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Submission date: 12-Jun-2020 03:05AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 1342087044

File name: The_Myth_of_Standard_English_2_PAGES.docx (18.43K)

Word count: 622

Character count: 3417

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McWhorter's Arguments on Standard English

There is no language superior to others. With all differences in languages, the ultimate use of language be it verbal or sign is communication. John McWhorter is a Columbia University linguist who debunks the myth that there is Standard English. He does so by analyzing the pattern of speech and accent to pinpoint the differences that exist between varieties of English. McWhorter's arguments are based on controversies of what people believe. He, however, does not give a politically correct position but provides his audience insights for the truth. The English language is ever-changing, and the changes started a thousand years ago up to date (McWhorter, p. 2). The world holds the perspective that there are varieties of English language used in different regions of the world, but among the many types, there is one which is "pure" English. Therefore, the perceived as "pure English" is the correct form of the English language and is widely accepted. Mostly, institutions use Standard English in formal situations. The language is tidily printed and spoken, especially in European nations.

According to McWhorter, the English language keeps on changing, and therefore, there is no Standard English. The language has suffered the influence of other languages ever since its origin. For instance, the original language was influenced by Vikings (McWhorter, p. 4). McWhorter holds that failure of the Vikings to learn the structure of the English language

thoroughly led to ESL deficiencies. They trashed the original language, especially on the part of genders. Ironically, the language they barely understood becomes their “user-friendly” and developed to what we call Standard English grammar. McWhorter compares language to “hot balls of wax” that are not static but ever tossing in convection currents which he meant the speakers. The language changes because of speakers search for their language identity. It is through the social status of the Vikings that their English language became popular. According to McWhorter, certain social groups dominate in society, and other groups comply with their culture. Communication is a crucial element of people’s culture and therefore, accepting the language of a particular people is equally embracing their culture.

Therefore, when people learn a particular language, they assimilate some elements of the new language in theirs. For that reason, there is language mixture which is facilitated by the interaction of various social groups (McWhorter, p. 6). McWhorter debunked the four levels through which language mixture takes place. The first level involves the borrowing of terms from the foreign language. For instance, the word “entrepreneur” is a French term borrowed by the English language. The second level involves coining of word and sentence structure. For example, Spanish language speakers, the Quechuas, translate English language structures to Spanish. While the English language, the sentence “peter’s shoes” the Spanish language has “the shoes of Peter.” Therefore, the Quechuas only follow that Spanish sentence structure (McWhorter, p. 9). The third level entails field slave creole. It is the language of slaves which is marked by the use of consonant-vowel words. They made it hard for the native speakers of the English language to understand some of their language constructions. The last level involves conjoining of two languages as in the case of Quechua and Spanish speakers.

It suffices to conclude that language, as McWhorter holds, is never static and therefore, it keeps on changing as people embrace social interaction. The social group that dominates in the society sets standards of language, and other groups follow. The same happened with the native English speakers who through their dominance, contributed to the standardization of the English language.

¹
Works Cited

McWhorter, John. *Word On The Street: Debunking The Myth Of A Pure Standard English*. Basic Books, 2001.

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