

How Language Can Influence Identity

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

Society has various aspects that signify the difference in lifestyles and behaviors amongst individuals in a community. Language is one of these essential aspects that help to identify individuals in a society. Identification of a common language will generalize a specific group of individuals possessing the same culture, even if they are from different races. In this essay, let's examine how language defines our identity in society. Let's also look at how two different authors have given different views about how language defines black schoolchildren in the Oakland School District.

In David D. Troutt's *Defining Who We Are in Society*, Troutt talks about the repercussions of the implementation of Ebonics in the United States' education system and how it was being taught to black schoolchildren. The author narrates that the use of language significantly defines who we are in society. He talks of two different cultures within America, Africa-America society and the "white" society, and how they can be identified by the languages they speak. From his book, Troutt considers people who speak Ebonics are the African-Americans, while those who speak vernacular are from the "white" communities. Trout finds Ebonics and the American vernacular important languages when it comes to the incorporation of American communities.

Troutt confirms that although Ebonics is not a language of any of the groups in America, it has been adversely adopted by Black Americans, due to their lives in ghetto neighborhoods.

Troutt defends the adoption of the language in schools, the Oakland District Schools to be specific. He believes that bringing how children communicate in their homes to school will improve their understanding and eventually their overall academic performance. The adoption by the large population of black people to this language can make it its own language within their society.

In James Hill's *Say What*, he initially suggests making Ebonics an official language in United States' Schools. Most of his life he had considered the language to be 'improper'. James Hills now considers Ebonics a dialect rather than a language. He defines Ebonics as popularly known speech or word phrases that are considered to deviate from standard languages. Hill's considers himself a user of Ebonics throughout his youth, though he finds it not relevant in the formal stage of adulthood. In his book, James Hill confirms the importance of Ebonics in America and how it has shaped the culture of the African-American community.

James Hill confirms that schoolchildren can easily understand and excel in studies when taught in a language they understand from childhood. In his writing, Hill narrates how a student's background can affect the understanding and communication of an individual. The effect of the ghetto on black Americans in America has helped them identify themselves through Ebonics as a language. James Hill suggests that Ebonics has been strongly implemented by learning institution in America to generate more money from the growing population of

African-American students. He believes that it will eventually be taught as a specific subject, since the language will continue to grow.

From these two authors, Ebonics has a significant influence on the understanding of the African-American students. The authors share similar views – they both support the adoption of Ebonics in schools, as it defines the African-American people due to their ghetto background in the United States. James Hill, in his *Say What*, contradicts David D. Troutt's *Defining Who We Are in Society*, in the aspect that Ebonics can only be considered as a deviation in dialect from standard languages and will never be considered its own language.

James criticizes the government for exploiting African-American students through the introduction of the language in institutions. Generally, the authors confirm that Ebonics has brought a significant bridge between African-American society and the "whites", while also defining their identity to the nation. Hence, it can be concluded that language is a form of identification for a person in a society, or it can categorize individuals by their ethnicities.

References

Hill, J., Besh, C. J., Thomas, P., & Gleason, S. (1996). Say what. *Watch your language*. *Chicago Tribune*, Dec, 29.

Troutt, D. D. (1997). Defining Who We Are in Society. *Los Angeles Times*.