

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES, PREJUDICE, AND PLANNING

Barbara Birch

California State University, Fresno

The Oakland School Board's plan to use Ebonics evokes outrage in the media. They withdraw their plan. California votes to reject Bilingual Education. Local school boards are improvising at the last minute. California State University administrators debate the abolishment of remedial English classes for native and non-native speakers even though many students do not meet the university standard after K-12. Administrators do not even consider what the standards for good or adequate writing are. These important policy decisions are made by people outside of the field of linguistics who do not understand the larger context for our language attitudes. This first part of this paper contrasts the two language ideologies that are in competition globally today, the older colonial/imperialistic view and the newer ecological view in terms of language rights, prescriptivism, multilingualism, and protection of minority or endangered languages (Pennycook, 1998). Contradictory mainstream US attitudes and trends can be easily situated within each point of view.

In the second part of this paper, prescriptivism is the focus, as one flashpoint within the language ideologies presented first. I believe, like Cameron 1995:vii-xiv, that prescriptivism is a point of view that linguists cannot afford to dismiss as misguided and trivial. It is most useful to think of prescriptivism as just one view on a continuum of attitudes which can range from the language equality position of most linguists to the extreme language prejudice one hears in the street and reads in the newspaper. The middle ground is a kind of "pragmatic prescriptivism" which combines what the linguist knows about language in society with the pragmatic realism of, say, the English teacher in front of a class of minority dialect speakers. The continuum of language attitudes is presented as three-part tables contrasting attitudes towards SAE, proper, and non-standard dialects, the people who speak them, the role of language educators in society, and the educational functions of dialects.

Language prejudice is a very common attitude. Critical comments in the media show that it is still acceptable and even laudable to make overtly prejudicial remarks about people's language, at a time when other forms of prejudice have diminished or become more covert. In fact, it is not just minorities who face this language prejudice, but anyone who has internalized the idea that some people speak or write English perfectly without effort and that their own speech or writing is inherently inferior because they don't follow "the rules." Many people have absorbed a view that there is a Proper English "out there" which intelligent cultured people speak and write, but that they themselves do not. For there to be a true debate about the use of Ebonics in the classroom, the value of multilingualism, or more flexibility in our thinking about writing standards in education, mainstream attitudes need to shift at least from language prejudice to pragmatic prescriptivism. This can be attempted through language planning, which is the topic of the last portion of the paper.

First, some terms and definitions are needed. Standard American English (SAE) is the acceptable way of speaking or writing American English which may not follow all grammar rules in the books. It has some regional dialect variation from north to south and from east to west, but is mutually intelligible. Proper English* is dialect spoken by a very few language purists, maybe, which especially in its written form follows the traditional grammar or stylistic rules in books, such as 'don't end a sentence with a preposition', 'no split infinitives', 'an historic', 'whom'. and so on. Ebonics is a dialect or variety of American English mainly available to African-American speakers, though people of other ethnicities speak it and not all African-Americans do. It has certain different lexical, phonological, and grammatical features from SAE., but its use is highly individualistic. For some speakers, it is a native dialect; for others it is merely a slight variation from SAE which is dependent on social context. Non-standard varieties or dialects are any types of American speech which diverge from SAE. They include Ebonics, Cajun, and some rural or urban ways of speaking.

There are two ideologies of language which seem to be operant in the global scheme today, the colonial/imperialistic which reflects the older, more traditional system of beliefs and the ecological view, which reflects our growing sense that people have human rights and that people's cultures are to be valued (Pennycook, Phillipson, and Wiley 1998).

<u>Colonial/Imperialistic</u>	<u>Ecology of Language</u>
People do not have language rights.	People have language rights.
One language/dialect is better than others, therefore it is prescribed.	Languages/dialects have equal status but possibly different functions.
Monolingualism is considered the norm; others should learn the dominant language.	Multilingualism is the norm for societies and individuals.
Laissez faire or "survival of the fittest" attitude towards languages and cultures is the policy.	Protection and maintenance of minority languages and cultures is the policy.
Multilingualism is a "problem."	Multilingualism is a "resource."

We can see signs of both of these ideologies in the USA today, but most decision-makers generally fall into the colonialist camp. For example, in the Ebonics question, we see that according to most people, the students in Oakland schools do not have the right to use their own speech in school because it is felt to be inferior. They should learn the dominant language, Standard American English and especially Proper English*. Their culture and language is not worth perpetuating and their bidialectalism is more likely to be a problem for them than anything else. The attitude is parallel for speakers of other languages like Hmong or Spanish. However, there is more going on here than meets the eye because intertwined with the colonial/imperialistic ideology of language we see overt and covert language prejudice.

I have tried to tease out language prejudice so we can see it more clearly by preparing a three-way table that overlaps in some respects with the two-way table above but also presents attitudes towards minority varieties or languages in greater detail. The three-way table is meant to illustrate a continuum of language attitudes that people might generally have towards languages, dialects, or variants.

