

Issues and Implications of English Dialects for Teaching English as a Second Language (part 1 of 3)

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 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,⁴ 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.⁵ 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.

Educational Programming

The usual ESL services are not a good match for World English and English-based creole speakers. The language learning content of beginning and intermediate ESL services is inappropriate for students who know much of the grammar and lexicon of U.S. English. Instructional programming for teaching U.S. English to speakers of a World English variety would need to focus on contrasts in the phonological, grammatical, and lexical systems. Advanced ESL classes that take a contrastive approach might be appropriate for World English speakers. Effective programs for teaching standard U.S. English to speakers of U.S. vernacular dialects could be modified to target

differences in the grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic systems of the English dialects at issue. A local needs assessment to determine which English varieties students speak should be linked to a resource review that would identify sources of information on students' Englishes (Crandall, 1993). For some World English-speaking students in the United States, the greatest educational needs are improving literacy and academic oral language skills because, as with some English language learners, they may have endured interruptions in their education and hardships in their family life (Lutz, 1994). Educational programs for these students need to be tailored to their educational level as well as to their language situation, and to offer counseling and other services as warranted (Walsh, 1991). World English speakers with comparable but different educational histories in their countries of origin will still need appropriate U.S. English language learning opportunities.

Assigning World English speakers to appropriate programs is likely to require refinements to placement procedures as well. School or district intake procedures involving home language inventories usually elicit the language(s) spoken in the home but not pedagogically relevant distinctions about language varieties. Speakers of nonindigenous Englishes are not identified by the language category. Creole speakers may be overlooked as well if they indicate that they speak English at home, out of a belief that their language is a variant of English, rather than another language. Moreover, speakers in the African diaspora may be further masked by racial identification so that they fall together in home language surveys with African Americans. Place of birth may also fail to identify World English speakers because some may have been born outside of their parents' heritage country. As a result, students who are proficient in an English-based creole language but not in a dialect of English may not be identified as needing ESL services, and World English speakers may not be assigned to appropriate programs. Oral language interviews by linguistically knowledgeable interviewers may help to overcome such problems.

ESL and Indigenous English Dialects

ESL programs must also acknowledge variation in U.S. English. It is unrealistic to aim for a "dialect-neutral" version of English in the ESL curriculum (Wolfram, 1995); in fact, the teacher's dialect usually becomes the model. Moreover, because ESL students interact with vernacular U.S. dialect speakers, they are likely to acquire vernacular dialect features. English language learners need accurate sociolinguistic information about the dialect differences they hear around them, just as native English speakers do.

Dialects and Teacher Education

Curricular and procedural demands connected to variation in English continue to challenge schools and teachers who may not be prepared to meet them.

Teacher education programs are still struggling to prepare ESL teachers in sufficient numbers (Crandall, 1993), and few have addressed the panoply of English dialects (Kachru, 1992). Increasingly, schools of education are requiring that all teacher interns have at least one course in cultural diversity, but dialect diversity continues to be treated perfunctorily (Cazden, 1988; Smitherman, 1995). Preparing teachers to recognize, value, and accommodate cultural diversity is crucial, especially those from mainstream backgrounds with limited personal exposure to cultural diversity (Zeichner, 1993), but all teachers, including ESL teachers, need dialect knowledge in order to support students' language development. To accommodate the language learning needs of World English and creole speakers and convey the information students need about English variation within the United States, teachers require a more substantive sociolinguistic education than they typically receive (Champion & Bloome, 1995).

Research Traditions

Several research traditions can contribute to professional development and program design regarding English dialects.

Dialectology

The early sociolinguistic research that contributed to TESOL's initial concern with teaching standard English emerged from the tradition of linguistic description of regional dialects established in the 1930s. That work had collected regionally distributed vocabulary items and phonological features, particularly in the vowel system (e.g., Kurath & McDavid, 1961). With time, there was increased attention to the social variables associated with language differences -- age, gender, ethnicity, and social class (Labov, 1966; Shuy, Wolfram, & Riley, 1968). Although the work of dialectologists and sociologists merged into the new discipline of sociolinguistics, the dialectologist's concern with describing regional differences in language continues to the present, and applications to education continue to be explored. For example, Wolfram and his students have recently completed dialect investigation on the island of Ocracoke (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, in press), and they are currently conducting field work in other isolated communities. Among their products is a dialect curriculum that introduces middle school students to the scientific study of language variation, including the rule-governed nature of their own dialect. A second example of current dialectology is the massive work in progress to build the Dictionary of American Regional English (Cassidy, 1985; Cassidy & Hall, 1991; Cassidy & Hall, 1996).

