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Title

Ebonics Tax in the Land of the Free

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/79f2w96v>

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Publication Date

2021-01-11

Data Availability

The data associated with this publication are within the manuscript.

By

A capstone project submitted for
Graduation with University Honors

University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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Department of

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Abstract

Introduction

The linguistic features of Ebonics, its usage, and attitudes towards it have been explicated ad nauseum (Green, 2002; Labov, 1972; Rickford, 1997; Smitherman, 1977; Wolfram, 1969). Whatever rules of convention that might be applied to language in the abstract, language is profoundly connected to social life. It is a human instinct (Pinker, 1994) that has become institutionalized (Sinha, 2017) and, it is a window into the human mind that can function as a proxy for identity (Myers, 2019). It occurs on the regular that people be gettin' offended by non-standard language. If the last sentence had to be reread because it stood out as deviant or incorrect, it is exemplary of the views many people have towards non-standard languages, such as Black English (BE). Attitudes towards BE have been studied at length (Doss & Gross, 1994; Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 2001), and typically, how a language is perceived is an indication of how people feel about its speakers (McWhorter, 2017). BE is a marked variety of the unmarked Standard English (SE) in the United States (US). Many language systems contain different vernaculars and dialects, which are measured against the unmarked standard language. In SE's case, it is not spoken by *any* natural population of speakers (Lippi-Green, 1997). Literature has revealed that SE is a myth (McWhorter, 1998; Lippi-Green, 1997) that has been endorsed by the education systems (Bourdieu, 1977). Despite this, participation and membership within educational systems and spheres of enterprise (i.e. workplaces) tends to increase social mobility. However, for Ebonics speakers—a vernacular predominantly spoken within the African American community—a “good fit” within these domains may involve code-switching. Code-switching is a complex, nuanced phenomenon that contains linguistic and psychological elements (Nilep, 2006). Auer (2005) encapsulates this notion as he writes, “Discourse-related uses of code-switching may be overlaid by identity displays” (p. 406). Code-switching corresponds to functions of agentic orientations that

can be used to strategically manage overt forms of discrimination and reduce the strain of the more socially taxing internalized stigma (Firat, 2016). Additionally, research has considered those who demonstrate greater mastery (i.e. agency) over their social surroundings are likely to have higher self-esteem (Firat, 2016; Rector & Roger, 1996). Code-switching provides Ebonics speakers with the linguistic capital to not only participate in mainstream domains, but also to renegotiate power balances and “reframe their relationships to existing constraints” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1010).

1

Code-switching functions as a communicative device and a means for strategic interaction (Flower, 2000; Myers-Scotton & Ury, 1977). It is ideological in essence (Young, 2009), extending beyond the linguistic realm into the realm of psychological experience (Nilep, 2006). Code-switching involves variation in pitch, tone, and inflection. Other features include truncation, g-dropping, and various verb tense practices. Gumperz (1982) defines conversational code-switching as “the juxtaposition of passages of speech, belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems, within the same exchange” (p. 1). Regarding matters of the mind, Firat (2019) describes how the frontal lobe region of the human brain functions as a catalyst for the development of many cognitive skills, including language. According to Firat’s study, the frontal lobe functions range from abstract reasoning and creativity to socially appropriate behavior, along with other social phenomena. Language is a *sui generis* development of humankind’s cognitive abilities to express themselves as a collaborative species. It is a praxis applied strategically to infinite possible functions, extending beyond communication (Bourdieu, 1977). Code-switching, then, is represented within the interwovenness of the mind, self, and society (Mead, 1934) that is symbolized via myriad linguistic exchanges.

2

According to Young (2009), code-switching produces diminishing returns for minoritized individuals. He claims that “code-switching spells failure for most students—and worse, it’s covered in racism” (p. 72). Instructional methods for code-switching recommend helping students understand grammatical differences between formal and informal settings, and teaching students context appropriate language styles (Wheeler & Sword as cited by Young, 2009). For Young, this is comparable to the fallacious reasoning behind Jim Crow legislation, “which held that the law recognized the equality of the races yet demanded their separation” (p. 53). If there is an official consensus on linguistic equality (Rickford, 1997) then this comparison may be accurate.

