

Abstract

This paper presents the results of an assessment of language attitudes towards African American Language (AAL) or US *Ebonics* by 12 graduate and undergraduate students from Eastern, Western and Southern Africa attending a large Midwestern University in the US.

A pilot study was conducted in spring, 2003 with African students enrolled at this large Midwestern University. A language attitude questionnaire, using a matched-guise technique developed on a model by Wallace Lambert et al (1960, 1967) and based on a semantic differential scale, designed by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) was constructed to elicit responses towards tape-recorded voices of African Americans speaking both African American Language (AAL) and General Standard American English (SAE). The respondent sample was comprised of twelve African students originally from Eastern, Western and Southern Africa. Four students, two females and two males, from each African region were selected, and an effort was made, where possible, to balance the number of graduate students with undergraduate students.

Firstly, the study's findings proved to a large extent the hypothesis that the respondents from each region would have a more favorable attitude towards the variety of English they are more familiar with. Many of the respondents especially those relatively new in the US ranked Standard American English (SAE) higher than African American Language/US *Ebonics* variety. Secondly, the findings also proved that the respondents from all the three African regions would rank the more familiar variety or varieties as more prestigious than the unfamiliar variety. Finally the findings proved the

hypothesis that the respondents could correctly identify African American Language/US Ebonics as well as Standard American English (SAE).

These findings are potentially useful in forging new avenues for reconciliation between the African and African American communities. The presence of African students and Africans at US universities and surrounding communities offers a great opportunity to further our understanding of how African American Language, and by extension African Americans themselves, are perceived by Africans in the US, and also possibly, those they represent back home on the African Continent. Knowledge of such attitudes and perceptions can be used to strengthen and perpetuate Pan African ideals of unity for Africans around the world.