Both the scientific approach to language study and the accumulated knowledge about linguistic and social constraints on formal features are relevant to education. As an example, Baltimore City Public Schools has revised its speech-language assessment procedures to accommodate the local vernaculars, incorporating research findings on vernacular structures distilled from quantitative study (Wolfram & Adger, 1993). Tailoring the

structural inventories of vernacular features drawn from research to the indigenous vernacular required careful field work by speech-language pathologists and sociolinguists.

Interactional Studies

Studies of language use for social purposes in the overlapping traditions of ethnography, pragmatics, and discourse and interactional analysis have included some work on language at school and on ethnically related discourse patterns. Those that examine the practical and symbolic role of dialects in everyday life have important implications for program design and teacher education. Zentella's (1995) long-term ethnographic study in the New York Puerto Rican community, showing young people's use of multiple dialects of both English and Spanish, challenges educators to recognize and respond to the complexity of students' language proficiency and needs. Fordham's (1996) study of African American high school students found that they avoided standard English as one emblem of "acting white." Baugh's (1983) work on "black street speech," one of many styles that may be used by African Americans, reveals the linguistic repertoire on which members of a social group may draw, as well as the boundary-maintaining function of social dialects.

Beyond attention to the language code, a wealth of studies has characterized ethnic differences in interactional style in educational and other institutional settings and in community life. Kochman's (1981) well-known work on contrasting argumentation styles among black and white Americans suggests one way in which misunderstanding and suspicion between these groups is perpetuated. Tannen's (1984) work on Jewish conversational style -- in terms of turn-taking and other conversational mechanics, as well as what is considered an appropriate contribution -- shows how interaction across ethnic groups runs afoul of different ways for creating community. Such studies provide a needed perspective for teacher education -- which has often assumed a unified interactional model that does not accommodate group-based differences.

Studies of language in the classroom show how language skills learned at home may conflict with teachers' expectations. Heath's (1983) close, ethnographic study of language socialization in two Piedmont working class communities -- one white, one black -- followed students to school where their language conflicted in some important ways with school expectations. For example, stories at school did not match students' experience with stories in their communities, and thus they had to learn new conventions. Likewise, Michaels' (1981) discourse analysis detailed structural conflict between African American students' episodic narratives and the topic-centered stories valued by teachers. The episodic style was also valued by middle class African American graduate students of education at Harvard (Cazden, 1988). Studies of cross-cultural interaction between native American students and their white teachers show that the interactional expectations of teachers who do not share ethnicity with their students

interfere in teaching and learning (e.g., Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Philips, 1983). Studies showing implications of social differences in language behavior for educational practice can be instructive for teacher interns.

Critical Language Study

Many scholars maintain that it is insufficient to detail group differences in language structure and interactional patterns without considering the power associated with certain ways of speaking (e.g., Fairclough, 1992). The traditional linguistic claim that dialects of a language are equal in terms of structural regularity and viability for communication is viewed as secondary because entrenched social attitudes clearly create another reality. In educational (and other institutional) situations that profoundly affect students' biographies, decisions about appropriate language use often appeal to systems that do not treat dialects as equal. Moreover, certain groups are more likely than others to be negatively evaluated. While critical discourse study has flourished in Europe, work in the United States has been influenced by Ogbu's (1978) scholarship, which traces patterns of groups' power to the circumstances of their immigration. In essence, groups whose ancestors came to the United States unwillingly, such as African and Mexican Americans, now constitute a caste-like minority whose students generally show low school achievement scores; whereas those who immigrated to seek a better life, such as European Americans, have fared better. Scholarship within this critical domain generally endorses a politically explicit approach to education (e.g., Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Milroy & Milroy, 1985), including acknowledging the political realities associated with speaking certain dialects.