Young’s (2009) argument contains some particularly important points vis-à-vis public policy and pedagogical methodology. His argument also invokes the idea of a duality of mind—or double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). Young concludes by noting that “Code meshing is a better resolution to the minority language debate because it allows minoritized people to become more effective communicators by doing what we all do best, what comes naturally: blending, merging, meshing dialects” (p. 72).

Regarding linguistic equality, Bourdieu (1977) explains that “Linguists are right in saying that all languages are linguistically equal; they are wrong in thinking they are socially equal” (p. 652). The social ranking of a language is typically associated with the social ranking of those who speak it. Many people deem BE as substandard, and racism encourages such inaccurate judgements (McWhorter, 2017). BE has often been equated with, as McWhorter pinpoints, “the distorted dialect that minstrel-show performers used, and supposed that the cartoonish quality of the latter requires treating the former as equally dismissible” (p. 21). For African Americans, the stereotypes of ignorance and buffoonery that emerged from such racist displays of Ebonics prompts disidentification from the vernacular. Moreover, the assertiveness of such genres of music like Rap

and Hip Hop, with Ebonics at its foundation, may perpetuate negative stereotypes towards the language and those who speak it. In this case, however, it might be quite misleading to make the claim that condescension and stigma towards Ebonics, that stems from critics of Rap and Hip Hop, makes the genre equivalently as toxic as minstrelsy. Contrary to condemnation and criticism of Rap and Hip Hop, it is nonetheless an art, skill, and form of sublimation for many diverse populations worldwide. It is likely the case that rap and hip hop carry the stigma that it does because it is associated with Blackness and Ebonics.

For Young (2009) to make the claim that most students will fail due to code-switching is a hasty generalization. Ebonics speakers who are not bidialectal are at a deficit in linguistic capital, which is inherent within the competence of the *lingua franca* (Bourdieu, 1977). Moreover, code-switching produces bidialectal speakers whose linguistic capital functions to renegotiate power balances. Flowers (2000) writes: “[C]ode-switching is a dynamic strategy, a symbol for the desire to change the social context” (p. 223). While speakers of Ebonics are often expected to code-switch, privileged groups are not (Myers, 2019). To maintain symbolic domination, privileged groups depend on norms of language choice, “while subordinate groups use code switching to resist or redefine the value of symbolic resources in the linguistic market place” (Heller as cited in Nilep, 2006, p. 13). This echoes Marx and Engels’ assertion that “What the bourgeoisie... produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (Marx and Engels 1848/2002, p. 21).

As Young (2009) attempts to negate the symbolic power of code-switching, code meshing is the language practice that he endorses as the better path towards communicative efficiency for minoritized people. It is important to note the relation between the, more or less, parallel terms code-switching and code meshing. Code meshing is a hyponym (i.e. a designated term) of code-

switching. Boztepe (2003) explains that “Code-switching is a cover term under which different forms of bilingual behavior are subsumed” (p. 4). Intra-sentential and inter-sentential are terms prevalently used by researchers in code-switch discourse (Kachru, 1983; Singh, 1985; Sridhar & Sridhar, 1980). Intra-sentential refers to switches within the sentence that reflect the features of code meshing. Inter-sentential is applied to switches that occur between sentences. Additionally, the terms situational switching (Gumperz, 1972) refers to linguistic changes befitting to the social setting, and metaphorical switching refers to the use of two language varieties within a single social setting. In short, code-switching is a very nuanced phenomenon. How a researcher employs the terminology is of individual preference, but it creates unnecessary confusion.

2

According to Mead (1934) each individual person is essentially a social structure that is manifested via social interaction. Attitudes and behaviors carried and expressed by the different identities claimed by an individual, typically reflect the social environment, from which they emerge (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Therefore, one must be tentative in presuming that the development of the self, its associated identities, and its behavioral outcomes are exclusively a matter of conscious decision making. One must also be tentative to presume that the self is simply a fixed social structure—a marionette whose strings are pulled by the social environment. Firat (2019) explains that “The human brain is not only shaped by the environment, it also shapes the social environment” (p. 9). As the social environment acts down on people, people act up on the social environment. Within symbolic interaction (i.e. repeated meaningful interactions among people that define the social environment), language and significant symbols are used by people in communicative exchanges (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). As people engage in communicative exchange, they naturally begin to constitute a larger community of attitudes. By constituting a

larger community of attitudes, Mead writes, “The individual experiences himself... not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs” (Mead as cited in Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, and Virk, 2012, p. 349).

