PART I INTRODUCTION ISSUE

Issues and Implications of English Dialects for Teaching English as a Second Language

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TESOL Professional Papers #3

Introduction

Educational issues concerning dialectal variation in the English language have received a great deal of scholarly and popular attention. Yet overall, schools have not satisfactorily addressed these issues.

The fact that dialects are a natural, normal aspect of language has been acknowledged only superficially: Educational programs typically do not thoroughly explore the dialectal differences that are clearly manifested in the communities they serve or confront the complex social attitudes surrounding variation in English. The persistent myth of a singular English has meant that English as a second language (ESL) programs have not had the informational resources nor the institutional power to address testing, placement, and instructional questions concerning variation in the language that they teach. Issues about dialect are not widely understood, and there are few program models to emulate. This paper presents some issues stemming from language variation for teaching ESL, identifies research strands relevant to program development, and describes two dialect program exemplars. It also suggests considerations for developing educational policy with respect to dialects and programmatic responses to it.

Perspectives on English Dialects in the Schools

Variation in English presents considerable challenge to schools, grounded as they are in standard English norms. The fairly uniform written standard English of school texts and tests is generally more accessible to students from middle class backgrounds who have been socialized into oral standard English and baptized in literacy than it is to students from other
Varieties of language

Dialect, style, register

Written by Kurnia Aya

Dialect backgrounds. Because written language plays a central role in determining students' school success or failure, dialect mismatch has important implications.

Dialect differences in oral English are also likely to disadvantage students from vernacular backgrounds because talk conveys metamessages about social identity, along with other meanings (Tannen, 1984). A student's accurate, insightful contribution to classroom discourse may be devalued when she or he uses vernacular dialect features in speaking. Moreover, such evaluation may be formally backed by local or state standards that call for students to use standard English in academic discourse.

As a society, we still harbor language prejudice to a far greater degree than we tolerate other ethnically related bias, at least publicly (Wolfram, 1991). Schools have not developed scientifically based language awareness programs to illuminate language variation and its social meanings. Programs to strengthen the standard English skills that schools require do not consistently point out predictable contrasts between standard and vernacular dialect features, nor do they adequately address the social functions that dialects serve. Because educators contribute powerfully to defining students' school identities, this persistently weak educational response to dialect issues at school must be exposed and corrected. As the well-known Ann Arbor Decision (1979) showed, not taking dialect into account at school violates students' civil rights. Schools can rectify their neglect and ignorance of students' dialects when they must.

New Dialect Challenges for School Programs

As schools have failed to adequately address the dialect issues raised in the 1960s and 1970s concerning standardized testing and literacy (Wolfram & Christian, 1989; Wolfram, Christian, & Adger, forthcoming) educational concerns related to dialects have grown more complex. The student population has changed. Early sociolinguistic scholarship had focused most intently on the dialect that was then called Vernacular Black English because African Americans were the largest vernacular-speaking group (e.g., Labov, 1972; Wolfram, 1969; Wolfram & Fasold, 1974). Now, however, schools that never adequately addressed indigenous vernacular dialects of U.S. English are also serving students who speak one of the
many dialects of English that Kachru (1988) has labeled World Englishes: those used as first or subsequent languages around the world, especially in the former British colonies.

The rising numbers of World English speakers in schools have brought dialect challenges to ESL programs that had not directly faced them previously (Crandall, 1993). TESOL had historically considered vernacular dialects to fall within its purview, but local ESL programs have generally restricted their clientele to speakers of languages other than English. In cases where ESL programs have enrolled vernacular dialect speakers in order to teach them standard English, communities have objected on a number of points (Baugh, 1995). Parents of vernacular speakers have protested that ESL placement is inappropriate and insulting because their children already speak English; and ESL teachers have pointed out that their expertise is in language teaching, not dialect teaching. But World English speakers are forcing schools to re-examine their policies regarding English speakers and ESL.

