

Language Awareness in Middle School: An Experimental Program

1. The Need for Education

- **Entrenched Language Ideology**
The most persistent challenge for sociolinguists attempting to educate the American public about linguistic diversity continues to be the widespread application of the *principle of linguistic subordination*. Mitigating the effects of the dominant ideology involves long-term, formal and informal re-education on both a local and global level.
- **The Miseducation of the American Public**
There is a strong tradition of language socialization that portrays vernacular dialects as little more than unworthy, illegitimate versions of the dominant language variety. The educational misrepresentation of the linguistic nature of language differences qualifies as one of the great scientific myths of modern society.
- **Lack of Established Tradition in Mainstream Education**
There is no established tradition for public education about language awareness in American society; it does not fit within current paradigms of informal and formal education. The initial challenge is thus establishing the need for information about language differences.

2. Preliminary Considerations in Developing Dialect Awareness Curricula

- Tailoring linguistics for grade-appropriate audiences
- Issues relating to metalanguage and terminology, e.g., *dialect*, *Ebonics*, *grammar*
- The non-linguistic background of teachers
- Dealing with linguistic stereotypes and prejudice

3. Rationale for Dialect Awareness Programs

- **The Humanistic Reason**
Understanding differences in human behavior, multicultural education
- **The Scientific Reason**
Understanding the "laws of language" that govern language patterning
- **The Historical Reason**
Understanding language as history
- **The Cultural Reason**
Understanding language as culture
- **The Utilitarian Reason**
Understanding the basis for learning mainstream English

4. Meeting Existent Educational Standard and Objectives: Excerpts from the *Program Description of the Middle Grades' Social Studies Program*

(www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/socialstudies/2003-04/004description.html)

- INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT – in each society, individual identity is shaped by one's culture, by groups, and by institutions.
 - *Language is an important aspect of individual identity*
- CULTURE AND DIVERSITY – There are similarities as well as differences between and among cultures. Culture helps people to understand themselves as both individuals and as members of a group. As cultural borrowing becomes more prevalent, the differences between cultures become less defined.
 - *Similarities, differences, and borrowings are readily manifested in language*

- HISTORIC PERSPECTIVES - Seeking to understand the historical roots of present-day cultures enables students to develop a perspective on their own place in time. Knowing what things were like in the past and how they changed and developed over time in a variety of societies and cultures provides students with a broader view of their own history.
 - ***Understanding language variation and change can help students develop a perspective on their place within culture and history***
- GEOGRAPHIC RELATIONSHIPS - Studying places and the people who inhabit them as well as their interactions and mutual impact on each other enables the student to develop a spatial perspective on their place in the world going beyond personal location.
 - ***The rich dialect diversity in NC is a prime indicator of spatial perspective and personal location***

5. Meeting Existent Educational Standards and Objectives: Excerpts from the Standard Course of Study for *Creation and Development of the State*, 8th Grade Social Studies (www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/socialstudies/2003-04/050eighthgrade.html)

- COMPETENCY GOAL 1: The learner will analyze important geographic, political, economic, and social aspects of life in the region prior to the Revolutionary Period.
 - 1.01 Assess the impact of geography on the settlement and developing economy of the Carolina colony.
 - ***Geography and settlement have shaped the linguistic landscape of NC, from the Outer Banks, through the Coastal Plain, the Piedmont, and the Appalachian Mountains.***
 - 1.02 Identify and describe American Indians who inhabited the regions that became Carolina and assess their impact on the colony.
 - ***The histories of Native American groups such as the Cherokee, Haliwa-Saponi, and Lumbee have impacted the language history and development of North Carolina in significant ways.***
 - 1.07 Describe the roles and contributions of diverse groups, such as American Indians, African Americans, European immigrants, landed gentry, tradesmen, and small farmers to everyday life in colonial North Carolina, and compare them to the other colonies.
 - ***Language is an important part of “everyday life”, and the historical and current roles of these groups are both similar to and different from those in other colonial and current states.***
- COMPETENCY GOAL 3: The learner will identify key events and evaluate the impact of reform and expansion in North Carolina during the first half of the 19th century.
 - 3.04 Describe the development of the institution of slavery in the State and nation, and assess its impact on the economic, social, and political conditions.
 - ***African American English and Southern English have a history that is at least partly rooted in plantation life and earlier social relations. The language history of African Americans offers an important perspective on slavery, segregation, and the development of ethnic identity.***
- COMPETENCY GOAL 8: The learner will evaluate the impact of demographic, economic, technological, social, and political developments in North Carolina since the 1970s.
 - 8.01 Describe the changing demographics in North Carolina and analyze their significance for North Carolina's society and economy.
 - ***Modern linguistic diversity exemplifies significant social and political developments and demographic shifts. Furthermore, new speech communities, including Northern transplants and Hispanics, significantly impact language and society.***

