

## White English: A Satire

Juan Taylor, 1981

Few pieces of literature have given me more insight on myself than Peter Farb's essay on Black English. He brought out conclusions about a whole race of people that I am sure the majority of the public, especially the Black public, are not aware of. After reading this essay, I began to understand that objectivity, not insight, is what one must possess in order to understand cultures different from one's own. Then I began to notice how strange the Caucasian dialect actually is. (I must emphasize that my discussion of the history of White English is highly controversial.) Down at Leon's Barber Shop, there are at least three different opinions on the matter: that White English is a completely different language from regular English, that it is only a different dialect, and the "let's change the subject" viewpoint. After extensive research I feel that the first opinion is the most accurate one.

The whole subject of White English is so tied up with both racism and good intentions that it is rarely discussed calmly, even by the linguistic experts at Leon's Barber Shop. At one end we have the racist who attributes the White hyperactive use of words to some physical characteristic such as thinness of lips and tongue. On the other end we have those of goodwill who try to rationalize that White English is simply an Americanized English and that it is no more incorrect than any other dialect because hardly any of us speaks pure English anymore. Noted linguist, Chico Gomez, says that the whole theory of White English is, in his words, "a bunch of chit." (I assume that the word "chit" is referring to the phrase "chit-chat" or small talk.) Both of these views are wrong though. White English has nothing to do with the anatomy of a race or with the "Americanization" of the language. The history of the English spoken by New World Europeans show that it has been different from the beginning. Of course, not all Whites speak "White English." Some speak just as we do, but besides Wolfman Jack, these cases are rare.

By "White English" I do not mean that quaint vocabulary adopted by some non-Europeans in order to pretend to be white. These rich and metaphorical words are just common slang, although even we who speak Regular English sometimes use such words to express feelings. Such words and phrases as "Mr. Hard Guy," "jerk," "gross," and "Mercedes" (rather than the more typical "Cadillac") are now used by speakers of Standard English. When I refer to White English, I am speaking of a different history, a different sound system, and a different basic structure.

Peter Farb had one definite advantage in his research that I have not had. Because all Blacks came from the plantation and formed ghettos up north,

he was able to observe them without too much trouble. In addition, Mr. Farb had that wonderful research paper done by Lorenzo Dow Turner, in which Mr. Turner studied the speech patterns of Blacks in the deep South. I personally had a hard time going along with this research work; I just assumed that natives of the deep South had a distinct dialect; I expressed this thought to my mother, and she replied, "You makin' sense, but you don't be makin' sense."

Because the White population is more diverse than the Black population, I had to find a group that would represent the White race. My three representatives were the Kennedy family, the Carter family, and the students of IUPUI. Another wonderful source of research was the daytime soap opera. Here, I could observe Europeans in a natural setting communicating with one another. All these sources helped me formulate the theory I will endeavor to explain to you now.

Since people from all over Europe had to ride the same ships over to the New World, and since they all did not speak the same language, a form of communication had to be established; the need resulted in what is known as "pidgin" English. (It is reported that the first words used were obscenities and ethnic slurs. These words are the bases of many words that we use even today.) Therefore, most of the Europeans arriving in the New World could communicate at some level with each other, and eventually they taught this language to their Black employees. As the nation grew, White English began to diversify, but these variations are minor in comparison to the major differences between White English and Regular English.

It would take a novel to discuss these distinctions sufficiently, but I will point out a few of the differences between White English and Regular English. In the Kennedy family, for example, the "r" is left off the ends of words, so "car" is pronounced "ca" and "rear" is pronounced "rea." In the case of the Carter family, some words are unrecognizable. For example, "sure" is pronounced "show," "bulb" is pronounced "bub," and "far away" is pronounced "way over yonder."

The grammar the Europeans use should be examined closely also. It is apparent that young Caucasians have a hard time forming thoughts into words, so many of them use "filler" words such as "I go" to help link their thoughts. A typical conversation at IUPUI will sound like this:

"I go, 'Are you taking me out tonight?' Then he goes, 'I can't.' I go, 'Why not?' Then he goes, 'I've got to go to the store.' Then I go, 'Can I go too?' He goes, 'Sure.' So I went."

After viewing soap operas, I noticed that the use of phrases like "I go" was superseded by use of more sophisticated words. In one episode I heard a woman say, "His exuberant behavior at the funeral was reprehensible. He acted like a debased imbecile." I had to get my dictionary out to see whether she liked the man or not. Some of the experts at Leon's have theorized that because Whites have no rhythm, they cannot space their words properly, so instead, they

use enormous words, such as “irreconcilable,” to keep their speech fluent.

Some argue that my findings are not valid. They say I cannot judge a whole race on a few examples. Some accuse me of inadequately defining “Regular English” and point out that no one form of English is universal. But I feel that Mr. Farb’s research has set a precedent that all researchers can now follow. My only hope is that my subsequent studies of Red, Yellow, and Brown English will not cause this much controversy.