's connection to location, however, perpetuates the stereotype that its speakers live in rural or low-income areas. Because these respondents live in wealthy or middle-class neighborhoods, and the fact that they believe they do not speak any form of Black English, they deduce that speakers must be in areas outside of their residential location. Location is often a reflection of class or socio-economic grouping; thus, the respondents' urge to posit speakers of AAVE in urban or rural areas is closely connected to their beliefs about AAVE as a marker of socio-economic status. Ben-Rafael attempts to explain such a connection:

> In particular, the social mobility of individuals may lead to their withdrawal from underprivileged milieux. To the extent that such mobile individuals retain some links with the deprived class, they create a confusion about the character of the group as an underprivileged category. These dilemmas question the contours of class boundaries and the tenets of their identity (23).

For these respondents, their description of AAVE as merely a habit of the "lower-class" may be an unconscious withdrawal from this socio-economic group.

Situating Black English and AAVE as the communication of the urban poor also establishes education as a determining factor. Smitherman (1999) acknowledges that education, particularly around the time of Baby Boomers, consistently promoted that Blacks "must master the prestige dialect" as a means of attaining socioeconomic mobility (123). Believing that they speak primarily Standard American English allows the respondents to distance themselves from AAVE and solidify their place within the socio-economic strata.

Attitudes Towards AAVE

Overall, each respondent's description of AAVE and its speakers reveals more than their lack of knowledge about the subject matter. It reveals their attitudes toward the language as well as how they identify themselves. Based on the explanations above, there doesn't seem to be much difference between these respondents and those who spoke out during the Ebonics Debate of late 1990's. They all either posit AAVE as a broken form of English or slang not to be labeled as a legitimate language. The urge to attribute the language to the underprivileged or uneducated aligns with what Wolfram and Schilling-Estes calls the linguistic inferiority principle (Fought, 53). This principle targets negative attitudes toward AAVE as result of comparing a

minority group's language to the dominate group. More than likely the language of the subordinate group is considered to be inferior to the language of the dominant group. This comparison is fairly noted by the respondents' description of SAE.

When asked to define Standard American English (SAE), their answers were very much like their descriptions of AAVE. Two out of three Baby Boomers as well as two out of three Generation X-ers attributed SAE to a particular location. Their definitions of SAE placed it as the language "taught in schools" or in the workplace environment. The other remaining respondents used such descriptions as "proper", "common", and "not hip hop". These descriptions all indicate a belief that SAE is a mark of both education and status. Daniel A. Heller defines Standard English as "the common language" that "we use when we want to speak across cultural barriers" or "the language of the marketplace and power system." Black Baby Boomers, sought to participate equally in that power system, and education was the best way to ensure that opportunity. In fact, African Americans between 1899-1966 operated with the understanding that education determines class and status"(Morgan, 1994, 337).

Though all three Baby Boomers and Gen-X'ers are members of the African American community they undoubtedly reject the language that has been attributed to them. This dilemma, in many ways, is typical of the Black middle class, especially because of their tendency to have contacts with other ethnic groups as well as with the standard dialect (Fought, 2006: 63). Often this dilemma is attributed to pressure of assimilation at the expense of ethnic pride and identity. But, how does one affect the other? What do the responses of these in-group members reveal about group identity formation and conflict?

Application of Group Identity Theories

The in-group resistance toward AAVE can be partially attributed to the changes of African American culture. Language has responded to these changes. While scholars note language's ability to shift and transform overtime (Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau, 1993) non-scholars may not share this same understanding. Black English is in the process of re-creolization, thus one generation's understanding of the language may differ from future generations. For example, Generation-X has had distinct experiences that have influenced their communicative practices. Baby Boomers, who did not share Gen-X'ers' same experience, have noted changes in their language use and often viewed it differently from their own forms of speech. Gen-X'ers react in the same fashion toward the language used by younger generations. These reactions are present in the responses of GenXer#1 and #2 as well as Baby Boomer #2. They use of age as a determinate to identify speakers of AAVE. Still, the respondents' resistance not only demonstrates the shift Black English has endured between generations, it also shows new understandings of identity formation in the African American ethnic group.