Following Mead’s logic, the identity that becomes activated in a situation depends on how relevant that identity is when compared to all other identities a person may embody (Stets, 2018). In other words, people can take on many identities (James, 1890) during the course of their lives that can be activated in any situation (Stets, 2018). For Goffman (1979) the term “footing” denotes the various stances (as compared to various identities) that a person may assume within an interaction. Even within a single interaction of brief conversation, language shifts and other linguistic markers can highlight these shifts in context or role (Nilep, 2006). Unlike the conflicting selves of double consciousness, Hogg (2018) points out that “People who have many distinct [social] identities have a complex overall social identity, which is considered more adaptive and resilient, than having few highly overlapping social identities and thus a somewhat monolithic self-concept” (p. 116). Code-switching as a psychological phenomenon allows one to assume the attitudes of a larger community of others and anticipate their intentions (Mead, 1934), and as an agentic orientation, code-switching may be used to modify the social context.

Stets (2018) highlights three self-esteem based outcomes that stems from verification of an individual’s identity/identities. First, because social identities rely on groups of similar others who may provide a sense of acceptance, verification of social/group identity may increase self-esteem when an individual is accepted and valued by a group. Second, Stets highlights that what one can do may increase self-efficacy via role identities. Role identities focus on performances and accomplishments related to one’s duties or tasks. Verification in this area may increase one’s self-

efficacy based esteem. Lastly, the author writes, “Verification should be about one’s ‘true’ self being revealed” (p. 93). Authenticity-based esteem relates to the essence of who a person is, and feelings of authenticity provides people with a sense of wholeness and purpose (Stets, 2018). Tying self-esteem, self-efficacy, and authenticity together with code-switching, Flowers (2000) states that “code-switching can have very specific functions, among them, a show of authority or solidarity” (p. 222). These specific functions can be observed in Paugh’s (2005) research in rural Dominica, where adults prohibited children from speaking Patwa so that children could acquire English. In Dominica, English is the official language, and it contributes to major language shifts. During peer play, children assume adult roles and employ Patwa. This highlights the children’s keen sense of role- and place-appropriate language use. The author notes, “Their use of Patwa provides access to particular practices, identities, and positions of autonomy or authority, which in turn enable[s] them to position themselves as leaders of play activities and hence to direct and shape the actions and speech of other children” (p. 79). Paugh’s research shows how code-switching practices provides people (even small children) a broader social range. Furthermore, code-switching allows people to create social spaces unique to their core interests/values (e.g. peer play, clubs, grassroots movements) that promote feelings of authenticity, group membership with similar others, and role performances that sustain the group.

Language can be conceptualized as a means to exchange information. The idea that an action such as code-switching is guided by interest can be observed within the economics of linguistic exchange (Bourdieu, 1977). Linguistic exchange represents the idea that language can be a scarce commodity that can be used as leverage to gain economic and/or symbolic profit. Beyond explicit knowledge of grammatical competence (e.g. syntactical formation) which is the

focus of linguists, tacit knowledge is required to grasp the social dynamics of language usage. Language is interconnected with the body (e.g. linguistic habitus) and attached to this union are forms of capital available to the individual. Linguistic capital is a form of the broader cultural and symbolic capital. Yosso (2005) describes cultural capital as “the accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society” (p. 76). Symbolic capital represents legitimacy—the rules of the game that have been reproduced over time via social interaction and signified in symbolic form (see Althusser, 1970). Linguistic capital is reliant on both cultural and symbolic capital to function with meaning. To illustrate this, imagine the words “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” These words can transform reality, but they must be uttered by a legitimate official (e.g. minister) who has navigated numerous fields (i.e. training programs, education systems) to gain the power to marry. The official (even with the power vested in him/her/themselves) cannot utter the words towards any random couple on the street and deem them married, as the words must be uttered in the proper field. The words alone are not significant beyond their definitional meanings and, they do not hold the power to bring a marriage into being. This is because they do not represent the totality of fields of relations that one must navigate to acquire the power to marry. This illustration shows how language, the body, and the field function as a synchronous network of exchanges that produces meaningful language. This also illustrates how code-switching may be guided by an interest to gain symbolic profit (e.g. college degree, professional license, etc.) to gain greater social mobility and a higher position in the social hierarchy.

