

Chapter 2

Integrating Language Variation into TESOL: Challenges from English Globalization

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Abstract Although the globalization of English underscores the range of English language variation world-wide, most models for TESOL assume an idealized, monolithic version of English. ESOL learners confront great variation in the English of their everyday lives, including many non-mainstream, vernacular varieties of English. This paper argues for the integration of language diversity into both teacher training and student materials in ESOL, offering a rationale and some representative, illustrative activities that might be considered in a curriculum. On a theoretical level, instructors and students understand the systematic nature of the English language in all its variation, regardless of social valuation. On a descriptive and applied level, students can understand local, community norms as they acquire English, including some of the vernacular community models spoken by those around them. Teachers and students also are exposed to attitudes about language variation that play a central role in how speakers view themselves and other speakers of the language.

Keywords Language variation · Norms · Standard · Sociolinguistics · Native-speaker · Linguistic

2.1 Introduction

As complex and perplexing as language diversity in English sometimes may be for native speakers of English, it is even more multifaceted and mystifying for speakers of English as a second or other language (ESOL). Though a monolithic version of standard British (British Received Pronunciation) or Standard American English (SAE) is still assumed as the idealistic norm for teaching and learning English programs, the sociolinguistic reality of TESOL programs is inextricably embedded in a community context of English language diversity. As Strevens (1972) noted, “in

“As English becomes ever more widely used, so it becomes ever more difficult to characterize the ways that support the fiction of a simple, single language.”(Peter Strevens 1982:23)

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every community those who habitually use only standard English are a minority.” If anything, the so-called globalization of English whereby we now have ready access to English spoken everywhere and anywhere seems only to underscore the range of English language variation rather than lead to the homogenization of English as an international language.

English language diversity in ESOL results from two conditions. First, virtually all learners of English as a second or other language are surrounded by an array of dialects in the immediate context of the language community, including those used by speakers of well-established vernacular dialects for those who do not live in middle-class, suburban contexts where a variety of Standard English might be the norm. In reality, the vast majority of ESOL learners do not live or work in middle-class, standard-English speaking communities. Our recent studies of English language learners in Southern rural and urban regions of the US Mid-Atlantic South (Wolfram et al. 2004; Wolfram et al. 2011), as well as earlier sociolinguistic studies of ESOL speakers (Wolfram 1974; Fought 2003, 2006) show how ESOL learners in urban areas accommodate aspects of vernacular African American English (AAE) and how rural ESOL speakers in Southern Appalachia may adopt dialect traits from vernacular Appalachian English as they develop a socioethnic variety of English (Wolfram et al. 2011). The dialect-neutral variety assumed in most TESOL materials is, in fact, a sociolinguistic myth. In the community context of ESOL, there is a dissonance between the variety of English presented in or assumed in most TESOL materials and the English language norms found in most surrounding localized contexts where this learning English in an everyday context takes place. This condition exposes ESOL students to at least two types of English, and usually more—the idealized norm that is the basis of their formal instruction and the everyday varieties of English used by the local community of speakers.

The second condition affecting TESOL instruction is that of the normative models adopted for formal instruction in English. The variety of English typically used in instruction is a non-local one that “is accepted by the public, worldwide, as a suitable educational model” (Stevens 1982, p. 26). Historically, the instructional model adopted for international instruction in English is the British standard norm, with the exception of countries where English is used as a primary native language. Thus, North Americans, Australians, or South Africans would use a standard version of American English, Australian English, or South African English, respectively, in TESOL instruction, but in Europe, Asia, Africa—and in the majority of contexts elsewhere, the normative standard British model is the assumed norm, following the route of political colonialism. In the past couple of decades, the North American English model for TESOL has gained some traction in places like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, but its normative status is still secondary to the British model. More than two decades ago and well before the virtual globalization of English, Kachru (1982, p. 31) questioned the efficacy of this normative model, noting that:

The question of a model for English has acquired immense pedagogical importance, mainly for two reasons. First, non-native varieties of English have emerged in areas such as South Asia (Kachru 1969 and later), Southeast Asia (Crewe 1977; Richards and Tay 1981), Africa (Spencer 1971), the Philippines (Llamzon 1969), and the West Indies (Craig 1982; Haynes

1982). Second, in those areas where English is a native language, as in North America and Scotland, this question has often been raised with reference to bidialectism.