8.04 Assess the importance of regional diversity on the development of economic, social, and political institutions in North Carolina.

➤ ***This regional diversity is exemplified by the language differences; thus understanding dialect diversity will reinforce the understanding of regional diversity.***

- COMPETENCY GOAL 9: The learner will explore examples of and opportunities for active citizenship, past and present, at the local and state levels.

9.01 Describe contemporary political, economic, and social issues at the state and local levels and evaluate their impact on the community.

➤ ***Dialect diversity is one of the contemporary issues that has a major impact on the community and state.***

6. Example of a Humanistic Activity

You will see some a short video on the Cherokee Native American language spoken in the southwestern mountain region of North Carolina. Based on your viewing of the video, answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think the Cherokee language has been preserved while other Native American languages in North Carolina have disappeared?
2. What are Cherokees doing to preserve their language?
3. Do you think that these attempts for preservation of the language will be successful? Why or why not?
4. What would be lost if the Cherokee language disappeared?
5. Evaluate this claim made in the video: "Language is culture and culture is language."

7. Example of an Inductive, Inquiry-Based Exercise

THE USE OF *A*- PREFIX



In traditional dialects of rural North Carolina, some words that end in *-ing* can take an *a-*, pronounced as *uh*, in front of the word. We call this *a-* a prefix because it precedes the *-ing* word. But there is a pattern that determines with which words the *a-* prefix can occur. We will try to figure out this fairly complicated pattern by looking at the kinds of *-ing* words *a-* can and cannot attach to. We will do this using our inner feelings about language. These inner feelings, called **intuitions**, tell us where we can and cannot use certain forms. Our job as linguists trying to describe a dialect is to figure out the reasons behind these inner feelings and to state the exact rules for the pattern.

Read each pair of sentences in LIST A and be sure to insert the *a-* ("uh") before the *-ing* word. Decide which sentence in each pair sounds better and place a check (✓) in the blank next to it. For example, in the first sentence pair, does it sound better to say, *a-building is hard work* or *she was a-building a house*?

LIST A: The First Rule for *a-* prefixing

1. a Building is hard work.
b She was building a house.
2. a He likes hunting.
b He went hunting.
3. a The child was charming the adults.
b The child was very charming.



Examine each of the sentence pairs in terms of the choices for the *a-* prefix and answer the following questions:

1. Do you think there is some rule that guided your choice of answer? You can tell if there is a definite rule by checking with other people who did the same exercise on their own.
2. Do you think that the rule might be related to parts of speech? To answer this, see if there are any parts of speech where you CANNOT use the *a-* prefix. Look at *-ing* words that function as verbs and compare those with *-ing* forms that function as nouns or adjectives. For example, in sentence 3, look at the use of *charming* as a verb (*The child was charming the adults*) and an adjective (*This child was very charming*).

The first rule for the *a-* prefixing pattern is related to that part of speech of the *-ing* word. But there are other rules that contribute to this pattern. To discover the second rule, read the sentence pairs in LIST B, insert the *a-* before the *-ing* word, and decide which sentence in each pair sounds better. For each pair of sentences, place a check (✓) in the blank next to one that sounds better with the *a-*.