Bourdieu (1977) uses the terms field and market interchangeably but there are subtle differences in their usage. Bourdieu implies the term market, which infers field, to provide an understanding of the ideas about exchange, consumption, and competition. Although the market

is Bourdieu's metaphorical play on words, it is at times is a tangible location in space (i.e. field). The field represents a hierarchy of competing individuals and, their relative positions within the hierarchy corresponds to each individual's relative sources of capital. The field is controlled by powerful people who control the symbolic capital or competence (see Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 16). A "person" can be represented by an actual person or an institution that legitimates forms of competence and are located at the highest ranks within the market. These persons or institutions control the field and the rules of the game that others must play by. Attempts to limit or exclude some from entering the market are constructed so that the status quo can be maintained. According to Hogg (2018),

"Subordinate groups' beliefs are ideologically structured by the dominant groups to conceal the real nature of intergroup relations. Although wholesale passing is not in the dominant group's interest... the ideology of mobility is very convenient for the dominant group. It prevents subordinate groups from recognizing the illegitimacy of the status quo and pursuing more competitive... group-based intergroup strategies that might eventually topple the dominant group and change the status quo" (p. 125).

The ideological structure extracts language from the material world, the political world, and economic conditions that makes language possible and infuses it into the realm of ideas (see Durkheim, 1893). These ideas become part of the socialization process which serves as the reproduction apparatus of the status quo. Because the socialized body is deeply programmed early in life (see Bandura, 1969; Bandura & Walters, 1977), competence unintroduced to the habitus is a feat of greater difficulty than simply expanding one's vocabulary or learning rules of grammar. To effectively acquire linguistic capital, one must learn a broad competence of characteristics of habitus of the targeted social class (Bourdieu, 1977).

The habitus can be conceptualized as practical dispositions that are assigned to individuals from distinct social classes (Bourdieu, 1977). It has a significant influence on an individual's outlook on life (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018), and people anticipate their chances of success and failure by this outlook, which may limit their personal goals and expectations in life. An individual's anticipated chances of likely success or failure can reproduce structures in which they want to be liberated from. The habitus, although durable and inflexible to change, is not a determinate state (Myles, 1999). Ritzer and Stepnisky (2018) note that "the habitus merely 'suggests' what people should think and what they should choose to do" (p.366). People also measure their chances of success by other's who embody a comparable habitus. This is what Mills (1959/2000) calls the first fruit of the sociological imagination which he describes as "The idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances" (P. 5).

Agency allows people to influence their environment (Firat, 2016) by stimulating cognitive and bodily improvisation that opposes complete submission to the rules of the game. Stated differently, agency stimulates behavioral strategies such as code-switching, which seeks to renegotiate the rules set in place by those in power. Once people push to modify the rules of the game and language becomes the object to be controlled and reconstructed in its legitimate representational form, conflict may develop over new linguistic competence and legitimization (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Because the habitus is a highly socialized disposition, an individual who takes on the challenge of modifying their linguistic habitus might hyper correct their speech to gain legitimacy from privileged classes. While more powerful people can afford to relax their speech, less powerful people are prone to hyper-correctness and self-consciousness (Bourdieu,

1977). Too much pressure can lead some to withdraw from the game prior to their actual participation (see Steele & Aronson, 1995). These linguistic malfunctions are likely an outcome of perceived threats, which can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Situational threats that disrupt task performances are known as stereotype threats (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Schmader & Johns, 2003). Because Ebonics is a stigmatized vernacular those who use Ebonics may develop an inferiority complex against it. This, and not code-switching per se, is what may lead to hyper-correctness of speech and self-consciousness as people attempt to conceal their vernacular.