A central issue for school language policies and programs is the mutual intelligibility of language varieties. In linguistic study, intelligibility is an important criterion by which languages and dialects are distinguished: Language systems that contrast with each other in some ways but can be mutually understood by their speakers are dialects of a language; systems that contrast and cannot be understood are distinct languages. However, intelligibility is not a fail-safe criterion. Some dialects are hard to understand at first but only take time; others require learning. At schools, U.S. English speakers may have difficulty understanding varieties of World English with which they are less familiar, such as those of West Africa and Southeast Asia, and those World English-speaking students may have trouble understanding teachers and students who speak U.S. English dialects. More familiar nonindigenous dialects, such as the Received Pronunciation (RP) dialect of Britain and the variety of Australian English spoken by educated people, do not present such problems. Beyond familiarity, though, is the matter of social status. Although there is no linguistic reason to prefer one dialect to another, RP is generally regarded as more prestigious than the Englishes of the Caribbean, India, and West Africa. This bias may affect intelligibility judgments. Questions arise as to the role of the speaker's ethnicity or race in judgments about intelligibility and the locus of responsibility for making interaction intelligible. Must all World English speakers learn U.S. English? If not all, then who? What aspects of U.S.
English must they learn? What changes are expected of students, and what of teachers? Despite the difficulties surrounding intelligibility as a criterion, it remains a useful notion in considering the changing responsibilities of ESL programs. In the case of English-based creole languages, intelligibility seems more straightforward because creoles are generally agreed to be not fully comprehensible to speakers of English dialects. Yet language prejudice persists: Even among creole speakers there is the view that creoles are deficient versions of English. To meet the language performance demands of schools and career, creole speakers need English language instruction that respects their language as a legitimate linguistic system. Instructional programming for these students needs to pay attention to the similarities between the creole and English as well as the differences, and to combat linguistically unwarranted language bias.

No consensus has emerged as to the obligation of ESL programs to serve speakers of nonindigenous English dialects or even those of English-based creoles. Apparently, many schools approach the matter informally, depending on teachers' judgments of which World English-speaking students need ESL because of intelligibility considerations as well as teachers' interest and ability in teaching them. Some states (e.g., New York and Maryland) have rewritten their ESL placement policies to accommodate speakers of other Englishes and creoles. Now local education agencies are searching for appropriate instructional programs and placement procedures.

Observations:

- "It is sometimes thought that only a few people speak regional dialects. Many restrict the term to rural forms of speech--as when they say that 'dialects are dying out these days.' But dialects are not dying out. Country dialects are not as widespread as they once were, indeed, but urban dialects are now on the increase, as cities grow and large numbers of immigrants take up residence. . . .

  "Some people think of dialects as sub-standard varieties of a language. spoken only
by low-status groups--illustrated by such comments as 'He speaks correct English, without a trace of dialect.' Comments of this kind fail to recognize that standard English is as much a dialect as any other variety--though a dialect of a rather special kind, because it is one to which society has given extra prestige. Everyone speaks a dialect--whether urban or rural, standard or non-standard, upper class or lower class."


"Prestige" Dialects in New York City
"In the earlier history of New York City, New England influence and New England immigration preceded the influx of Europeans. The prestige *dialect* which is reflected in the speech of cultivated Atlas informants shows heavy borrowings from eastern New England. There has been a long-standing tendency for New Yorkers to borrow prestige dialects from other regions, rather than develop a prestige dialect of their own. In the current situation, we see that the New England influence has retreated, and in its place, a new prestige dialect has been borrowed from northern and midwestern speech patterns. We have seen that for most of our informants, the effort to escape identification as a New Yorker by one's own speech provides a motivating force for phonological shifts and changes."


Regional And Social Dialects
"The classic example of a *dialect* is the *regional* dialect: the distinct form of a language spoken in a certain geographical area. For example, we might speak of Ozark dialects or Appalachian dialects, on the grounds that inhabitants of these regions have certain distinct linguistic features that differentiate them from speakers of other forms of English. We can also speak of a *social* dialect: the distinct form of a language spoken by members of a specific socioeconomic class, such as the working-class dialects in England."
PART II

DEFINITION

DIALECT, REGISTER AND STYLE

Dialect, register and style are major topics of institutional linguistics, and since language is a social institution, they are worth studying.

DIALECT

A regional, temporal or social variety within a single language is known as dialect. It is the product of individual's geographical and class origin. It differs in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary from the standard language, which is in itself a socially favored dialect. So a dialect is a variation of language sufficiently different to be considered a separate entity, but not different enough to be classed as separate language. There is no clear qualitative linguistic measure to indicate where difference of dialect becomes difference of language. The issue is political and social, not linguistic. Everybody speaks a dialect, which is not seen as some kind of derivation from the norm of standard language. There is no linguistic justification for saying that one dialect is better than another rather it is a social judgment that leads people to say that a particular dialect is the correct one.