Because language use is a key determinant of group membership (Woolard, 1989; Fishmen 1977; Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau, 1993; Fought, 2006), the in-group respondents' rejection of AAVE may, for some, indicate a rejection of the African American ethnic group altogether. However, Kroskity (1993) challenges this view of identity, particularly ethnic identity. He aligns ethnicity to language in that it is not a static entity, nor is it one-dimensional. In fact, an ethnic individual can have what he calls a "repertoire of identities", where an individual may acquire multiple constructions of identity. He provides an example of this notion:

> Members of urban ethnic groups have membership in a larger sociocultural group as well as in more specific ethnic groups and often employ the linguistic and communicative styles that signal the situationally relevant interactional identity (222).

With this understanding in mind, the in-group respondents do, obviously, have membership in the African American group; they also participate in other group of identity that is not merely based on ethnicity. Fought furthers this notion by saying that other factors, (i.e. gender and class) are not isolated from ethnicity, and thus are all accounted for within the "repertoire". Language, and in this case, language attitudes of the respondent reveals their multiplicity.

In Dyson's exploration of Black identity, he highlights the typical nature to dismiss complex levels of identity formation. He states, "often, Black identity is reduced to the mantra of 'positive' versus 'negative': an image that either uplifts or degrades Black folk" (34). This simplistic view of Black identity, he asserts, is the result of stereotypes perpetuated by the dominant group; thus, "we are loath to expose ugly dimensions of black life to a white public that is often hungry for confirmation of black pathology"(37). Gen-X'er #2's possessive nature over Black language— and her disapproval of academe's dissection of the language— in many ways displays some of the same tendencies to avoid "airing our dirty laundry[5]".

Having such a protective response to Black culture can obviously create identity dilemmas and intergroup conflict, the same displayed during the Ebonics debates. Gen-X'er #1, who admits the embarrassment she faces when hearing someone speak AAVE in a public

[5] Dyson uses this reference in referring to Bill Cosby's public remarks made May 17, 2004 when he criticized the behaviors of the urban poor, but this was also allusion to those who criticized Cosby for publicizing problems within the black community.

environment, shows how such a conflict can manifest itself in the form of biased language attitudes. While she acknowledges that her views perpetuate stigmatization of language, she tries to prevent her own children from falling into the same habit of speaking "with that dialect". Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor's (1977) explanation of intergroup relations illuminates a reasoning behind this display of intergroup conflict. They propose that some individuals will seek "a new positive distinctiveness" by comparing themselves with "other ingroup members rather than with that of the dominant group" (321). The objective is that the individual believes in the need to promote positive images of their own group and thus counter the dominant group's ideals.

Turner, et al. (1987) examines how self-categorization, or self interests, often times promotes what he calls intergroup discrimination. He asserts that "people are motivated to establish positively valued distinctiveness for groups with which they identify…When social identity in terms of some group membership is unsatisfactory, members will attempt to …make their existing group more positively distinct" (30). In other words, because social categorization is an inescapable part of societal norms, an individual may seek to establish a positive group standing within the hierarchy. Also, because a positive self concept often hinges on having a positive group identity, intergroup discrimination may be a response to those in-group members who jeopardize this undertaking. Gen-X'er #1's embarrassment, as well as the in-group members who publicly declined affiliation with Ebonics, is an example of the reciprocal relationship of establishing a positive self and group identity. While their action may be seen as inter-group prejudice, their intentions may be to combat prejudice from other outside groups.

These theories of group identity and intergroup relations remove the simplistic understanding of Black identity and, thus, discredit the simple notion that these in-group respondents must reject their ethnicity. Instead, it prompts scholars to consider multifaceted definitions of identity that move beyond the obvious external and consider the needs for self-fulfillment separate from a collective motive. The in-group respondents' reactions, along with these understandings of identity formations, further denote that a speech community isn't always a homogenous, collective unit (Ben-Rafael, 38). As the language of the African American speech community shifts to accommodate heterogeneity, new definitions and scholarship of the language should follow suit.