A couple of decades later, following the explosion of English in virtual time and place, Kachru et al. (2006, p. xvii) noted that “There is indeed greater emphasis today than in the past on capturing the expanding fusions and hybridization of linguistic forms and the unprecedented variations in global functions of world Englishes.” Obviously, language variation is not abating and its role in the Englishes of the world is becoming more prominent and complex. If anything, the expansion of English in physical and virtual place leads to further diversity on a local, state, and national level. Ironically, the admission of increasing variation in English on a theoretical level seems to have little apparent effect on pedagogical programs in TESOL, where most instructional materials continue to ignore the vast range of diversity in the English language.

2.2 English Language Models

A casual search of “world Englishes” on the media internet site You Tube (<http://youtube.com>) turns up countless illustrations of the varieties of English around the world as well as the wide range of models and norms used in teaching English. The notion of a unitary language such as English is, in the words of Strevens (1982, p. 23) “a convenient and necessary fiction with a great mass of inconvenient facts.” On a practical level, there are only localized versions of English that are used in a given language community. Given the vast range of variation and the local embedding of English, several taxonomies of world Englishes have been offered in order to organize English varieties into major types. In Kachru’s three circles of English (1992), the INNER CIRCLE includes countries where English is a primary native language (e.g. Australia, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States); the OUTER CIRCLE includes nations where English is not the native tongue but plays an important part in the nation’s institutions, either as an official language or otherwise (e.g. India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines,); and the EXPANDING CIRCLE encompasses countries where English plays no historical or governmental role but is used widely as a foreign language or lingua franca (e.g. China, most of Europe, Indonesia, Japan). The inner circle has historically provided the norms for the English language, the outer circle been involved in the extension of norms, and the expanding circle is often seen as norm-dependent because it relies on the standards set by native speakers in the inner circle.

A different but related conceptualization of the historical spread of English is offered by Schneider (2007), who suggests that there are five stages that can be applied to the spread of English throughout the world, and that this spread has a direct relationship to English norms. In the initial phase, the FOUNDATION stage, English is used on a regular basis in a region where it was not used previously. In this stage, often typified by colonization, speakers come from different regional backgrounds and do not behave linguistically in a homogeneous way. At this stage, norms for

English are relatively loose and immaterial, and, for the most part, not prescribed. In the second phase, called EXNORMATIVE STABILIZATION, communities stabilize politically under foreign dominance—historically mostly the British empire—with expatriates providing the primary norms for usage. In the next phase, NATIVIZATION, there is a transition towards independence in a nation—politically, culturally and linguistically, and unique linguistic usages and structures emerge in the process. An important part of this phase is the differentiation of the language variety of the region from its linguistic origins and country of emigration. In the fourth phase, known as ENDONORMATIVE STABILIZATION, the new nation adopts its own language norms rather than adhering to external norms, while in the final phase, DIFFERENTIATION, internal diversification takes over and new dialects evolve on their own, usually in quite different ways from how language change is proceeding in the country of origin. Each phase in this cycle is characterized by a set of historical, cultural, and political conditions and shifting norms that coincide with linguistic changes. In these situations, there is a close association that develops between language and nationhood, especially in Western industrialized societies. In the progression set forth by Schneider, we see how language variation and English language norms in different areas of the world have developed from its initial roots in the British Isles to its current state in which the dialects of English are viewed as the regional and cultural manifestations of diversity within a particular nation or state. Though language variation is dynamic and continuous, norms for English usage are often bounded and instantiated within the nation-state.

