

Practical Pedagogical Ideas 2

Variations in English: Attitudes and awareness

Variations in English as a language of people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are inevitable. This lesson focuses on variations in English, people's attitudes towards the variations and the consequential implications.

Proficiency Level: Advanced

Age Group: Adults, First-Year, Bachelor Level

Class Time: 100-120 minutes

Objectives

The activity seeks to 1) raise students' awareness of the varieties of English 2) identify the prevailing attitudes toward different varieties of English and 3) understand the relationship of language attitudes and English varieties and its implications for international and intercultural communications. For a class with students of the same native language, the students will be introduced to regional and/or social variations.

Resources: DVD clips/ You-tube clips/ Worksheets

Procedure

1) *Introduction (10 minutes)*. The teacher asks students to come out from their seats and introduce themselves to as many students as they can, share what languages they know, where they learned English, and any interesting experiences in learning English.

2) *Class Discussion (10 minutes)*. Ask the students what they think of the interactions and persons they spoke to, what impression they had of the English they spoke, and if they think their English is different from or better than their classmates'. The teacher leads a discussion that each of them speaks English differently in pronunciation, set or words, and non-verbal clues. Conclude that these differences of accent, words, sentence structure, and other linguistic features are known as variations and that the students have also experienced language variations at an individual level (idiolect).

3) *Regional variations (30 minutes)*. Teacher presents short 5 DVD clips (5 TV ads of 2 minutes each) in American¹, Australian², British³, Indian⁴, and Nepali⁵ Englishes. As they watch the

clips, the students are asked to note the differences in the languages in as many ways as they can. They are then asked to point out variant forms in the language, i.e., the forms which they think are different in the English spoken in the clips. Taking one clip at a time, the teacher writes down the pointed out differences on the board. Indicate that the key variations are vocabulary, syntactic construction, and/ or accent and group the differences in terms of region. Point out that they are regional variations known as 'dialects'.

4) *Variations in English and Attitude (20 minutes)*. Students are divided into language/dialect/cultural groups (e.g., Nepali, Newari, Maithili/Bhojpuri, Rai/Limbu/Tamang and so on). In case students are of the same language background, this activity can be conducted in groups of regions and/or states they come from. The students are given a worksheet on 'food and dialect' (available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/schools/worksheets/pdf/food.pdf>) in which the same food is referred to in different ways. Students are asked to indicate which ones they are familiar with and if other terms mean different things to them. They are also asked to say how they would refer to the food in the English they speak.

5) *Language Variations and Attitudes (10 - 20 Minutes)*. Lead the discussion by inquiring:

- a. Why do people use different terms to express the same thing?
- b. What do the differences mean to the speakers of other Englishes?
- c. How do they feel when they come across such differences?

Draw the conclusion that variations in English are natural and they occur because people of different cultures experience the same thing differently, that people speaking one variety of English may feel in a different way about other varieties of English, and that is natural as well.

6) *Activity (10 - 20 Minutes)*. While remaining in the same cultural/language groups, students work on a sheet with 7 (See Appendix 1) items. Each item has five words. Each word is written in different English. Students are asked to choose the one they think it is correct. After 5 minutes, encourage them to explain why they think a particular choice is correct. In the post-activity discussion, ask students how they would respond if they meet someone using the English words, which they think incorrect. Then, explain to the students that variations in English are inevitable but the speakers of one variety of English may make

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cHmhsu3qr8>

²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUF7ja9ehIs>

³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNFAsKwCCHw>

⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzJj-PL-kPs>

⁵https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V02_j5ZXa1w

judgments about the speakers of other Englishes and develop some attitudinal issues.

7) *Conclusion (10 Minutes)*. Allow time for a brief question-answer session. Conclude that in terms of language features, variations may be classified at a social group/ethnic/cultural group or community level (sociolect/ ethnolect), or a province or state level (dialect), or a country level (prestige dialect or language). Englishes spoken in America, Australia, Britain, India and Singapore are all dialects of the same language. However, some dialects of English are perceived to be more prestigious than others. As a result, people often think that expressions of other Englishes are incorrect and therefore unacceptable.

8) The teacher may ask 'Should there be just one international variety of English?' at the end of the session to encourage students to think ahead for the next session.

Additional Information

The above activities are based on the experience in Australian ELI classrooms which are usually multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic. In "homogenous" classes where the students have the same language background, the activities can be conducted in groups of students from different regions or students with exposure of different Englishes (American, British, Australian, Indian and so on). For younger and less proficient students, the focus should be on variations rather than on the implications

of the variations. Awareness of the implications will develop gradually.

Appendix 1

In each of the following sets of words, circle the word (or words) you think is correct:

1. (a) evening meal or dinner, (b) a milky, hot sweetened beverage served anytime, (c) late lunch/brunch, (d) afternoon light meal/snack, (e) formal afternoon occasion/banquet.
2. (a) cookie, (b) biscuit, (c) a plain bun, (d) a small cake (e) cracker
3. (a) green onion; (b) spring onion; (c) shallots; (d) scallions, (e) gibbles; (e) onion
4. (a) gas; (b) fuel; (c) petrol; (d) gasoline; (e) oil
5. (a) spigot; (b) faucet; (c) stop valve; (d) tap; (e) cock
6. (a) spuds; (b) taters; (c) murphies; (d) potatoes; (e) chitties
7. (a) mushrooms; (b) blewits; (c) mushers; (d) Gipsies stocks (e) fungus

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Note for the teachers:

Possible affiliations: The affiliations may be different for people depending on what English or Englishes they are exposed to. Here are some possible affiliations

Tea: India- a milky hot and sweetened beverageserved anytime; Australia - Evening meal or dinner; Singapore-late lunch; UK - Afternoon light meal; US - formal afternoon occasion

Cookie - US- cracker, cookie (also Scotland); UK-biscuit; Scotland- a plain bun (also in the US); Euro/ Singapore- small cake

Green Onion - India/UK- green onion; US- spring onion; Singapore- shallots; Aus- scallions; Parts of UK - gibbles

Petrol - US-gas, gasoline, Aus- fuel; UK- petrol; India-oil

Tap - UK - spigot, tap, stop valve; US- faucet, cock; Singapore/India - tap

Potatoes - Irish- spuds; US- taters; Irish -murphies; UK/ Aus/US- potatoes; Euro/ Aus/UK- desirees

Mushrooms - US/parts of UK/Euro - mushrooms; UK- blewits; Parts of UK/Euro- mushers; Gipsies stocks, fungus

(Sources: Food and dialect/bbc.co.uk/voices and various dictionaries)

Contributor: The Editorial Board of Journal of NELTA has prepared this pedagogical idea as a sample. ELT practitioners interested in sharing their pedagogical ideas may use this sample as a template.