World Englishes

An impressive body of research into World Englishes has built on work in several linguistic research traditions, including the study of pidgins and creoles (e.g., Winer, 1989). This work offers an increasingly important resource for educators, both because it challenges some sociolinguistic myths,⁶ such as the privileged status of the native speaker as a source of linguistic knowledge, and because it provides some sociolinguistic understandings and descriptive knowledge of varieties of World Englishes.

Scholars have represented in several ways the relationships among English varieties. Kachru's (1992) intersecting circles show that English is expanding most rapidly among nonnative speakers. McArthur's (1987) circle of World English echoes the sociolinguistic insight that the varieties of a language are related to each other in terms of where structural variants of a dialect fall along a standardness/nonstandardness range. McArthur posits a "remarkably homogeneous but negotiable 'common core' of World Standard English" (McArthur, 1987, p. 11), a written variety, around which other somewhat heterogeneous standard varieties cluster. In juxtaposition to these standards are other varieties, many of them vernaculars.

In sum, updating professional development regarding variation in English can

appeal to a broad and vibrant research base. At the same time, however, the familiar need to explicitly translate theory into practice has not been addressed with any thoroughness. Forming partnerships among educators and researchers to apply the various strands of research to educational policy and strategy is of the essence.

Program Development

Until quite recently, educational programs related to dialect differences have focused on teaching standard U.S. English to students from indigenous vernacular language backgrounds. Earlier views of variable features as errors in "proper" or "correct" English gave way, at least in theory, to the view that these variants were regular features of nonstandard language varieties; and standard English has been seen as constituting a second dialect for vernacular speakers, rather than a replacement. One instructional approach involved contrastive analysis of formal features and emphasized the contrasting domains of use for vernacular and standard dialects (e.g., Feigenbaum, 1970). Despite the numbers of vernacular English speakers in U.S. schools and the enduring public perception that success beyond school requires standard English, these products did not become commercially available.⁸ Newer programs to teach standard English, such as one now being tested in Los Angeles (Butler, Sata, & Snyder, 1992), have developed their own materials. Devising materials that reflect the local dialect(s) is certainly advisable because social dialects vary regionally, but there seem to be few linguistically accurate materials available.

A very different approach to dialects involves teaching students about language variation, in contrast to teaching them the standard dialect. One such program, described here, involves sociolinguistic education for all students, including English language learners.

Language Awareness

Language awareness arose as a topic of study in England, where educational policy had endorsed the notion that World English speakers, many of them from countries that had been British colonies, ought to learn to speak standard British English and that the way to accomplish that goal was to introduce them to sociolinguistic facts surrounding language variation. British language awareness programs acknowledge the viability of students' own language systems, but they gloss over the matter of language dominance, implying that speaking a standard is politically neutral (Clark, Fairclough, Ivanic, & Martin-Jones, 1990).

Walt Wolfram and his colleagues have been experimenting with an approach to language awareness that does not link to teaching standard English necessarily, although it provides linguistic knowledge that is useful for learning a second dialect (Wolfram, Detwyler, & Adger, 1992; Wolfram, Schilling-Estes, & Hazen, 1996). Language awareness curricula address the following goals:

- *Scientific: Students discover the rule-governed nature of English dialects*

by examining sets of phonological and syntactic data, developing hypotheses, and testing them against more data. They also gather and analyze data in their own speech communities.

- *Sociohistorical: Students learn about historical and social bases for dialect development with particular focus on the dialect of their community.*
- *Humanistic: Students confront the social attitudes surrounding language variation through a variety of video and audio exercises involving language differences.*

Versions of these curricular materials have been pilot tested in Baltimore City Public Schools with upper elementary and middle school students, and in five different North Carolina communities. Student evaluations report enthusiasm for activities such as role playing a language contact situation in which speakers must innovate a rudimentary pidgin and make generalizations about data sets.