2.3 Language Diversity Myths in TESOL

Though there has been much more focus on the varieties of English world-wide in journals (e.g. *English World Wide*, *World Englishes*, etc.), anthologies (Kachru et al. 2006), and university courses (Baumgardner 2006) in the past couple of decades, there has been surprisingly little discussion of how localized norms and English language diversity might be integrated into the TESOL pedagogy. Brown (2006, p. 688) notes that diversity in world English is “rarely introduced as a central component of language teacher training” (Brown 2006, p. 688) and few teacher training preparation and student curricular materials include the extended, systematic discussion of language variation. Accordingly, this paper argues for its integration into both teacher training and student materials, offering a rationale and some representative, illustrative activities that might be considered for inclusion.

The absence of language variation in teacher training and in pedagogical materials for students can only be attributed to several assumptions in TESOL, though these are often more tacit than explicit. First, there seems to be an assumption that English language variation is largely irrelevant to TESOL given the magnitude of pedagogical challenge confronting ESOL learners. But the sociolinguistic reality is that dialect choices are inevitable and consequential in acquiring English as a second or other language. From the onset of language acquisition, choices about

dialects of English come into play on a number of different levels (Wolfram et al. 2004; Carter 2007). For example, in our study of English language acquisition by Spanish speakers in urban and rural North Carolina (Wolfram et al. 2011), we find speakers with similar lengths of residencies in the US, with comparable levels of proficiency, similar language contact situations, and parallel family histories making quite different choices in terms of dialect accommodation. In one case, an 11-year-old brother and a 13-year-old sister in the rural Piedmont of North Carolina showed dramatically different patterns in the adoption of the Southern rural ungliding/ai/ in words like *tahm* for *time* or *sahd* for *side*. The 11-year-old girl had only one case of unglided/ai/ out of 17 potential tokens (5.9%) for ungliding, while her brother produced almost two-thirds (62.8%) of his/ai/ diphthongs as unglided, indicating an obvious difference in the accommodation of the local Southern norm for these two speakers. The adolescent boy, who also indicates other Southern vernacular features in his speech, identifies strongly with the local non-Hispanic “jock” culture of adolescent boys, projecting a strong “macho” image, while his sister, who uses few vernacular features to go along with her predominantly glided production of/ai/, is much more oriented toward to mainstream American institutional values. Such cases demonstrate the symbolic choices that speakers may make in acquiring English as they mold their identities in relation to those around them. It also demonstrates the two manifestations of English language variation in ESOL speakers. First, there is the social manifestation of English as communities develop localized forms of English. Second, there is the manifestation of the individual, whose command and use of English is “a mixture both of conformity to one or more LFEs [localized forms of English] and at the same time the consequence of specific features of his [sic] personal identity” (Stevens 1982, p. 23).

Our studies of emerging Hispanic English in different locales in North Carolina (Wolfram et al. 2004; Carter 2007; Callahan 2008; Kohn 2008; Kohn and Franz 2009) suggest that one of the factors that guides choices about accommodating the local dialect is related to the symbolic role of that dialect. In some instances, the local dialect might be viewed simply as a regional mainstream norm, whereas in other cases it may be viewed as a vernacular alternative associated with a particular socioethnic or regional group that is in conflict with mainstream norms. Ideologies about regional and local dialect forms and symbolic affiliation through language therefore cannot be dismissed in examining the emergence of ESOL at any stage of language acquisition.

It may further be assumed that the emergence of dialect diversity in the acquisition of English is an incidental by-product of imperfect learning of normative, standard English that is adopted as the target model for English in TESOL programs. But it has been demonstrated that dialect differences (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006) and interlanguage variation (Preston 1989) are highly systematic and rule-governed, notwithstanding popular beliefs that dialects are simply unworthy approximations of the standard norm. This prevalent mythology about language variation and vernacular dialects is not limited to native speakers of English; ESOL speakers often adopt a parallel perspective on language variation. For example, both native speakers and ESOL speakers are often surprised when they learn that the

use of invariant *be* in vernacular African American English (AAE) formally marks habitual aspect so that a sentence such as *Sometimes my ears be itching* is grammatically well-formed in AAE vis-à-vis a sentence such as **My ears be itching right now*. In the latter case, the sentence is ungrammatical because it is used in a punctual time frame as compared with a habitual one. This perspective on language patterning is no less important for ESOL speakers than it is for native speakers of English, and language learners have a right to know the truth about patterning in language variation.

