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English 110 B
Dr Clenace
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Dear Dr Clenace,

When writing this essay, I wanted to write about a topic that has personally impacted me, and I believed others might relate to as well. Knowing that many of my peers come from immigrant households or even grew up speaking or being surrounded by another language. Writing about how different dialects of English are often judged, as this creates barriers and can lead to a change in identity, would be an important idea to discuss and support. My audience would be those who judge those who speak non-standard English, as well as those who feel the need to conform to proper English due to society's standards. I was able to tailor my language and rhetorical choices to appeal to my audience by using evidence that proves and goes against this prejudice while also using visuals that many can relate to or have seen before. I wanted to allow many to feel seen, and by using the authors and my peers have explored during class, I feel like I have done that.

Some meaningful insight I have learned through writing this is that many ideas explored regarding dialects and the way people speak are something that many go through, no matter who they are. To further explain, after viewing some of the visual elements my classmates implemented into their writing about famous actors who are constantly made fun of, or even in film, how prejudice has become so normal that many don't even see how wrong it is, and just laugh it off, is something that has to be reevaluated. With my peers bringing prejudice in films into light, I felt inspired to do the same politically in my essay. A concept that has impacted my

writing and learning is synthesis. Through writing this, I was told to synthesize, and to synthesize isn't just to make an argument and provide evidence and connect it back to the claim. It means to connect your evidence together smoothly so that it supports a claim. I won't lie and say that I didn't find this concept confusing and didn't know how to synthesize smoothly or in a way that would make sense. I was even confused about how to even go about writing this essay, but with some thought, I learned that I needed to build off each piece of evidence and connect them back to each other. I feel I did the best of my ability in this essay and was able to communicate my message in a way that smoothly blends in my evidence.

Sincerely,

Yasainey Njie

The Damage of “Proper English”

In classrooms, workplaces, and even in day-to-day conversation, people who don't speak “proper English” are quickly judged as uneducated before a thought is taken to understand their words. However, their words that have come out in a certain way due to their background have just as much meaning as the words from those who speak “proper English”. In the United States, there are many different backgrounds of people who come from all over the world. As they build a life and find a way to communicate, their background, intertwined with the official English language, may sound different from the language spoken by those who were born here. Black English, Spanglish, Caribbean English, etc, are dialects that reflect cultural identity and the community that created the way to express themselves. Despite this linguistic diversity, people who speak in a dialect that's not considered standard English are often labeled as uneducated or less intelligent. This affects many aspects of their lives and often hinders their ability to be successful. Misunderstandings of different English dialects create social and educational barriers for speakers from urban or immigrant households. This prejudice attacks their sense of identity and forces many to change or hide how they speak in order to fit society's narrow idea of “proper English.”

In the United States, all types of English are allowed; there are no government-set restrictions on the type of English used, yet “standard English” is treated as if it's the only correct form. In her 2013 article, “Dialect, Interaction And Class Positioning At School: From Deficit To Difference To Repertoire,” Julia Snell, Professor of Sociolinguistics at King's College London, asserts that promoting acceptance of

different dialects may not work due to the prejudice against them having a huge negative impact on those who speak them. Snell backs up her claim by defining non-standard English and how it's perceived. In 2005-2007, she conducted a case study of dialect use resulting in social meaning behind linguistic choices. Lastly, she proposed that street English is a valid form of English due to its grammatical structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and is as correct as standard English. In other words, Street English is to be understood and learned, just as standard English is used and understood.

This idea is further supported by American Linguist John R. Rickford, in his essay, "How Linguists Approach The Study Of Language And Dialect", published in 2002 by Stanford University, which addresses the topic of principles of African American vernacular English and argues that certain assumptions should not be made towards linguistics. He supports this claim by explaining how all dialects follow rules, then how language differences are normal, and finally social prejudice affects how dialects are judged. Rickford highlights how "every naturally used language variety is systematic, with regular rules and restrictions at the lexical, phonological, and grammatical level". Rickford and Snell reveal a shared understanding of how other types of English dialects, particularly black English, are a "correct" form of English. A misunderstanding rooted in stereotypes is caused by certain dialects being judged and misinterpreted. In reality, these dialects are forms of communication that need to be learned and understood because they have their own basic structures, as this avoid communication misunderstandings.