Table 2: Gen-Xers' AAVE Knowledge, Use, and Attitudes

	Gen-X'er #1	Gen-X'er #2	Gen-X'er #3
Description of Standard English	English taught in schools	English of the workplace; Common English	British English; not broken or hip hop language
Identifies Standard English as their primary form of speech	Yes	Only at work	Yes
Heard of AAVE	Yes	Yes	No
Heard of either Black English or Ebonics	Yes	Yes	Yes
Classify Black English or Ebonics as a language	No	No	No
Believe they are speakers of AAVE	No	No	No
Description of AAVE/Ebonics/Black English	Slang; words not pronounced like the Standard	Crap; Slang; Something made-up by scholars	Terminology relevant to Black culture; combination of English and Black experience
Believe all African Americans speak AAVE/Ebonics/Black English	No	No	No
Description of AAVE speakers	Live in rural or urban areas, inner city, Uneducated or poorly educated parents. Over 70 years of age	believes no one can fit into one category ; believe location can determine speech even if of same ethnicity	Youth; lower-class or developing areas

Table 3: Baby Boomers' AAVE Knowledge, Use, and Attitudes

	Baby Boomer #1	Baby Boomer #2	Baby Boomer #3
Description of Standard English	English taught in schools; Regular English	Proper English that everyone can understand; Not "street-ghetto"; English taught in school	Speaking clearly; words that could be understood by anyone
Identifies Standard English as their primary form of speech	Yes	Yes	Yes
Heard of AAVE	No	No	No
Heard of either Black English or Ebonics	Yes	Yes	Yes
Classify these as a language	No; only a means of communication for Blacks	Yes; in the neighborhoods where it is spoken	No
Believe they are speakers of AAVE	Yes, based on surroundings	No	No
Description of AAVE/Ebonics/Black English	A means of communication among Black people; but not the English taught in schools	Ebonics is something humorous; Black English is Slang; Neither is proper English	Not real; not a formal language; like rap
Believe all African Americans speak AAVE/Ebonics/Black English	No	No	No
Description of AAVE speakers	Those who experience Black life/culture; Not those who grew up in wealthy areas	People who are streetwise and kids	People from country or mountainous areas; not from city or suburbs

Chapter 6: Conclusion

On December 18, 1996, the Oakland school board announced a resolution that was proposed to help African American students in that district (Perry, 1998). While this proposal was to benefit local in-group members in Oakland, the outcome of the Ebonics Resolution affected the entire African American speech community. Many African Americans publicly rejected Ebonics, revealing in-group prejudice in a way that had never been documented before (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). The Ebonics debates revived discussions about Black language, prompting questions by scholars and non-scholars who challenged its validity. Lisa Delpit's (2006) response shows the conflict in addressing such questions:

> I have been asked often enough recently, "What do you think about Ebonics? Are you for it or against it?" My answer must be neither. I can be neither for or against Ebonics any more than I can be for or against air. It exists. It is the language they heard as their mothers nursed them and changed their diapers and played peek-a-boo with them. It is the language through which first encountered love, nurturance, and joy" (93)

Delpit acknowledges that the Ebonics Debates often encouraged anyone within earshot to "pick sides", especially members within the Black community. Her response promotes advancement beyond the mentality of viewing Black language as a notion to debate.

While the language has proven to be a justified language by linguists, the concept still faces prejudicial resentment by scholars and non-scholars alike. Both in-group and out-group respondents have expressed disdain for the idea of classifying it as a language. However, particularly in the African American community, there is a discord present between the middle and urban classes as well as the young and older generations. Though most linguistic scholars

believe that between 80%-95% of all African Americans speak some form of the language (Rickford, 1990), there has been ongoing struggle of acceptance for AAVE by members of the African American speech community. Most Blacks, especially in the Middle-class or those capable of code-switching to Standard English, assume that they don't even speak AAVE. Or, they assume that it is the mother-tongue of the ignorant, the ill-educated, or the lower-class. Even respectable Black figures have labeled the concept of Ebonics as an "embarrassment".

Because American society innately functions on status, or social categorization, minority and ethnic social groups often face the challenge of adopting a positive social identity. Seeking to establish a positive self-concept and group identity often affects how one views their group membership. Because of the prominent racial struggles associated with status classification, language undoubtedly plays a major role in establishing a positive position within the social strata. Negotiation of social groupings, thereby, fuels negotiation of language, where individuals learn to assume the language that accommodates a given environment. Those who are able to manage this shift often have contacts with various social groupings and languages, particularly a standard form of communication. This continues to affect how members of minority and ethnic groups— whose language is continuously denoted as inferior to the standard dialect— view their own group identities and language.