Like native speakers of English who may view their vernacular-speaking peers as linguistically deficient in the use of English (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006), ESOL speakers are also subject to prejudices and stereotypes about language differences. In fact, many speakers simply transfer prejudices from the first language to the English they are acquiring. For example, a native speaker of Spanish from Cuba may view a speaker of Puerto Rican Spanish as speaking an imperfect and unacceptable variety of Spanish and simply project that attitude to English dialects. Or speakers may simply learn from their interaction with English speakers stereotypes and prejudices related to particular vernacular varieties. Furthermore, the misinformation about the nature of dialect diversity is not all innocent folklore, and may lead to LINGUISTIC PROFILING, that is, the use of vocal cues to identify the probable ethnic or social affiliation of a person and then discriminating against the person because of a perceived ethnic or social status. This can happen in employment, housing, access to services, and criminal convictions. It is conservatively estimated that there are 6,000–15,000 cases of linguistic profiling per day related to housing in the United States and 2–4 million cases a year (Bullock 2006). In an instant-poll question included as part of a webinar on integrating language variation into TESOL (Wolfram 2011, October 13, 2011), participants were asked to choose if they (1) have witnessed linguistic profiling firsthand, (2) have heard about cases of linguistic profiling, (3) haven't seen or heard about linguistic profiling, and (4) think linguistic profiling is a sociolinguistic fabrication. Of the respondents, 87% reported that that had either witnessed firsthand or heard about cases of linguistic profiling, underscoring its significance in the context of ESOL as well as for native speakers on English. In fact, in many cases, linguistic profiling can be applied on the basis of "foreign accents" as well as vernacular dialects of English (Lippi-Green 2012; Derwing et. al. this volume).

Since most TESOL programs do not incorporate substantive information and activities focused on English language variation, we can only conclude that it is assumed by these programs that there is little to gain from such information. In reality, there are essential theoretical, descriptive, and practical reasons for the incorporation of such information into TESOL programs. On a theoretical level, instructors and students understand the systematic nature of the English language in all its varieties and the linguistic equality of varieties of English regardless of social valuation. On a descriptive and applied level, students can consider local norms they acquire English, including some of the vernacular community models to which students are exposed. And they confront everyday issues of language stereotyping and prejudice as a sociopsychological issue in learning English. Language attitudes play a central

role in how speakers view other speakers of the language and themselves as they acquire ESOL.

2.4 Rationale for Language Variation in TESOL

In other work (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006; Adger et al. 2007) we have argued that there are humanistic, scientific, and utilitarian reasons for incorporating dialect awareness programs into a curriculum. We might apply this same rationale to ESOL programs. From a humanistic standpoint, such programs help teachers and students understand similarities and differences in human behavior. They also offer an opportunity to see how language reflects and helps shape different historical, social, and cultural developments. Understanding language differences, including those reflected in varieties of world Englishes, is a significant manifestation of cultural and historical differences.

At the same time, there is also a scientific rationale for examining dialect differences related to the nature of intellectual inquiry. The study of varieties of language affords us a fascinating window through which we can see how language works. Certainly, an important aspect of understanding language in general and the English language in particular is the development of an appreciation for how language changes over time and space and how various dialects arise. Studying dialects formally and informally provides a wealth of information for examining the inherent and the dynamic nature of language. Given people's intrinsic curiosity about dialects, this type of study has great potential for piquing students' interest, including ESOL students, about how language systems work. Furthermore, the inner workings of language are just as readily observed in examining dialects and their patterning as they are through the exclusive study of a single standard variety.