4

According to Goffman (1959), people are generally accustomed to the rules of decorum within society. People know how to perform appropriate behaviors in context-oriented ways. Code-switching resonates with Goffman's notion of frontstage and backstage behavior (Boztepe, 2003). Front stage is where performances associated with rules of decorum take place, while Goffman defines backstage as a place "where the suppressed facts make an appearance" (p. 69). While code-switching involves front and backstage "performances" (i.e. personal fronts), front and backstage are also used to represent actual locations (i.e. settings) in the social realm where performances take place. It is the frontstage where actors display their linguistic competence. Goffman notes that there are two broad groupings to frontstage performances. The first group involves "the way in which the performer treats the audience while engaged in talk with them or in gestural interchanges that are a substitute for talk" (p. 67). The second group involves competence of the requirements of decorum (i.e. moral and instrumental requirements). Goffman's list of backstage language behaviors consists of:

“[R]eciprocal first naming, co-operative decision-making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborative griping, smoking, rough informal dress, ‘sloppy’ sitting and standing posture, *use of dialect or substandard speech* [emphasis added], mumbling and shouting, playful aggressivity and ‘kidding,’ inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potentially symbolic acts, minor physical self-involvements such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching, and flatulence” (p. 78).

Goffman (1959) describes front stage language behavior as the absence of backstage language behavior. His premise is “the higher one’s place in the status pyramid, the smaller the number of persons with whom one can be familiar, the less time one spends backstage, and the more likely it is that one will be required to be polite as well as decorous” (pp. 81-82). Goffman’s idea of language behavior is most reflected in situational code-switching (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; see also Goffman, 1979, 1981) where changes in linguistic form are contingent on the social setting. In a similar fashion to the way syntactic or grammatical restrictions define the modes of expression (Nilep, 2006) social settings can “restrict the selection of linguistic variables” (Blom & Gumperz, 1972, p. 421).

5

The Standard English myth is the idea that there exists a proper and correct form of English spoken by idealized speakers (Lippi-Green, 1997 see pp. 53-62; see also McWhorter, 1998). This ideal standard is what other speech forms are measured against. The grammar of BE and other non-standard speech forms consequently become subordinate to the *idea* of Standard English. Standard English is not spoken by any natural population of speakers (Lippi-Green, 1997). What is perceived to be “proper” US English are merely varieties “which find acceptance and favor over space and social distinctions” (p. 62). According to Lippi-Green, these varieties of English are

most accurately termed Mainstream English (MUSE: Mainstream United States English) and is generally employed by the dominant ranks in society.

The notion of Standard English emerged from grammarians and linguists creating rules of grammatical right and wrongness (Lippi-Green, 1997). The idea of right and wrong arouses the moral obligation to be non-deviant and assume what is proper. Linguists can acknowledge from an objective scientific stance what is grammatically correct, but they know that there exist power relations in linguistic exchange (Bourdieu, 1977). Linguists can also make the assertion that all language systems are laden with complexity and systematicity (e.g. 1996 Ebonics Resolution), but subordinate groups are on uneven ground with the dominant group's language. The value of a language and its speakers is predicated on "the power and authority in the economic and cultural power relations of the holders of the corresponding competence" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 652). Hence, linguists are correct to assert that all languages are equal, but they are mistaken to think that this finding will lead to social equalities pertinent to language.

6

Ebonics, as a racialized language, takes on the stereotypes associated with the Black social identity. The term Ebonics itself is a portmanteau, combining the terms ebony and phonics which translates as "black sounds." Ebonics has significant relevance to African American culture and social identity, as it is a salient marker of social solidarity (Greene & Walker, 2004; Koch et al, 2001). Despite its cultural relevance, many non-linguists (the public) continue to be skeptical of Ebonics as a legitimate vernacular, deeming it as an illegitimate, substandard, and deviant form of English. In 1997, the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) affirmed that Ebonics "is systematic and rule-governed like all natural speech varieties" and the vernacular "has been established by numerous scientific studies" (Linguistic Society of America, para 2, 1997). Contrary to the LSA's

affirmation of Ebonics' linguistic legitimacy, popular opinion persists to regard Ebonics as a language of the ghetto—even within the African American community. Thus, the African American community cannot be mistaken as homogeneous as it pertains to language attitudes. Instead, one must consider variation in language proficiency, and political attitudes (Hoover, 1978).

