



What to Say and Write - or Not: A Vest-Pocket Language Primer

Donald D. Hook
Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, USA

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Abstract

The impetus for this piece came from several newspaper and TV reports on celebrity Bill Cosby's harsh criticism of black Americans using substandard English. The article has a number of general purposes: to recognize language as man's greatest achievement, to applaud the huge diversity of languages, to further the appreciation of literature and the science of language, to impart information about English, and, no less, to treat of a few practical aspects of everyday language use, particularly for black Americans. Whereas black persons and their imitative peers, black or white, will sometimes suffer exclusion for the public use of substandard English, particularly if it is laced with obscenities and the like, it is suggested that little or nothing can be done to eliminate this practice aside from rejection by the workaday world and a realization that the practice usually results from the permissive times and inadequate upbringing, none of which, however, excludes the raising of the level of sensitivity to the proper time and place of use of less than standard English.

About the Author

Dr Hook is Professor emeritus of Modern Languages and Linguistics, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, USA.

E-mail: ProfDoktor1@aol.com