Understanding that identity is multi-faceted can move identity definition from previous simplistic and destructive mentalities of Black vs. White, right or wrong, and positive or negative. Instead, scholars can fuel a more positive view that instills a more complex understanding of the vast "repertoire of identities" (Kroskity, 1993) each individual holds. African Americans definitely have long been connected through close communal ties, especially

because they have been historically grouped into one simple category. However, as the Black experience progressed— through slavery, Civil Rights, Black pride, and the introduction of Hip Hop— Black identity and language has changed to accommodate these movements and experiences. No longer does Black or African American have one connotation. No longer is African American language a one-track form of communication. Scholarship is taking note of this and broadening the rainbow, so to speak. Direct study of intergroup relations, group formation, and intergroup prejudice will enable the scholars to promote an awareness of AAVE, one that accommodates a complex view of African American identity of language.

Awareness of African American language is still very much lacking in and outside of academia. Those who concur with the validity of the language do so because of their familiarity with the subject-matter, including its history, structure, and usage. While it may not be possible to educate those who have progressed beyond academe, there are many generations to come who continuously operate in the same mentalities seen in members of the Baby Boom generation and Generation-X. As seen with these two generational groups, education, or mis-education, of one's own language as well as the purpose and function of SAE can have long-lasting implications. Desegregation resulted in African Americans losing a great deal of control in educating their own people. Thus, assimilationist approaches were able to prevail. However, now Black scholars have the potential to fill the gaps. So, how should scholars proceed in developing educational tactics that will both promote positive attitudes towards community

language but also proficiency with SAE? Presumably, the answer to this question will not be a simple one; however, as scholarship progresses and seeks ways of approaching this conundrum, educators must adopt a critical pedagogy that addresses teachers' biases and lack of knowledge. The goal is to avoid the problems seen in the education of Black Baby Boomers and Black Gen-Gen-X'ers and better prepare future generations to come.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Where did you grow up, or spend the most of your childhood?
2. What type of school did attend?
3. Describe the type of environment you grew up in? Was it the suburbs, low-income area,
4. What is a diverse or homogenous area?
5. What is your first language?
6. Do you have a second or third language?
7. Describe your education experience? Did you graduate high school? Attend college? Graduate?
8. How would define "Standard English"?
9. Do you feel that "Standard English" serves as your primary form of speech? Why or why not?
10. Have you ever heard of the term African American Vernacular English? If so, provide a definition.
11. Also heard of the terms Black English or Ebonics? If so, define.
12. Do you believe that you speak AAVE/Black English/Ebonics?
13. Do you classify these as a language? Why or why not?
14. Do you agree using Ebonics/AAVE in the classroom as a means to transition them into Standard English?
15. Do you believe all African Americans speak this vernacular? If not and you had to describe probable speakers of this language, what would your description be?

Appendix B

Answers to the Interview

X'er #1:

1. Since I was a military brat we moved a lot. I guess I spent the most time in Fort. Devon, Massachusetts.
2. Public School.
3. My younger years we lived in mostly military installations and army bases. After my parents retired we lived in rural areas or suburbs. We moved a lot so it's hard to say for sure.
4. Diverse. Well, when I lived on a military base there were people from all over the world. I really don't know how to answer that to be perfectly honest. I will say that once my mother retired from the military we lived in a town where it was pretty much only black and white. I had been in an environment like that for a couple of years.
5. English.
6. No.
7. Currently enrolled in college. I have an Associate's degree and of course a high school diploma.
8. Standard English, I would think, is the English taught in school using text books. In America anyway.
9. Generally speaking, yes. I might throw slang in there sometimes. But, I think overall I speak Standard English.

