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Teachers with training in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) are often called upon to participate in programs to teach a standard English dialect to speakers of non-standard dialects ("dialect expansion"). A course outline is presented here which should respond to the needs of four groups (1) college professors who recognize that their students use socially stigmatized forms of English not appropriate for university level work, (2) students who want to learn a standard form of English, (3) students with an intellectual curiosity about dialectology, and (4) students who question the necessity of learning an approved dialect but who want to investigate the relationship between their dialect and standard English. Such a course should not be a required or remedial course, but should be open to speakers of all dialects and offered for academic credit. The content of the course must both teach a dialect and teach about dialects. To teach about dialects the course should begin with background information about regional and social dialects. A second segment would offer linguistic fieldwork techniques. Students who wish an "intellectual" command of a dialect may be guided in classical styles of presenting dialect data. Students who want to master another dialect would be guided in language learning techniques and allowed to repeat the course. (JD)

DIALECT EXPANSION: THE COLLEGE LEVEL

by

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It is not at all unusual to find that persons with TESOL training are being called upon to participate in instructional programs which address the problem of alternate dialects. There is no need to review here the hisory of this involvement or the reservations linguists and teachers have felt about such training, particularly if it is done indiscriminately. This paper avoids the use of such labels as "dialect retraining" and employs instead the cover term "dialect expansion." This suggests perhaps, at the outset, what particular attitude to dialect teaching is assumed here and provides a convenient label which is consistent with radically different goals in the teaching of dialects.

The most important question to ask about dialect instruction at the college level is, to borrow a current term, this: What constitutes an appropriate response? For that question to be meaningful we must accurately describe both the situations and groups that require the response.

Some are educational academic, and prescriptive demands. That is, colleagues confront teachers of English as a second language with the problem of unacccptable, non-standard linguistic performance on the part of their students. Somewhere they have heard that methods

employed in teaching English as a second language may be helpful in "correcting" these stigmatized forms. Many such requests are not formal complaints about intelligibility and style but realistic evaluations of the social stratification of individuals who characteristically use, in speech and in writing, non-standard forms. For many, who might agree with the questionability of mass training in standard English, there is no room for equivocation here since the students they refer to have chosen university level training. What constitutes an appropriate response to this group?

A second group which requests action is made up of potential students, motivated in drastically different ways, but their request is the same: Teach me standard English. There is no difficulty in suggesting an appropriate response to this group since it is essentially the same called for by the first group.

A third group, motivated primarily, it would seem, by intellectual curiosity, wants to learn about geographical and sociological dialect distinctions in this country. One appropriate response to this group is traditional -- an academic response to a request for courses in a certain area. It is the intent of this paper to show, however, that a response to this group might be consistent with responses to the earlier groups and be appropriate, as well, to a fourth group.

The last group, in questioning the cause and the continuation of their social stigmatization, begin, too, to question the necessity of learning the approved dialect. No attempt will be made here to evaluate that response to a current situation; but, it is not appropriate, I believe, to press students who hold such a view beyond the practical information they can be given about the socio-economic results such a refusal will almost certainly yield in the near future.

There is another request from the fourth group, however, which suggests that courses in dialect are appropriate at the descriptive level and would, indeed, contribute in part to the university's attempt to provide specific course work in the history and culture of minority groups. What constitutes an appropriate response to this group, which asks, first, not to be forced into a pattern it refuses to accept and, second, to be provided with the opportunity of investigating various aspects of its culture, language included?

This paper does not suggest that one and only one course is appropriate to all these purposes, nor does it suggest that one course can fully satisfy the various demands indicated above. What is proposed here is simply one kind of response which seems appropriate to all the above requests.

A number of those requests are met by administrative rather than pedagogical decisions. First, a course in dialect expansion

should be offered for credit. If the university is a training-center which has as one of its purposes the production of individuals prepared to meet the cultural requirements of a career and position, then there should be no discrimination among those courses which students select as necessary to their purpose. That is, the student in group two, who requests dialect expansion, asks that the university assume responsibility for training him in an area he feels is important to his objectives. That this training is linguistic does not justify its being set apart from other skill-development courses in the curriculum.

Second, a course in dialect expansion should not be required. Although it is desirable that persons from group four be acutely aware of the likely socio-economic repercussions of their refusal to "play the game," there is no justification in requiring formal acceptance of a manner of behavior which is inconsistent with a student's beliefs about himself and society. On the other hand, there is no suggestion here that the university community at large be "instructed" to accept this attitude; doubtless there will remain many faculty who will continue to demand performance in the standard language, but that is a fact the student knows well enough.

Third, a course in dialect expansion should be open to speakers of all dialects. This helps preserve the obvious prerequisite that

any such course should bear no demeaning or pejoritive label, e.g. "remedial." It serves, too, to educate speakers of socially and academically acceptable varieties of English in the matter of the multiplicity of dialects and in the matter of the historical and arbitrary stigmatization of some.

