

Content and Structure

Your review should be intelligible to somebody who has not read Cratty et al. 2010. (Pretend like I'm not the one reading it.)

- Any reader of your review should be able to discern what the basic content of the article is and understand the claims made.

You should be evaluating LINGUISTIC claims made in Cratty et al. 2010 based on outside sources.

- As the prompt says, you are to evaluate “the extent to which the study is based on facts and linguistic research in the study of African American English.”
- Put another way: Cratty et al. (2010) quote lots of experts; how do you know that their claims are accurate? You should be answering this question.
- You must cite Green (2006) in addition to one other course reading. Cite those sources immediately when you use them; I will not try to figure out where your claims come from if you don't tell me.

Your personal opinion is not relevant unless there is some evidence that supports it.

- Claims like “I think AAE is a different language because I don't speak that way” or “I feel like the article spent too much time on Wolfram's comments” are not evidence-based criticisms.
- Instead, try things like “AAE differs systematically from mainstream American English in many ways. For example, ...” or “Wolfram notes that AAE is a separate language. However, Green (2006) notes ...”
- If you know of evidence that contradicts the views in Cratty et al. 2010, you should definitely bring it up! That's an important part of reviewing material. However, citing a lack of opposing viewpoint is not a valid criticism on its own.
- Remember: Explain any evidence or examples you introduce! Why is it important?

Your introduction should include your conclusions about the article.

- An intro should preview your main points and enough context to understand why they are important. There should not be a great deal of summary here.
- Are the claims made about AAE factually accurate, and is the DEA's opinion correctly informed? An answer that addresses these questions should form your thesis for the rest of your review.
- Avoid vacuous intros like: *Throughout the world, linguists have always debated about blah blah blah...*
- Avoid vague thesis statements like:
 - *Now the DEA has a proposal about how to deal with AAE.*
 - *The DEA has decided it needs translators, and there are pros and cons to this idea.*

Statements like these make it sound like you have no idea what you are talking about. Be specific.

Make sure you are accurately summarizing Cratty et al. 2010.

- It is really easy to accidentally insert your interpretation. It is also very easy to misremember details (like who said what).
- Go back and check the article! Is what you attribute to Cratty et al. (2010) actually in the article?
- For example, a lot of essays claimed there is a huge controversy around what the DEA wants to do, but no claim to that end is made in the article. While use of the term *Ebonics* is controversial in general, there is no reason to think there is controversy specific to this issue.

A few final things:

- Be consistent in your use of the terms *African American English* (AAE) and *Ebonics*. Linguists prefer the former as it's less politically charged.
- Your essay must be at least 1000 words in length and no more than 1100. Include a word count!
- Please include a works cited/references section! (See example below.)

Questions to think about

- Do the authors of the CNN article actually take a position on the issue?
- According to the article, the Center for Applied Linguistics says that AAE is “a systematic language variety, with patterns of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and usage that extend far beyond slang.” Is this true? If so, how do we know? What is the evidence for this claim, and does the article provide any?
- If AAE is systematic and not just slang, then does it make sense when Wolfram says “the differences between dialect and code words can get pretty blurry at times”?
- Is AAE a completely different language, or does it overlap with Mainstream American English? What are the properties of AAE that would lead the DEA to need translators?
- Agent Sanders refers to AAE as “urban language” and “street language.” Does this suggest that he knows what AAE is and who uses it? Do any linguists refer to AAE in such a way?
- Why does the article focus on the issues that it does? Are they relevant to the DEA's position, or is it context for readers who may only think that AAE is slang?

References

- Cratty, Carol, Ashley Hayes, and Phil Gast. 2010. DEA wants to hire Ebonics translators. URL <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/08/24/dea.ebonics/>.
- Green, Lisa. 2006. English, African-American. In *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, ed. Colin Palmer, volume 2, chapter 708-711. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2 edition.