Language Awareness and Teaching Standard English

Other language development programs combine sociolinguistic education about languages and dialects as human systems with instruction in standard U.S. English. An exemplary program is the Caribbean Academic Program (CAP) at Evanston Township High School, Illinois, which is designed to teach English to classes including speakers of several Caribbean English-based creoles (in this school, primarily those of Jamaica and Belize) (Fischer, 1992). This is the sociolinguistically complicated case of a creole language with dialects, but because the language is viewed by many, including its speakers, as a deviant form of English, variability may be regarded as evidence of deficiency. The CAP program confronts these language attitudes by providing students with historical and linguistic information to substantiate the claim that these creoles are languages distinct from English though related to it. Through reading and writing Creole, students experience its regularities and discover inter-island dialectal differences in Jamaican Creole as well as regular contrasts among Caribbean creoles. Fischer reports that "students who clearly distinguish English as a separate language from Creole develop the motivation to tackle English language acquisition" (p. 100). In addition to sociolinguistic education, she supports students' sociolinguistic inclinations concerning code switching, teaches English grammar using activities from ESL textbooks, emphasizes written English, uses Caribbean literature, and organizes "Creole Days" during which students perform in Creole.

Given the society's idealized view that schools should allow only standard U.S. English, it seems remarkable that this program is not challenged in the community. The key to the CAP program, as well as to experimental programs in California that are reviving the dialect reader (Rickford & Rickford, 1995), is parent involvement. The CAP program is carefully explained to parents by teacher and students, and a CAP parent group meets regularly. "Parents are usually supportive when they see that someone at the

school is taking a personal interest in their children, and addressing the special needs which their children have" (Fischer, 1992, p. 110).

Language awareness instruction -- sociolinguistics in the schools -- is relevant to language variation in schools on several fronts. When it underlies standard U.S. English instruction, it addresses two key barriers to learning that dialect: misinformation and motivation. Asking students to learn standard English because it is important for career development indexes a vague future. Showing them how standard English plays a role in their lives currently and how their own dialect contrasts with other systems gives students a knowledge base for developing a second language or dialect. In addition, language awareness instruction can play an important role in exposing dialect prejudice when all students -- not only vernacular speakers -- have the benefit of this knowledge.

These two exemplary programs suggest possible dimensions of curricula that deliver sociolinguistically accurate and practical information about dialects to students.

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Dialect Policy

Because of social equivocation on the status of dialects, real advances in bringing educational programs into alignment with linguistic facts in order to treat language differences equitably require that educational institutions formulate explicit policy and that administrative commitment be articulated. The policy statements of two language-related professional organizations are presented here as input for school districts' and other educational organizations' policy.

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

In 1974, the Committee on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), a subdivision of NCTE, adopted a strong position on students' dialect rights, from which the following is excerpted:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of the language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and

writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of the students to their own language. (*College Composition and Communication*, 1974, pp. 2-3)

A number of discussions from within and outside NCTE have attacked this position, and subsequent discussion has attempted to modify it and clarify the meaning of critical phrases such as "the rights of students to their own language." The dialect rights position may seem overstated and unrealistic to some, but it points to the unequal burden placed upon vernacular speakers for linguistic adjustment. The position presents the equally strong moral responsibility of the mainstream population to alter its prejudices and respect dialect differences for what they are -- a natural manifestation of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Wolfram, Christian, and Adger (forthcoming) contend that while the dialect rights position may be morally right, there is another issue to be confronted: Some type of endorsement of one particular language variety seems inevitable. The crux of the standard English debate involves balancing the naturalness of dialect diversity and the inevitability of social endorsement with the sociopolitical realities that confer the status of "nonstandardness" on nonmainstream, vernacular-speaking groups.

NCTE did not endorse the strong position of its member group, CCCC, quoted here, but instead issued a weaker version asserting that students should learn the conventions of written standard English (Smitherman, 1995). It also committed to promoting "classroom practices to expose students to the variety of dialects that occur in our multi-regional, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society so that they too will understand the nature of American English and come to respect all its dialects" (NCTE Resolution No. 74.2, 1974, cited in Smitherman, 1995).

The CCCC developed materials for teachers that would have allowed them to teach students about dialects, but they were never published. Thus their position statement seems to have had virtually no effect on the teaching of English in the classroom. This is one of the reasons that some of the issues related to language variation, which were raised initially several decades ago, need to be revisited (Wolfram, 1995).

