

Ralph W. Fasold's article " Making Languages" published by Cascadilla Press in the *ISB4: Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium in Bilingualism* (2005) argues that because languages are socially constructed, their closely related language systems can be classified as dialects or as separate languages based on ideology not just science. For example, English as spoken by African American communities has been classified as broken or sub-standard, Black, ghetto English, regional Black dialect, or a separate language system called Ebonics according to the political ideology behind linguistic research. In this article, Fasold defends Ebonics as a separate language based on sociolinguistic research of its mutually intelligible, words and syntax shared by languages of the African Diaspora.

According to Fasold, Heinz Kloss' (1967) definition of "abstand" (language by distance) is not absolute criteria to distinguish languages from dialects. Moreover, Kloss' definition of "ausbau" (literary expansion of language and political boundaries) is too rigid criteria to distinguish language from dialect because it excludes community identification with language as in the case of Ebonics. According to Fasold, closely related dialects such as Swedish and Norwegian are languages due to popular social perception, cultural beliefs, political hegemony, and national ideology while distantly related dialects such as Chinese remain separate, mutually unintelligible dialects. Although Ebonics does not fit as neatly into "abstand" or "ausbau" criteria, Fasold considers it language because linguistic science is generally inconclusive and socio-political criteria is specifically evident to classify Ebonics as language.

Fasold, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at Georgetown University, supports the Oakland School Board decision to use Ebonics as a tool of instruction. In this article, he cites research that Ebonics is socially constructed from distantly related dialects of the languages of the African Diaspora unlike AAVE (African American Vernacular English), largely perceived in the United States as a corruption of Standard English. The ruling of the Oakland Board raised social perception of Ebonics from broken English to the higher status of a language system taught in public schools. The Oakland ruling challenged social perception about AAVE as the dialect of the underprivileged and undereducated, thereby creating a firestorm of debate among educators. Consequently, proponents of teaching Black English as

instructional remediation were confronted by proponents of instructional reform of English in order to provide equity and justice to the community of speakers of a socially oppressed language.

Fasold agrees with Smith (1998) and other Afro centric linguists who noted that although Ebonics borrows words from the European and English lexicon it is not a variant of European languages. He concurs with research that Ebonics has a distinct syntactic structure derived from a mosaic of variant African African Diaspora languages. However, disagrees with Blacksire-Belay (1997), that Ebonics is rooted in the languages of all descendants of Africans, or that it belongs to a Pan African language system (Twiggs,1973). Instead, Fasold believes that Ebonics derives from Africans of the Niger-Congo family, and he further emphasizes that evidence of linguistic science and paralinguistic communication data is not absolute criteria to attribute Ebonics with language status. It is evident to Fasold that Ebonics is a language because the community who speaks it exists, and any inconclusive sociolinguistic research that argues otherwise is secondary to his argument.

Fasold has shown in his research that linguistic science such as classifications of "abstand" and "ausbau" do not determine language classification unequivocally. He explains that classification of Ebonics vary according to group ideology: For example, non-Europeans who perceive African Americans as inferior due to poverty or race have classified Ebonics as broken English. Mainstream linguists who believe Ebonics is a mosaic of distinct ethnicities classify Ebonics as dialect. American dialectologists who believe in an egalitarian society classify Ebonics as "Black English." Afro centric scholars who see Ebonics as a unity of the Black Diaspora classify Ebonics is a separate language. Each of these different classifications has had far reaching effects on English pedagogy found in schools where dense populations of students of African American descent attend.

Not all languages fulfill criteria of being both mutually unintelligible and socially distant. For example, Chinese dialects are socially proximate accepted variants of one language but are mutually unintelligible. However, because they share a unified writing system, and national identity these dialects are considered one language. Ebonics has no written language and no national identity, but shares a similar lexicon and syntax derived historically from different languages of people from the

African Diaspora. Ebonics continues to mutate between generations of descendants living in minority, urban communities within the United States. Fasold argues in support of teaching Ebonics as language based on its unique social history and expression of personal identity, culture and values of African American communities who speak it on behalf of socio-political justice and equity.

But how does the acceptance of Ebonics as language impact the teaching of English in American schools? Do schools teach Ebonics to scaffold the teaching of Standard English or do they teach Ebonics as a separate language? Do urban schools in minority districts only hire black teachers who by the nature of their own ethnicity or race understand how to transition students to mainstream English? Or do they require teacher training in the pedagogy of TESOL for all teachers of English despite their racial and ethnic backgrounds? Do schools apply TESOL methodology to Ebonic speakers or do they use TESOL to teach all students whose first language is not English including speakers of Ebonics, Creole, Chinese, Spanish....? Finally, how do we as teachers build up students' communication skills with knowledge and respect for their linguistic identities to help them achieve the English standards so they can thrive in mainstream society?