←—————→	←—————→	←—————→
equality	pragmatic prescriptivism	prejudice
All dialects are effective and valid for all communicative functions.	All dialects are effective and valid for many communicative functions, but like it or not, one is accepted better in business, government and education.	Proper English* is correct; others are ungrammatical or inferior; they may be called "slovenly thinking" "lazy speech," "deficient," or "slang."
Language maintenance is good. SAE is not a defining characteristic of a good citizen.	Language maintenance is good. SAE is not a defining characteristic of a good citizen.	Speakers of other languages must learn Proper English* to be American. Language maintenance is discouraged.
Intelligence and morality are not correlated with dialect/language.	Intelligence and morality are not correlated with dialect/language.	People who don't speak properly are stupid and bad. They may be called "sloppy thinkers" or "lazy speakers."
Productivity and loyalty are not language dependent.	Productivity and loyalty are not language dependent; however, speakers of other languages can learn SAE to enjoy the full range of opportunities.	Productive and loyal inhabitants speak and write Proper English.*
Nations can support a number of dialects/languages.	Bilingualism or bidialectalism is encouraged; other language/dialects are resources.	Monolingualism or monodialectalism needed; Diversity is a problem.

The following shows a continuum of views which might occur within our schools, as teachers consider their attitudes and goals:

←—————		—————→
equality	pragmatic prescriptivism	prejudice
Teachers should internalize socio-linguistic truths. Education can take place in any dialect or language.	It is the teacher's role to respect students' dialect or language, and encourage and teach SAE speech and writing as a key to socioeconomic improvement. Effective Bilingual or Bidialectal Education is worth the expense.	It is the teacher's role to eradicate grammatical "errors" from their students' speech and writing. Respect for the students' home dialect or language is political correctness.
Use of a home dialect/language in school is allowed.	Use of the students' dialect/language in school in order to promote content and SAE learning is allowed.	Use of the students' dialect/language is prohibited in school. It is "dumbing down" or "catering to."

A true debate about Ebonics never took place because the attitudes of most Americans seem to fall within the language prejudice column of these continua. For there to be a reasonable impartial debate about the use of Ebonics in the classroom, or bilingual education for that matter, mainstream attitudes towards language must shift towards pragmatic prescriptivism and language equality, which is where the true locus of debate should be. However, the issue of remediation and our attitudes towards it brings up other relevant opinions which are shown in the continuum found on the following page.

The divergence between spoken and written SAE and written Proper English* is growing over time. At what point does the word diglossia apply? In any discussion of remediation and who our remedial classes might be designed for must be carried out within the context of a consideration of our attitudes towards Proper English* and the reality that only a handful of language purists may actually speak it and write it. Even more importantly, although only a few people actually write Proper English* consistently, many educators and others have internalized the point of view that it is the only correct way to write and they overestimate how proper their own writing is. They consider themselves good judges of what proper writing is and should be. Their ideas of what is "grammatical" are often rigid and rigidly wrong. They confuse grammar with style when they say that grammatical sentences must have parallel structure. They hypercorrect, marking instances of "between you and me" as incorrect. They blindly follow the rules without remembering any exceptions; adverbs "modify" verbs so the correct sentence is "I smell badly." instead of "I smell bad." These people are the judges of who needs remediation and what they need to learn. The result is that almost no one meets the standards because the

standards are not valid. Students learning to write feel as though there is a language critic looking over their shoulders at all times; they fear to put words on paper.

equality	pragmatic prescriptivism	prejudice
SAE is not inherently better than any other English dialect.	While SAE is not inherently better, it is the most acceptable in the most social contexts. It is unmarked.	Proper English* is better than other varieties because it is more logical, grammatical, refined, or melodious. It follows rules.
Norms of speech and writing are due to long ethnic, social, economic and gender privilege.	Norms of speech and writing may reflect ethnic, social, economic, or gender privilege.	Norms of proper speech and writing are enshrined by tradition and by grammar books. No privilege is involved because all can learn.
Language changes. In time, speech diverges from the more conservative written language.	Language changes. In time, speech diverges from the more conservative written language.	Proper English* resists change because all change is degenerative.
People should speak and write the way they want to as long as others can understand.	People should be able to speak and write the way they want to, but they should be encouraged to learn SAE speaking and writing for academics, business, etc.	People should speak and write Proper English* always. Attempts to change our standards are "dumbing down" or "racist," because they imply that people can't learn.
Remediation unnecessary.	Teaching SAE is sufficient. Remediation may be necessary for some.	Remediation widespread to teach SAE speakers and all others Proper English*.