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

ASHA's position on dialects, adopted in 1983, is this:
It is the position of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) that no dialectal variety of English is a disorder or pathological form of speech or language. Each social dialect is adequate as a functional and effective variety of English. Each serves a communication function as well as

a social solidarity function. It maintains the communication network and the social construct of the community of speakers who use it. Furthermore, each is a symbolic representation of the historical, social, and cultural background of the speakers. (ASHA, 1983)

The ASHA position on dialect differences has important implications for service delivery to a linguistically and culturally diverse student population. Implications for the competencies of pathologists with respect to language differences were set forth by Cole (1983) as follows:

- 1 knowledge of the particular dialect as a rule-governed linguistic system*
- 2 knowledge of nondiscriminatory testing procedures*
- 3 knowledge of the phonological and grammatical features of the dialect*
- 4 knowledge of contrastive analysis procedures*
- 5 knowledge of the effects of attitudes toward dialects*
- 6 thorough understanding of and appreciation for the community and culture of the nonstandard speaker (p. 25)*

As with NCTE, it is not clear that ASHA's policy has made a real difference in serving students. Despite repeated calls for more attention to informal approaches to language assessment, the profession has not succeeded in overcoming its reliance on standardized testing for school placement decisions. Nor has the standard English, middle class language socialization bias in these tests been overcome. Several testing companies now list acceptable vernacular responses for test items, but these lists are incomplete and inadequate. For example, they do not provide for regional variation within social dialects. As a result, there is a danger of false positives when the list of alternative vernacular responses does not adequately describe some regionally appropriate vernacular items, and of false negatives where the local vernacular excludes or modifies items on the list. Moreover, the particular details of descriptive and applied sociolinguistic knowledge required to serve students equitably and effectively have not been infused into pathologists' academic training.

In sum, the NCTE and the ASHA policy statements on dialects have not substantially affected the delivery of services to students. Both organizations have devoted some attention to developing materials for practitioners, but in neither case has sufficient knowledge become available within the profession to enable serious policy implementation (Smitherman, 1995). Reforming professional development and writing instructional materials for students have been decoupled from policy, with the result that the policy is ceremonial.

Developing Educational Policy on Dialects

In light of the perspectives on dialects outlined here and the history of language-related organizations' actions, a number of considerations and possibilities suggest themselves for policy development in educational

organizations. This section explores some policy development options and practical steps that might follow from policy statements, as well as some possible implications for ESL associated with them.

What is to be gained from adopting a position on dialects of English? There can be no question that language variation is tied to issues of social equity and that schools and school districts have a fundamental commitment to promoting equal treatment of students in preparing them for successful participation in society. Moreover, because the view that dialects are all fully systematic varieties worthy of respect (expressed in NCTE's and ASHA's position statements) is still not universally known or accepted, then it seems only right that educational organizations take a position on this matter. As the dialect situation in the United States becomes more complicated, many teachers and teacher educators face vexing questions about language variation in program design decisions that ultimately link to dialect policy. With increasing pressure for schools to maintain high standards for all students, there is a danger that variability in human systems, including language, may be increasingly viewed as perverse. Educational organizations need to define policy to guide professional practice by delineating a linguistically, pedagogically, and morally enlightened position on a matter of such consequence for students.

A number of interlocking questions bear on the matter of devising a dialect policy. Those with import for ESL programs are discussed here as crucial considerations in devising a comprehensive policy that encompasses other programs as well.

1 For which English dialects should ESL programs be responsible?

ESL programs appear to be focusing less on indigenous varieties of U.S. English and more on World Englishes and creoles. Yet persistent educational inequities remain for vernacular U.S. English speakers. Does ESL have programmatic responsibility for these students? Are ESL teachers prepared to teach standard English to U.S. vernacular speakers? Should they be? As a practical matter, it seems unfair that the ESL profession would be expected to teach this population in addition to English language learners, especially because materials and programs are scarce. Yet the failure of other disciplines to address the cause and consequences of language prejudice presents a moral dilemma. ESL teachers who are knowledgeable about dialects can make valuable contributions.

In addressing such questions, it is likely that defining indigenous dialects will be difficult. Clearly, dialects of social groups vary regionally; they also vary in other ways. Hispanic English varies according to speakers' history of residence, as well as their heritage (Baugh, 1984). The same is true for Asian English. Moreover, questions are likely to arise as to which dialects ought to be considered indigenous and what criteria separate them from World Englishes. Is Jamaican English a U.S. dialect? In some areas of the United States, it may be considered so.