Additionally, supported by Guardian News, a video, ['Such good English': Trump praises Liberian president's use of his country's official language'](#) published in 2025, shows the president of the United States, Donald J Trump, praising the Liberian president's English. The Guardian news supports this idea of “correct” English by



presenting President Trump asking the Liberian president, “ where he learned to speak so beautifully”. This causes a sense of awkwardness and embarrassment. He puts down those who don't speak proper English by saying, “ I have people at this

table who can't speak nearly as well. And they come from here”. This praising and belittling of others' English, especially coming from someone with influence, shows that those who don't speak proper English are often judged and their intelligence is essentially questioned.

Dialect prejudice influences more than just the way a person speaks; it has a large impact on identity, culture, and belonging. A well-known writer who specialized in English, Amy Tan, in her essay, Mother Tongue published in 1990, addresses the topic of prejudice of language identity and argues that one type of English should not be normalized into society; everyone should be represented and understood. She supports this claim by talking about how she used language growing up, then telling a story about her mother and the prejudice she faced because she spoke a different dialect of English, and finally, she talks about how she was able to overcome this prejudice, yet it

still goes on. Tan states, “I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say”(78). Tans' experience illustrates that the prejudice faced in society changed her perception of how she perceived her mother's identity. Those who don't speak standard English are often seen as uneducated or inferior, which is how Tan perceived her mom with her mom's constant use of nonstandard English.

Building on this point, Graduate Student, Ina N Owens, in her study, *Experiences of Bidialectism in College-Educated African Americans: An Exploratory Study*, published in 1996, addresses the topic of dialect prejudice and conducts research on whether speaking two dialects makes things easier for them in society or if it causes uncertainty in how they should communicate and their identity. By supplying information about what dialectism is, explaining the history of Black English, and conducting a study on American students, Owens builds her claim about the effects of dialectism. Owen's research concludes that the type of dialect they used is based on "perception of environment". She further states how Black English is used to provide “cultural solidarity,” while standard English is considered "valuable" to communicate in society. Owen's findings suggest that the choice of dialect used in a situation is a way to navigate through social expectations and help adapt to the prejudice that is faced. Using Black English when not in a formal situation is a way to preserve one's identity; however, it's still dismissed in society.

To expand on this point, a known poet, writer, activist, and teacher, June Jordan, in her political essay, *Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Wille*

Jordan, published in 1985, addresses the topic of prejudice against black English and argues that Black English marginalizes African Americans. She supports this claim by giving context on black English and how those who use it are affected, then by her discussion with her students about a boy named Reggie Jordan who was affected by his use of black English, and finally, by what she learned from her experience. Jordan emphasizes this idea by stating, “ We begin to grow up in a house where every true mirror shows us the face of somebody who does not belong there, whose walk and whose talk will never look or sound 'right” because that house was meant to shelter a family that is alien and hostile to us”(363). Jordan reveals that prejudice not just judges a person's language but shapes how a person sees themselves. Society labeling those as “alien and hostile to us” causes many to feel out of place in an environment that values one proper way of speaking.

Further supporting this idea of impacted identity would be this image labeled “Silenced by success,” created by Opinion Columnist, Scarlett Bilobenes. The image emphasizes this idea of conforming to standard English, causing one to change/ hide one's identity. As shown in the image, the word “hello” is being translated into different



languages, and the figure is overflowing with the English version of the word “hello”. Bilobenes describes this image as being “drowned by the tongue that overflowed with foreign influence”. This feeling of being “drowned” causes many to lose parts of their identity just to fit the standard, and feeling the need to speak English to be

successful causes many to feel ashamed of who they are. This image illustrates the same idea of feeling out of place the author June Jordan argued by displaying the need to fit into the language, which causes many to feel out of place.

Ultimately, society values certain dialects in a diminishing way that not only shapes people's perception of themselves but also forces those who speak non-standard English to redefine who they are. Across the works of authors and new lines mentioned, they all share an argument that goes against the idea of language prejudice with the goal of moving past it. Recognizing and normalizing dialect diversity should be something we come to an understanding on as a society.

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