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## **The importance of Black English**

June Jordan was an African American Poet, college professor and activist. Jordan in her personal narrative "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You And the Future Life of Willie Jordan", published in August 1988, addresses the topic of Black English and argues that Black English is a key factor in many African American lives who live in the United States, and that it should not be judged or looked down upon because of the others negative view towards it. She supports this claim by using logos to illustrate how other Countries who have multiple languages within their society, and are able to peacefully coexist with each other, then Jordan uses diction by providing a horrific story which demonstrates why she and her students are trying to make changes using Black English due to an event that happened to a student's brother, and finally she uses repetition to emphasize the significance of Black English in the community of African Americans living in America. By using these rhetorical strategies and devices, Jordan effectively pushed the idea that Black English should be recognized by others and should not be ignored.

The author argues that Society doesn't view Black people as they view the other races. Society looks down upon "Black English" because it doesn't sound right or appropriate, but when it comes to other variations of English it is deemed acceptable. This claim is explicitly stated upfront in the first paragraph of June Jordan's text, which states "In contrast to India, where at least fourteen languages co-exist as legitimate Indian languages, in contrast to Nicaragua, where all citizens are legally entitled to formal school instruction in their regional or tribal languages."(1) The author outlines that there are other Countries such as India where there

are multiple different languages spoken within that Country, and are able to successfully coexist with each other. This implies that if other Countries who speak totally different languages can operate without conflict, then a Country such as America who mostly speaks English, should be able to operate even though we speak different variations of the same language. This text connects the relationship between language and identity by presenting the differences in how English is spoken throughout the world, depending on what country or race you are. In the text it states “ I would suppose "the standard" for English in Malaysia is not the same as "the standard" in Zimbabwe. I know that standard forms of English for Black people in this country do not copy that of Whites. And, in fact, the structural differences between these two kinds of English have intensified, becoming more Black, or less White.” (2) By expressing this statement in the text the author speculates that Jordan establishes that there is a barrier between Black English and White standard English and also supports the fact that the way English is spoken really does depend on the background that you were raised in. If that was not the case then every person speaking English would talk/write the same way. However it is because we speak English differently that I feel like we can grow closer with our cultural identity.

Throughout America, there are a variety of languages and English variations spoken depending on a person’s ethnic background, and even what state that person lives in. For example people from New York are associated with a rude and loud variation of English. However, no matter where you are from, the type of language you speak is a key significance of who you are and what you represent. Black English is used widely throughout the United States, and many African American communities rely on Black English to express themselves and communicate with others. Jordan displays this idea in her text by conveying “Black English is not exactly a linguistic buffalo; as children, most of the thirty-five million Afro-Americans living here depend

on this language for our discovery of the world... Black English is not exactly a linguistic buffalo.”(1) Jordan propels the message that Black English is not a dead language nor is it extinct by emphasizing the use of repetition with the phrase “Black English is not exactly a linguistic buffalo.” To further assist her claims Jordan proceeded to use logos by providing statistics of how many African American people who migrate to this Country and can use Black English as a way to communicate with others which is approximately 10 percent of immigrants.

The author uses diction to convey a serious tone/mood for the text by using certain word choices and descriptions. In the text it states

“The facts, however, speak for themselves. According to the Death Certificate and autopsy report, Reggie was shot eight times from point-blank range. The Doctor who performed the autopsy told me himself that two bullets entered the side of my brother's head, four bullets were sprayed into his back, and two bullets struck him in the back of his legs.”(11)

The author uses imagery to illustrate the unimaginable pain and force used on Willie’s brother (Reggie), by the white police who claimed that only one of them shot him. By describing the severe wounds on Reggie, this can appeal to the audience's pathos, by making the audience feel anger and sadness towards events that took place. The author wants to expose the truth of what the Black community is facing to those reading this text, and inspire people to help make a change in the treatment of Black people. In addition to this, when the students wrote to the police station in Black English was also a very positive and important event that happened, which sent a message to the police, that Black people are aware of what they are doing, and are trying to make a change. However, writing the letters in Black English could also have a negative impact because the police might not understand what the students are trying to say, due to Black English being totally foreign to them. When people aren't familiar with Black English it can be very difficult to understand which can be seen when Jordan introduced her students to the text “The

Color Purple” in which her students proclaimed “Why she have them talk so funny. It don't sound right" and "It don't look right, neither. I couldn't hardly read it."(2) This indicates that even Jordan’s class which was composed of a majority of black students had a hard time understanding Black English. If blacks had a hard time understanding Black English then the police who are white would certainly have an issue as well.

It is certain from this analysis, that through rhetorical strategies and devices, Jordan portrayed Black English as a language that should be acknowledged by others and must not be ignored. In the modern world, we can follow Jordan’s footsteps and make changes. As a fellow African American, it is shocking to see many of the same issues Jordan was writing about, still relevant in today’s society; the killing of innocent blacks and African American communities being suppressed. But just like Jordan, we have to think, how can we make a change?