10. Yes I've heard of it. I think African American English…when I think of the term I guess I think of Ebonics. A lot of slang that is typically used by African Americans. A lot of words that African Americans have adopted, or stereotypically, I guess.
11.
12. No, I don't think so.
13. Personally, no I don't because and I could be wrong. My understanding of it is that it's English or slang or words that are not pronounced in ways that they are in Standard English. Maybe it's a twist or a dialect of Standard English, not a language of its own.
14. No, I don't. I think that it's something that should be brought to students' attention because it does exist and people do use that vernacular. But I don't think it should be taught as a standard. I'm not sure if I know what you mean. You mean if you say "skreet" and it should be "street". Well… I guess if you are using that to relate to your students then I guess it's okay. But, I think all students should be encouraged to use Standard English.
15. No, not all African Americans. I think, and I may be going off a stereotype, I envision that either people from really rural or urban areas or maybe less educated. Maybe inner city, poorer background, whose parents may not be educated or highly educated. Or, older generations. Maybe over 70, the black people in those areas. Sometimes, if I am somewhere in public like in an office or even in school like if a professor is around— you know somewhere I would assume you should use standard or proper English— and I hear people talking with that dialect, it irritates me a little bit. I feel like it's a sign of ignorance or lack of education. And, I feel like "come on, you know you making these people looking at you. Or, looking at me like they looking at you and you're making us

all look bad because you are not speaking like you are educated". I guess I do get a little irritated. I hate to admit it but I think I am one of those people who attach a stigma to it. When I hear it, it's not positive at all. I hate to admit it, but I correct my children all the time when they bring slang into it. Like when they say "what you doin'?" Cause I don't want them going into the streets saying that and people look at them like they are uneducated.

X'er #2)

1. Decatur, GA.
2. Public, primarily black school.
3. It was suburbs, middle-class, and pretty educated. When I grew up it was the wealthiest, Black community in the U.S. Probably in the mid to late 90's.
4.
5. English.
6. No.
7. Yep.
8. The English that everybody uses every day. I would say the English used in the workplace is standard. It's not a correct English but it's standard. The English that everybody in society uses regardless of ethnic or all that stuff. Socioeconomics. It's like the common English.
9. Ummmm….yes and no. I don't speak in Standard English at home or like around my friends. But at work I do.
10. Yes. I think it's something somebody made up so they can have something to study. It's just the pattern in which Black people talk. Somebody took our slang and made it an

"African American Vernacular English". They tried to say it's like it's an official language or something. Crap.

11. Crap.
12. Ummm…no. Because the examples that I heard in the media of Ebonics, it sounds like idiot stuff. I don't even understand and it's supposed to be what Black people speak. I don't think it makes any sense to me. And, if it doesn't make sense to [me], how is that supposed to be representative of Black people speech, and I am Black and I don't even understand it.
13. No, I don't classify it as a language. I just think its regular slang. Each group have their own relaxed English that they speak outside of work or….like when you're at home or you are with your friends you speak a different way than when you are with others that you don't know, or those that you work with, or those that might not be from the same cultural background or neighborhood that might not understand what you're saying.
14. No, I don't. Cause if you do that you'll have to do an Asian Vernacular English and Indian Vernacular English or each cultural group in a class. And, that doesn't make sense when in the corporate world or in the general world everybody speaks that one Standard English or understand that one standard English. Or they should. You shouldn't be teaching a slang or what I think is a slang in the classroom.
15. I think we all speak a relaxed English. I can't give you a concrete, cause I don't think everybody's speech fits into one category. So, I can even give you an example if that makes sense. Like how I speak might not be how you spoke when you grew up, or how somebody on the West Coast growing up just cause they're Black. Like I don't think that's the same.

X'er #3

1. Toronto.
2. Public,
3. Multicultural, suburban, just outside of Toronto.
4. Toronto is the most multicultural place ever. There was a little bit of everybody there. I had Chinese friends, Indian friends.
5. English
6. If Patois counts as a language and French, but that's minimal.
7. College degree and University degree.
8. Standard English is...we look to like London or the U.K. for Standard English. Like "Hi", "How are you". Just not broken. If you wanna say like hip hop, I wouldn't consider that Standard English with all those slang terms. Even though in Jamaica they clearly speak English, their twang and all that is not considered English. It's patois.
9. Yes.
10. No.
11. Ebonics yes. My understanding of Ebonics is it's a language that is a combination of English and then the Black experience. So, terminology relevant to the African American culture.
12. No.
13. No. Because it isn't something that can be easily translated to another culture. Not everybody knows Ebonics.
14. If a student who that's all they speak is Ebonics, that teacher should be able to speak Ebonics to that student so that they can teach the student how to speak English.

Okay…I'm going to say yes. However a teacher can communicate to that student so that they can fully comprehend the lesson plan and ultimately help the student to grow, then yes.