The study of dialects offers another enticement. Language, including dialects, is a unique form of knowledge in that speakers know a language simply by virtue of the fact that they speak it. Much of this knowledge is not on a conscious level, but it is still open to systematic investigation. In examining dialect differences, students can hypothesize about the patterning of language features and then check these hypotheses by carefully studying and describing a set of data on people's actual usage patterns. This process is, of course, a type of scientific inquiry which involves the observation of data, the formulation of hypotheses about data that account for all but only the data, and the process of confirming or rejecting hypotheses about language patterning. Such a rationale for studying dialects may seem a bit esoteric at first glance, but hypothesizing about and then testing language patterns is quite within the grasp even of younger students—and this is what both first and second language learners do as an intuitive process. In effect, then, learning about the rules of language varieties is a kind of metalinguistic activity. We have led classes of students in the middle elementary grades through the steps of hypothesis formation and testing by using a variety of exercises involving dialect features. An exercise on *a*-prefixing reported in Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006, p. 4–6) in which

students rely on their language intuition was used successfully with students in Grade 4 (age 9–10). In this exercise students make a choice between two sentences, simply choosing which sentence sounds better; for example, the sentence pairs *A-building is hard work* vs. *They were a-building a house* or the sentence pairs *She was a-following a trail* vs. *She was a-discovering a trail*. Based on such choices, students can learn that *a*-prefixing occurs with verbs and adverbs but not nouns and adjectives and that it is preferable with words with initial stress as opposed to unstressed initial syllables in words (e.g. *fóllowing* vs. *discóvering*). We have used a version of this exercise for several decades now to demonstrate how vernacular dialects are systematically patterned. Students inductively learn how to formulate and test hypotheses at the same time that they learn about the intricate nature of patterned dialect differences.

Finally, there is a utilitarian reason for studying language variation in English. Information about dialects should prove helpful to students as they acquire language skills in English that are sensitive to community norms in relation to the idealized, standard-English models that found in most curricular materials. An understanding of some of the local norms compared to the invariant, monolithic model offers a kind of sociolinguistic realism that can only enable students' skills in English. For example, the systematic exposure to vernacular varieties may help students in their comprehension of these varieties that they encounter in their routine interactions with such speakers. It may also offer an introduction to the notion of bidialectalism in English that students can apply to their local situation. Information about local, everyday norms versus idealized prescriptive forms of instructional English is as relevant to ESOL speakers as it is to native speakers. Though the notion of bidialectalism in English is often ignored in TESOL materials, Kachru (1982, p. 31) has noted that it is of increasing significance in TESOL as our understanding of World Englishes expands.

2.5 Language Variation Activities for TESOL

For a couple of decades now, we have been engaged in the development of programs on language diversity for students at various stages of education, including the development of curricular materials (Wolfram 1993; Reaser 2005; Reaser and Wolfram 2007; Adger and Reaser 2007), research on the effects of such instructional materials on knowledge and language attitudes (Reaser 2006; Sweetland 2006), and the implementation of a regular course of study for students in the public schools of North Carolina. A number of these programs are now also available online; for example, the complete Grade Eight curriculum developed by Reaser and Wolfram (2007), including audiovisual material, is accessible at <http://ncsu.edu/linguistics/dialectcurriculum.php>, an online curriculum for the DVD *Do you Speak American* (Reaser et al. 2005) is available at <http://www.pbs.org/speak/education>, and a dialect curriculum for the study of secondary school literature developed by Massengill (2011) is accessible at <http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/docs/curriculum/>

Massengill%20Lit%20Curriculum.pdf. While the target audience for these materials was not ESOL originally, many of these curricular activities are readily applicable to TESOL, and some of our colleagues and students are currently piloting materials on language variation in ESOL classrooms.

Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to introduce a comprehensive set of activities and lesson plans for ESOL students, it is reasonable to demonstrate the major themes that might be covered in such activities and to offer some concrete, illustrative examples. Most of these activities have now been piloted informally in a variety of ESOL classrooms as well as for different proficiency levels in English. The activities presented in the following discussion exemplify themes about language variation that extend from general humanistic objectives aimed at examining language stereotypes and prejudice to specific exercises for examining language patterns exhibited in regional and/or socioethnic varieties that ESOL learners may confront in ordinary interactions.