Dialect is not an important type of language variation for teaching. All language teaching, however, at least implies an assumption about the best dialect to teach. Dialects are dialects not because of linguistic reasons but because of the political and cultural reasons. It is customary to describe them as varieties of a language according to users. Examples: Cockney, Georide and Scouse are the prominent dialects spoken in England. To the linguist, however, as stated by Sapir, "There is no real difference between dialect and a language". Grierson also observes, "In the course of survey, it has sometimes been difficult to decide whether a given form of speech is to be looked upon as an independent language or as a dialect of some other definite form of speech". In practice it has been found that it is sometimes impossible to decide the question in a manner which will gain universal acceptance. The two
words 'language' and 'dialect' are in this respect like 'mountain' and 'hill'. One has no hesitation in saying that Everest is a mountain and Hauberk a hill, but between these two a dividing line cannot be accurately drawn. However, dialects are of many kinds: Regional dialects, Sociolects, etc.

REGIONAL DIALECTS
Regional dialects are spoken by the people of a particular geographical area within a speech community. A regional dialect is not a distinct language but a variety of a language spoken in a particular area of a country. Some regional dialects have been given traditional names which mark them out as being significantly different from standard varieties spoken in the same place.

SOCIOLECTS
Sociolects are spoken by the members of a particular group or stratum of a speech community while a variety of language used at a particular stage in its historical development may be termed as temporal dialects such as Prakrit and Pali in Ancient India.

REGISTER
Whereas dialects are the varieties according to the users, registers are the varieties of language associated with people's occupation. Registers are the languages that are used in the pursuance of one's job. They are stylistic, functional varieties of a dialect or a language. They may be narrowly defined by reference to subject matter (field of discourse), to medium (mode of discourse) and level of formality, that is style (manner of discourse). Registers are, therefore, situationally conditioned discourse oriented varieties of a language.

According to the role of the speaker, a young lecturer, will speak in different ways when communicating with his wife, his children, his father, his colleagues, his students, when shopping and so on. Each of these varieties will be a register. According to the subject matter or field of discourse, registral varieties are scientific, religious, legal, commercial, of airport announcers, of telephone operators, etc.

A register is also determined by the medium or mode of discourse. The main distinction is between speech and writing, but in speech also one may find such distinctions as conversation,
discussion, debate, lecture, talk, etc. In the same way personal letters, a biography, a memoir, a poem to be read or a play to be staged, etc. are the distinction in writing.

Registers may be classified on the basis of style. This refers to the relation among the participating people who may talk of religion in a temple, or at a seminar with scholars or in a restaurant with friends. In a religious gathering people may be serious, in a seminar analytic while in a restaurant casual. The following type of stylistic varieties may be noticed - archaic, colloquial, humorous, formal and ironical.

**Another definition of register**

In linguistics, a register is a variety of a language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting. For example, when speaking in a formal setting an English speaker may be more likely to adhere more closely to prescribed grammar, pronounce words ending in -ing with a velar nasal instead of an alveolar nasal (e.g. "walking", not "walkin'"), choose more formal words (e.g. father vs. dad, child vs. kid, etc.), and refrain from using the word ain't than when speaking in an informal setting.

As with other types of language variation, there tends to be a spectrum of registers rather than a discrete set of obviously distinct varieties — there is a countless number of registers we could identify, with no clear boundaries. Discourse categorisation is a complex problem, and even in the general definition of "register" given above (language variation defined by use not user), there are cases where other kinds of language variation, such as regional or age dialect, overlap. As a result of this complexity, there is far from consensus about the meanings of terms like "register", "field" or "tenor"; different writers' definitions of these terms are often in direct contradiction of each other. Additional terms such as diatype, genre, text types, style,acrolect, mesolect and basilect among many others may be used to cover the same or similar ground. Some prefer to restrict the domain of the term "register" to a specific vocabulary (Wardhaugh, 1986) (which one might commonly call jargon), while others argue against the use of the term altogether. These various approaches with their own "register" or set of terms and meanings fall under disciplines such as sociolinguistics, stylistics, pragmatics or systemic functional grammar.
Style

Mastering style is a vital skill for someone wishing to write or speak English well. From the formal to the informal, from refined technical language to slang, there are many different ways of using English.

In any language, different styles of expression are appropriate in different situations. We can go from the formal to the informal, the written to the spoken, from technical language (or jargon) to slang.

Examples of style

a. *The president was obliged to return earlier than planned due to poor weather conditions.*  
   *(Formal)*

b. *The president had to go back sooner than planned because the weather was so bad.*  
   *(Informal)*