15. No, I believe people who speak Ebonics now is the younger generation coming up. I think Ebonics is relegated to lower class areas. That's where it thrives. Not lower class but developing areas. Yeah a politically correct term.

Baby Boomer #1

1. Elementary and High School I liked in Kirkwood. (Atlanta)
2. I went to Kirkwood Elementary, Bass High School and Murphy High school.
3. It was low-income, but we had a lot to do with what we had. We enjoyed ourselves, and we could play outside without anyone bothering us.
4. It was all-Black.
5. English
6. No. (2nd or 3rd)
7. Graduated High School, and I attended two years in college where I got an Associate degree. [My college] was majority White. 75% White and 25% Black.
8. (standard eng) It's regular English. English you were taught in school.
9. (standard as primary form of speech) Again, as I said that's what I was taught. That's what I spoke, irregardless of what I heard around me.
10. No I have not.
11. I've heard of them both, and that was based on what kids were taught in school and their surroundings. Ebonics to me is broken English. Where they don't annunciate words correctly. But, some kids speak Ebonics while they understand regular English as well.

12. I— from time to time, based on my surroundings— can speak Black English.
13. I believe that they are languages that we speak among our own race because we can relate to one another that way, not necessarily being the English that we were taught. [after asked for clarification that she does indeed believe it is a language] I don't consider it a language; I consider it a means of communication among our race.
14. No, I do not. I think they should be taught to speak the way they have to relate to people outside the classroom.
15. No, I do not because some Black kids were never brought up around it; therefore, they have no idea. They were brought up in surroundings of wealth and money. And, therefore, they were never able to experience that life or that livelihood. I don't know [who are speakers of Black English or Ebonics]. I was surrounded by [Black English] more when I was coming up throughout my childhood. But, because of my job experience, I'm surrounded by it less. I'm surrounded mostly by Whites. And, I'm surrounded mostly by professionals. Therefore, I attend to speak accordingly.

Baby Boomer #2

1. It was Kirkwood. Atlanta, Ga.
2. I went to Murphy High School. Graduate in 1970. Left in '72 to move to Baltimore.
3. It was nice. It was a family oriented neighborhood. I used to go to the park for Road shows. It was like a inner-city neighborhood.
4. Predominantly Black.
5. English.
6. No
7. Graduated from high school. Attended 2 ½ years of college.

8. Being able to speak proper English. The type of English that everyone can understand. Not street ghetto, but…the English that is basically taught in school.
9. Yes, because most people can speak English. Those who cannot, try to understand it.
10. No;
11. Yes; I heard of Ebonics as being something funny. Someone speaking not proper English. Black English I guess would be something known as slang. Something that we in the Black neighborhood could understand. It's not the proper English, it's just slang.
12. No
13. To the neighborhoods that they are in, yes.
14. Not necessarily. It depends on how the teacher is teaching or what kind of people or what race of people they have in the class. Cause a lot of people will not understand some of the English that you're talking about.
15. Yes, most of them. Generally people who are streetwise are the ones that does. The ones that doesn't, the ones that try to speak proper, or what you consider proper, are some of the older people. A lot of the kids play around with it.

Baby Boomer #3

1. In Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. In a 3 bedroom house with about 12 of us.
2. It was all Black. No integration.
3. Low income.
4. Predominantly Black.
5. English. Only.
6. No

7. 2 years of college. Broward Community College. It was Broward Junior College at that time.
8. Speaking clearly. Words that could be understood by anyone.
9. I think it should be my standard form of speech. It is my standard form— the only language I know. I grew up in America.
10. No.
11. Ebonics, yes. Black English, yes. Ebonics is speaking in broken phrases. It's not complete words.
12. No
13. I don't know how to explain that, but I wouldn't classify it as a formal language. Because it's hard for anybody to understand that grew up…..I don't know how to explain it. To me, it's not considered English. It's just something popular for, you know; it's like rap to me.
14. No. To me [Black English/Ebonics] is confusing. Why give them Ebonics and it's not real? They shouldn't be exposed to it. I'm mean if you are reading a book and it's in there then that's fine. But, you have to be able to understand it and where it's comin' from. I know in the country and mountainous areas they speak Ebonics. But, when they come to the city, the suburbs, then they're made fun of because it's not clear to others. And, they may end up changing their language because it's not complete.
15. No; country and mountainous.
16.