Finally, courses in dialect expansion should be repeatable, perhaps for fewer credit hours, but the practical consideration of the time necessary to master a second dialect requires this added condition.

All these comments expand on the general outline of a course which satisfies both academic and group demands current on campuses, but they do not, as yet, approach the content and methodology. If the above requirements and purposes are to be met in one course, that course could obviously not follow typical foreign-language classroom procedures. For one thing, the presence of speakers with radically different purposes indicates that pattern practices in one dialect, arbitrarily chosen by the teacher, will meet the demands of only the first two groups.

In some way the content of the course must both teach and teach about dialects. It must offer, as well, a choice among dialects for the students. Since the instructors of such courses will be limited in their ability to "perform" the entire range of dialects

that might be requested, the data for student research must come, in part, from other sources. A mechanical solution to this problem would be the acquisition of a large tape library. This is unsatisfactory in two respects: first, it is costly, cumbersome, and dependent on facilities which may not exist; second, it provides only a limited corpus, one which is not open to question and one which might provide false bases for analogical construction.

The solution to this question depends on the preparation offered students at the outset of the course. There is no doubt that they should be offered introductory facts about the sociological and geographical distribution of dialects in the United States. This provides not only a specific response to requests from groups three and four above but also a background for the remainder of the course work. Carroll Reed's new introduction to American dialects might be a good resource book for this preparatory unit.

The second segment of this course offers linguistic fieldwork techniques, including descriptive terminology according to a grammatical framework the instructor has mastered. William Samarin's recent text in field linguistics is an excellent resource for the teacher as are some older articles from PADS and DN.

The stage is now set for the students to provide an analysis of their own speech patterns, identifying both sociological and geographical varieties. It is now clearly a matter of student choice

which dialect will be selected from those available in the class. After the students team up, their first chore will be an accurate description of a well-defined area of the dialect they have chosen. Perhaps some students will be concerned with morphological variance, others with lexicon, some with phonological and syntactic differences. Students whose purposes include mastery of the dialect they are studying should probably spend less time in description and more in practice.

The specific methodological problems now rest with the teacher: how does he contribute to a meaningful learning situation in the midst of this divided class?

The teacher will, of course, contribute to different groups of dialect students in different ways. Students whose goal is an "intellectual" command of a dialect or one aspect of it may be guided, perhaps as a group, in the "classical" styles of presenting dialect data. Their instruction may include more advanced descriptive techniques than those which were earlier presented to the class as a whole. Such work should lead to a paper or presentation of structure of the dialect that has been investigated.

Students whose purposes include mastering the dialect they are investigating may be served by direct instruction in several ways: first, the teacher may want, after a minimal descriptive statement has been completed, to instruct students in some of the techniques

of foreign language instruction, particularly the art of pattern practice. These instructions need be as detailed as necessary to the specific goal of the student for a given quarter. These students, in particular, should be dissuaded from setting general, unaccomplishable goals for themselves. Second, the teacher can provide guidance in identifying those aspects of a dialect which a student intends to master which are most necessary to his broader goals -- perhaps the achievement of standard English. The teacher can point out in such cases that standard English is no more monolithic a structure than any other broad classification of dialect and can help the student avoid wasting time on such matters as the /I/ /e/ distinction between "pin" and "pen."

A number of other suggestions could be made about the teacher's involvement in this latter part of the course, but I believe these examples are sufficiently representative to illustrate the possibility of continued instruction and control.

It is perhaps now even more evident why such classroom work could best be carried out by a TESOL-trained instructor. Besides his training in the structure of English and in the techniques of foreign-language teaching, the TESOL instructor is psychologically prepared to make meaning out of madness. Nearly all of us have had to deal with classes, unfortunately short of the ideal, which are

made up of students who do not have a homogeneous language background, whose competence in English may vary greatly, and whose goals in language learning may radically differ. That situation is precisely duplicated in this proposed class for dialect expansion. That the TESOL instructor may lack knowledge of American Dialects is granted, but such information is becoming more readily available. The Reed book mentioned above is helpful, but the teacher who seeks more thorough preparation would perhaps best be guided by two excellent articles which cover the general history of linguistic geography in England and America: E. Bagby Atwood, "The Methods of American Dilectology," Zeitschrift für Mundartforschung (October 1963) and Wolfgang Viereck, "Englische Dialektologie," in the same journal, October, 1968. Alva Davis and Raven I. McDavid have announced, too, their forthcoming text on American dialects, one which will, no doubt, include much previously hard-to-get-at information from the regional atlas compilations.

I believe this approach to dialect studies at the undergraduate level is both academically and culturally satisfying; I believe, further, that it is consistent with different faculty and student goals concerning the matter. I don't have the slightest idea whether it will work or not. Perhaps I can report to you next year.