English dialects in U.S. life fall along a locally differentiated familiarity continuum marked at one end by European American dialects (standard and nonstandard) and at the other by World Englishes without a significant history of immigration to the United States (perhaps Singapore English). Should students who speak a standard variety from outside the United States be expected to learn standard U.S. English? Where does the responsibility for intelligibility lie? To what extent should students be expected to alter their language, and what responsibility do teachers bear for learning to understand other English varieties? Decisions should be made at the local level, and program design should accommodate the range of English varieties within classes.

Another question relevant to policy-making concerns ESL teachers' responsibility to provide knowledge about other U.S. English dialects to their students. Language awareness instruction can be particularly beneficial to ESL students in helping them make sense of the variability they hear around them.

2 How could language variation policy be developed?

The statement of purpose of TESOL's former interest section Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) is a valuable resource for developing dialect policy and program response in schools and teacher education. It does not include a statement concerning the status of dialects, but it offers a blueprint for follow through. Taking the moral high ground counts for little if the organization does not undertake related activities.

The Standard English as a Second Dialect Section of TESOL is concerned with theoretical and practical considerations related to all learners of standard English whose first language is a regional, social or linguistically related (e.g., Creole) variety of English. We are concerned with the educational problems of these learners, including the socio-linguistic issues which arise from differences in dialect or language variety.⁹ (Standard English as a Second Dialect Interest Section, 1988, p. 12)

The objectives are presented below with discussion relating to the perspectives sketched in this paper's first section.

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To stimulate thought and inquiry into the problems of second dialect learners.

Educating students for whom standard U.S. English is not the first dialect involves an array of perplexing linguistic, social, and pedagogical issues that are only indexed in this paper. Given the fact that, in general, educators appear to have limited information about language variation, increasing professional knowledge is likely to require collaboration with those who have specialized training and experience, perhaps through school-based research, action research, coaching, and other new

approaches that stimulate educators to modify their practice with respect to dialect differences.

- *To foster awareness of the implications of dialect differences for education.*

Teacher education has been under fire for failing to prepare teachers for the cultural diversity of today's schools (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1996; Goodlad, 1984). This charge should extend to dialect diversity as well (Wolfson, 1989). Preservice teachers must be prepared to teach a linguistically diverse population through programs that force them to confront not only their cultural bias but their dialect bias as well.

- *To disseminate available information about successful instructional strategies and materials.*

Curriculum materials that respect students' language competencies and provide essential sociolinguistic background to second dialect learning are being developed, as exemplified by the language awareness materials mentioned above. Using them in the classroom may require more sophisticated sociolinguistic training than is now available, another motivation to emphasize language diversity in teacher preparation programs.

Related to this objective is the opportunity to publicize other kinds of successful responses to language variation. A focus on what schools can do and are doing to accommodate vernacular dialects and to teach standard dialects might be promoted in and across educational organizations and through TESOL and its local affiliates.

- *To offer assistance in the training of teachers to enhance the possibility of educational success for second dialect learners.*

Both at the preservice and in-service levels, teachers need to have significant training and retraining with respect to language variation and cultural diversity. Given society's history of discriminating against vernacular dialects and assuming the superiority of standard English varieties, a good deal of unlearning is required along with learning about the nature of dialect and communicative style differences linked to cultural background. State departments of education, federally funded resource and assistance centers, and professional organizations might provide support for increasing teacher knowledge and developing instructional materials.

- *To serve in an advocacy role and to provide public education on issues pertaining to the section.*

Advocacy is a familiar function of ESL professionals. ESL teachers often serve as culture brokers for English language learners in schools. The capacity to fulfill this function is sometimes strained when schools assume that that

role will extend to speakers of dialects other than standard U.S. English, if ESL teachers do not regard these students as their responsibility. Other professionals may be tasked with addressing dialect -- often the reading teacher in the elementary school and the speech-language pathologist. All of these practitioners need a strongly supported, local language policy and support from their professional organizations with respect to representing vernacular dialects as language systems to be respected.

The following activities could be considered in connection with developing a dialect policy and preparing to develop related programs.

