

## Two letters about language

To: Educators, bureaucrats, and politicians,  
who seek to regulate, dismiss, or judge  
other people's speech:

1. Standard English is a written code.
2. There is no such thing as Standard Spoken English.
3. If you are speaking in Standard English,  
you must be covered in ink and wallowing in a book...

To: The people who own Ebonics, Brooklynese, Appalachian,  
African-American English, and other allegedly imperfect languages  
given to them as gifts by their families, cultures, and subcultures:

Your language—  
the words that really hum in your throat—  
is wonderful and valid.

Just because the people at your local school speak differently,  
just because you may want to learn new ways of speaking  
in order to get a good job,  
does not mean you have to abandon your primary code:  
Hold onto the language of your family and neighborhood,  
even if you choose, sometimes, to sound "proper."

Language must be free, flexible, and organic in order to keep people free.

Language is for:

communicating among real, live human beings; expressing feelings; building bridges  
between ethnic neighborhoods in a city; doing commerce; working out the details of  
living; learning and processing the moral lessons of our mothers (however poor,  
uneducated, or differently colored they may be); making agreements in  
communities; singing praises in churches and temples; expressing grief; venting  
anger; singing lullabies; dreaming dreams.

4. Underneath your veneer, you proper people need your  
humming language, too.

5. You need to feel unashamed to  
    think and  
    dream and  
    sit down at the family table with your common speech.
6. Be thankful to those who keep our language alive  
    with modifications, variations, and cultural merging.
7. A language with no dialect or slang is a dead language.

Signed,  
A neighbor

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