Language status planning offers us some ideas for changing the status quo, but it raises more questions that it solves at this time. Language status planning is more common outside of the United States than within. It is a field devoted to increasing the number of functions that a language or dialect has in a society in order to increase its status. There have been status planning

attempts in Louisiana, with French and Cajun, recognizing their functions in education and culture. There has been more successful status planning in Canada with French and Native American languages. According to Cooper (1989:99-121), status planning works best as a grassroots effort by the speakers of the language, aided by experts, academicians, and authorities. If speakers value their own language (and culture), and experts and authorities support it, it will tend to be more valued by others. For language status planning to begin, there must be a goal, a research plan, and a method of diffusion.

In the case of Ebonics, the goal might be situated from a minimal general public awareness of the history, functions, and value of Ebonics among African Americans to a more radical acceptance of Ebonics by all as a standard variety of American English. In terms of a research plan, we know a bit about the history and features of Ebonics, but we need to know more about the community of speakers: the number of bidialectal and monodialectal speakers of Ebonics, the functions it has in the community: home, neighborhood, media, church, school, workplace, or academia, and the attitudes of African Americans and other Americans towards it. For instance, although Ebonics is generally disallowed in academia, I noted extensive use of it among African American professors during an Ethnic Studies Conference that I attended. I was told that this was normal and that it marked solidarity and a way of showing that in spite of all of the ways that African-American Ph.D.'s must assimilate to white culture in higher education, there was still a central identification with their own culture and language.

A diffusion plan to change attitudes about Ebonics would require a grassroots reevaluation among African-Americans as the first step. It might take place through African American political organizations, churches, or the media, because those are areas of more African American influence. Universities and teacher education could follow. However, there are some problems to overcome. First, colonialist/imperialist ideology and language prejudice are entrenched in our society. People see them as the norm. Other points of view are controversial, and people who express different points of view (Oakland School Board) are shouted down and not allowed to present their views.

Second, many African Americans do not see Ebonics as a separate variety of English; their use of it is unconscious. If they are aware of it, many African Americans do not value Ebonics because they have internalized the majority culture's prejudice towards it. They see it as a problem to be overcome rather than as a cultural resource for them. Although many linguists value Ebonics, prominent African-Americans do not. The latter are considered the experts on language, not linguists. Therefore, when Bill Cosby and Maya Angelou condemned the use of Ebonics in the classroom, it gave everyone the license to do so without the stigma of racism. Third, if Ebonics were to become accepted as a standard variety, it could cease to be a fairly exclusive linguistic marker of solidarity among African Americans, because more and more whites could adopt it.

In a campaign to change attitudes towards the value of bilingualism or multilingualism in a society, the goal is nothing short of a general public change to an ecological view or at least a pragmatic prescriptivism which includes the notion that languages are resources, that bilinguals have more resources for themselves and for our society and that language maintenance is good.

Many experts and authorities have supported bilingual education, but they have not supported bilingualism. They support bilingual education to promote English learning and when it doesn't seem to be accomplishing the goal of making perfect SAE speakers and Proper English* writers, they are happy to throw it out. In any case, supporters of bilingual education and bilingualism have not succeeded in changing the mainstream point of view away from colonialism/imperialism towards the ecological view. The research issue might be to find out what the key ways to influence public thinking about language issues are, in order to set a reasonable goal and a diffusion plan. The problems are legion: colonialist/imperialist ideology and language prejudice are entrenched. As in the case of Ebonics, many speakers of other languages are anxious to give up their own language in favor of English because they themselves have internalized the majority point of view. Many Hispanics in California voted in favor of abolishing Bilingual Education because they don't view their use of Spanish as a resource, but rather as a problem for them.

Remediation is in some ways the most controversial of these language policies because it is the least obvious. Let's say our goal is to make people aware of the divergence between SAE and Proper English* leading to a possible change in our writing standards. Our research plan might be to find out how distant they are for most native SAE speakers, for most Ebonics speakers and for other non-standard dialect speakers. Another research area would be to determine what the standard should be and how English teachers and other educators can be encouraged to change. There are many problems with language planning in this area, not the least of which is that just talking about this issue brings people's prejudices to the surface and they are not pretty. People outside of Linguistics don't seem to be able to be impartial about this. Any change in standards, instead of being seen as a readjustment or realignment of speaking and writing in order to encourage literacy, will be seen as a "dumbing down." Proponents of change will be subject to projections of racism because their position will be misinterpreted as implying that minorities can't learn Proper English* when, in fact, they are questioning why anyone should.

To conclude, linguists are in a unique position to support a change in people's attitudes towards language and thereby influence the debate about language policies in our society. No one else is going to do it; we cannot expect grassroots movements to arise if the affected people don't have the information on which to base their stand. Linguists, as experts, may have particular social or political agendas about language, but even without particular agendas, they can at least make the public debate more tolerant and reasonable and responses less prejudicial and knee-jerk. That involves changing the culture of Linguistics to value social consciousness and social activism as much as our more conventional areas of interest.

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