- *Conduct needs assessment. Conduct a survey of teacher preparation programs and/or teacher educators to determine the nature of dialect training and needs in this regard. Survey school-based practitioners to determine their needs for knowledge, materials, and services.*

- *Develop a knowledge base on dialects. Develop a bibliography and a library of dialect information for teachers. Collect curricula on language awareness and standard U.S. English as a second dialect for students, and modify them to meet local needs. Identify instructional materials concerning World Englishes. Emphasize dialect as an ongoing concern in departmental meetings. Encourage staff to pursue professional development-related to dialects.*

- *Build collaboration. Establish links with departments concerned with dialect topics: English language arts, reading, and speech/language pathology services. Convene special meetings to discuss issues. Align practices with dialect policy across programs.*

Conclusion

At a time of political, demographic, and educational change, unresolved issues related to U.S. dialects are coming to the fore again, with the added complication of dialect diversity introduced by immigration from other countries where English is spoken. Despite the significant challenges attached to educating speakers of diverse English dialects, there are resources to meet them that have not been fully tapped. A significant and growing knowledge base exists on variation in language form and use, and findings from research are reported regularly in journals and at conferences. New materials are being developed. In order to develop programs that illuminate and respect the naturalness of dialects, it is essential that educational organizations establish scientifically and socially enlightened dialect policies.

Distinguishing standard English speakers on the one hand and vernacular speakers on the other considerably simplifies the sociolinguistic facts. Most children have at least been exposed to more than one dialect, and many have a linguistic repertoire that includes a range of variable features.

Like everything associated with dialect differences, terminology carries political overtones. The term vernacular is used here to indicate dialects that contrast with standard or prestige dialects and thus are more or less stigmatized. It is more linguistically accurate to regard standardness or prestige as an abstraction characterizing one pole of a dialect continuum and vernacularness or stigmatization as defining the other. This sociolinguistic continuum can handle the fact that dialects may be defined in terms of structural variants from this range (Wolfram & Fasold, 1974).

TESOL was founded during the 1960s, when sociolinguists were exploring educational implications of speaking a vernacular English dialect (e.g., Labov, 1969) and several of the founding organizations were confronting the educational effects of vernacular dialects, including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL). TESOL's 1982 constitution delineated a membership policy mentioning those who teach "standard English to speakers of other languages or dialects" (cited in Alatis, 1990). When TESOL's first interest sections were organized less than 10 years after its founding, Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) was among them. This SESD newsletter explored issues in teaching standard U.S. English, described instructional programs, and reviewed instructional materials. In 1981, resolutions adopted at the annual Legislative Assembly had included one to "show support for the teaching of standard English to speakers of nonstandard dialects" (Alatis, 1990, p. 31). Gradually, however, interest in English dialects declined as the organization focused on language teaching and learning. In 1989, the SESD interest section was disbanded, and a proposal for an interest section on World Englishes was rejected. This ultimately resulted in the creation of a new organization, International Association of World Englishes (IAWE) and the establishment of a new journal, World Englishes.

Creoles show variability, of course, as other languages do. If a creole speaker is using the variable features that are closest to the English equivalents, then English speakers may understand.

Articles such as Prator's (1968) "The British Heresy in TESL" and the response by Kachru (1976), "Models of English for the Third World: White Man's Linguistic Burden or Language Pragmatics?" highlight the controversy over these myths.

A consideration that arises in examining McArthur's circle becomes important for educational policy. By what criteria are dialects and languages distinguished? Although we might expect fair unanimity concerning the status of language varieties listed as standards, disagreement is likely concerning those in the outer circle. For example, McArthur places Nigerian English in contrast to West African Standard(izing) English. Although he does not claim to represent the facts of worldwide English comprehensively, critics might insist, for example, that his categories exclude standard Nigerian English

(Bamgbose, 1992). Another criticism concerns the inclusion of creoles, such as Sierra Leone Krio and Tok Pisin, which many would consider to be distinct languages related to English rather than dialects of English, based on their degree of intelligibility to English speakers.

Standard English is claimed to be a powerful determinant of career path. Certainly the prevalent language attitudes may militate against employment or promotions for professionals who do not fully control a standard dialect, but does adding proficiency in a standard variety to the vernacular speaker's repertoire have real benefits for everyone? Research into this question is needed in order to justify large-scale standard English instruction.

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

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TESOL Professional Papers #3

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Notes

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