One of the exercises introduced early in our instruction (Reaser and Wolfram 2007) asks students to confront the issue of language prejudice by having them view the one-minute ad on linguistic profiling and housing discrimination prepared by National Fair Housing Alliance, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education (Ad Council 2003). The activity from the student workbook is presented in the format given below. The video used as the basis for this exercise is readily available on YouTube (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=zup2qlFuCDc>) as well as the curriculum website cited above.

Video Exercise: Examining Language Prejudice

During phone conversations, it is often possible to tell a number of things about a person based on the characteristics of their voice. You will see a 1-min commercial produced by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=zup2qlFuCDc>.

The purpose of this commercial is to raise awareness of how discrimination can occur over the phone. As you watch the video, think of answers to the following:

1. How common do you think it is for people to be discriminated against on the phone?
2. How strong are people's prejudices about language?
3. How do these attitudes apply to speakers of English as a second language?
4. Why do you think people have such strong prejudices about language?

This activity is not just relevant for ESOL learners at higher proficiency levels. From the onset of English language acquisition, the social valuation of variation in English is confronted. As noted, most ESOL students readily transfer socialized language attitudes and prejudices from their experiences with language variation

in their first language or other languages, so that it is an essential discussion with reference to language variation in general and the acquisition of the second or other language. English language users need to confront stereotypes and misconceptions about dialects early, and this is probably most effective when it is done inductively. The video exercise on linguistic profiling and discrimination often provokes extended discussions about language prejudice and linguistic inequality among students, and it is one of the topics most frequently mentioned by students in their post-curriculum discussion of the significance of the dialect curriculum. Furthermore, a pre- and post-curriculum survey questionnaire administered to students in the curriculum indicated the most significant change in some of the questions related to attitudes about language differences (Reaser 2006).

It is also essential to have students listen to representative speech samples of regional, class, and ethnic differences now increasingly available through public media venues. Students can hear how both standard and vernacular speakers around the world and in various regions of the British Isles and the United States and compare these with each other to appreciate the reality of diverse regional spoken standards, just as they need to recognize different vernacular varieties in these regions. Students further profit from examining some of the features of the local dialect as it compares with other varieties, whether it be the Northern Cities Vowel Shift, the Southern Vowel Shift, or the peculiar vowel system of a city like Philadelphia (Labov et al. 2006) in the United States. And of course they need to examine differences on different levels of language organization that include phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, and discourse. Our study of emerging Hispanic varieties of English in rural and urban North Carolina shows the early adoption of lexical forms like plural *y'all* in *Y'all have a nice day*, quotative *like* in *So she's like, "What do you think I'm doing?"* and, in urban areas, the adoption of grammatical forms such as habitual *be* in *Sometimes they be acting weird* (Kohn and Franz 2009; Wolfram et al. 2011) to understand the early emergence of dialect traits in ESOL. A growing inventory of video productions can be used to provide an entertaining introduction to dialects of English while, at the same time, exposing some of the social valuation of language differences.

If they are in a heavily English-speaking context, students need to examine cases of language variation from their own community and beyond as a basis for seeing how natural and inevitable dialects are. Students should at least be exposed to some of the regional names for short order, over-the-counter foods and drinks (e.g. *sub/hoagie/hero*, etc.; *soda/pop*, etc.), as well as local transportation (e.g. *beltline*, *beltway*, *loop*, *perimeter*, etc. for 'road encircling a metropolitan area') and how these choices relate to everyday experience. All communities have some local and regional lexical items that can be used as a starting point for examining dialect diversity.

It is also essential for ESOL students to understand the natural patterning and systematic nature of dialects of English, not just the grammatical patterning of standard English that is incorporated into most TESOL programs. As noted above, we have been using an exercise related to the patterning of *a-* prefixing in rural Southern regions for a couple of decades now (Wolfram 1982; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, pp. 4–6) to introduce a wide variety of students, including ESOL students

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