Ebonics has been at the center of controversy for several decades. Hoffman (1998) points out that “from the start, terminology was problematic: Negro Dialect, Black English, Black English Vernacular (BEV), African/Afro-American Vernacular English (AAVE), Ebonics” (p. 77). Ensuing issues pertained to language acquisition, such as the landmark Ann Arbor decision in 1979. The author states that, “Some [B]lack parents sued its Board of Education, arguing that their children were not learning Standard English effectively and that effective instruction required teachers to know about the language of Black English-speaking pupils” (p. 79). The latter stages of the Ebonics controversy involved the legitimization of the vernacular. In December 1996, the Oakland California School Board made resolutions to implement Ebonics into classrooms to improve students' Standard English acquisition (Rickford, 1997; Wolfram, 1998).

The LSA's (1997) resolution of Ebonics as a systematic and rule-governed language was not enough to negate unfavorable stereotypes attached to the vernacular; the notion being that Ebonics, although systematic, is systematically wrong (McWhorter, 2017). The Oakland School Board and LSA resolutions might only serve as an argumentative reference for Ebonics apologists. Furthermore, Rickford (1999) states that African American parents “often express their concern that if their children were limited to the vernacular, this would negatively affect their chances of going on to college, getting good jobs, and getting ahead in society more generally” (p. 284). Symbolic power is held by institutions that provide the means for social mobility (i.e. educational

systems). These institutions provide literacy and linguistic competence based on SE curriculum. Bourdieu (1977) asserts that, “The educational system is a crucial object of struggle because it has a monopoly over the production of the mass of producers and consumers, and hence over the reproduction of the market on which the value of linguistic competency depends” (p. 647). After decades of controversy and debate, code-switching became “the teacher’s standard response to linguistic variety in the American college composition classroom” (Howard, 1996, p. 266).

Conclusion

Historically, Black speech is often required to maintain authenticity within the Black community, and anglophone dialects used by a Black speaker can likely lead to presuppositions of inconsistency with the ingroup (Smitherman, 1977). Although rejection from a dominant outgroup can cause distress, it is ostracism from the ingroup that may be most taxing. Researchers have observed that, “When one lacks the social mobility to leave a lower-status group and join the relevant higher status-group, then a more viable option is to identify with one’s lower-status ingroup and work to protect its identity and interests” (Outten, Schmitt, Garcia, and Branscombe 2009, p. 149). However, reliance on the norms of collective agency and agentic solidarity while undervaluing agency for oneself, may lead to diminishing returns for one’s ability to challenge discrimination outside of one’s ingroup (Firat, 2016). Some researchers who have used language as a proxy for identity (Myers, 2019; Young, 2009) describe the dual-mindset of Ebonics code-switchers. The two warring ideals (Du Bois, 1903) of a dual-mindset that Ebonics code-switchers are surmised to contend with is the dilemma of selling out one’s group identity or being left out from broader opportunities relevant to one’s personal identity. Du Bois (1903/1994) used the term double consciousness to describe what he referred to as “a peculiar sensation... of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others” (p. 2).

Research shows that felt or internalized stigma is more harmful to those who are negatively stereotyped (Firat, 2016; Schmader & Johns, 2003; Steel & Aronson, 1995). Code-switching is not a panacea for ridding society of discrimination or stereotypes against Ebonics. Instead, code-switching “as a marked choice is a strategy which negotiates power for the speaker [and] signals the speaker’s intention... to change the RO [rules and obligations] balance” (Goyvaerts & Zembele as cited in Flowers, 2000, p. 223). Resistance to code-switching may imply a resistance to change. In other words, resistance to code-switching may imply a resistance to change the social structure. Instead of contending with the dilemma of selling out one’s group identity or being left out from broader opportunities, code-switching provides the linguistic capital for Ebonics speakers to *buy in* to social mobility and *stand out* in their social interactions.

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