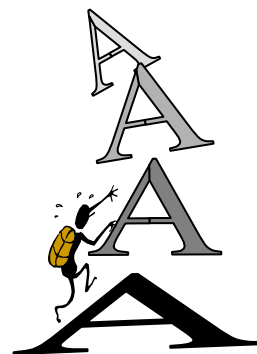
LIST B: The Second Rule for *a-* prefixing

1. a They make money by building houses.
b They make money building houses.
2. a People can't make enough money fishing.
b People can't make enough money from fishing.
3. a People destroy the beauty of the island through littering.
b People destroy the beauty of the island littering.

This rule is related to the "little" words like *by* or *from*. These are called *prepositions*. Can an *a-* prefix come after a preposition or not? We now know two rules for the *a-* prefixing pattern but there is a third rule. To discover the third and final rule, read the sentence pairs in LIST C, insert the *a-* before the *-ing* word, and decide which sentence in each pair sounds better. To help you figure out this rule, the stressed or accented syllable of each word is marked with the symbol **·**.

LIST C: The Third Rule for *a-* prefixing

1. a She was discó·vering a trail.
b She was fóllowing a trail.
2. a She was repéating the chant.
b She was hóllering the chant.
3. a They were fíguring the change.
b They were for·gétting the chant.



Say exactly the three rules that determines the *a-* prefixing pattern.

Using your rules, try to predict whether the sentences in LIST D may use an *a-* prefix. Use your understanding of the pattern to explain why the *-ing* word may or may not take the *a-* prefix.

8. Example of a deductive, Inquiry-Based Exercise

You will see a vignette from the documentary *Mountain Talk*, which features the language and culture of people who live in the Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina. As you watch the video, listen to the pronunciation and grammar of mountain talkers keeping in mind the pronunciation and grammar of other dialects that we've discussed. Answer the following questions:

1. What **pronunciation** and **grammar** features do you hear that sound **similar** to those heard on the Outer Banks?
2. What **pronunciation** and **grammar** features do you hear that sound **different** to those heard on the Outer Banks?
3. What unique **vocabulary** features do mountain talkers use? What do these words mean?

9. Language Differences as History and Culture

Following are some words introduced in the different videos on the dialects of North Carolina: Outer Banks dialect, mountain dialect, and the Lumbee dialect of Robeson County. Fill in the blanks in the following sentences with the appropriate dialect word.

airish	boomer	buck	doast	ellick
gaum	goaty	juvember	meehonky	mommuck
on the swamp	poke	plumb	quamish	sigogglin
slick cam	touron	token	yonder	young 'uns

1. They used a _____ for target practice.
2. That _____ is from New Jersey.
3. That place sure was smelling _____.
4. Put those groceries in a _____ and I'll take them home.
5. When I got up this morning it was right _____ outside.
6. You can find it way back _____ when we were children.
7. They're always together because he's his _____.
8. At night we used to play _____ .
9. The ocean was so rough today I felt _____ in my stomach.
10. Last night she came down with a _____.
11. I saw a _____ in the field last night and it scared me.
12. They worked so hard that they were _____ wore out.
13. Last night a _____ got in the attic.
14. They live over there _____.
15. If I don't have some _____ I'm going to fall asleep.
16. The road going up there sure is _____.
17. She used to _____ him when he was a child.
18. It sure was _____ on the sound without any wind.
19. Don't _____ up the radiator with that stuff.
20. _____ don't act like they used to back then.

Some of the dialect words are used on the Outer Banks, some are used in the mountains, and some used mostly by the Lumbee Indians in Robeson County. Some words are shared by different groups of speakers. In the following table, list the words that are used by each group as well as those that are shared by groups.

airish	boomer	buck	doast	ellick
gaum	goaty	juvember	meehonky	mommuck
on the swamp	poke	plumb	quamish	sigogglin
slick cam	touron	token	yonder	young 'uns

Outer Banks	Lumbee	Mountains	Shared

10. Example of a Reflective Comparison/Contrast Exercise

1. How have the histories of the Lumbee Native Americans and the Cherokee Native American been similar?
2. How have they differed?
3. Why have the Cherokee been able to preserve their native language whereas the Lumbee have lost of their ancestral language?
4. How does speaking a unique dialect of English differ from speaking a different language like Cherokee?
5. What role does language play in these two communities?

11. Reflection on African American English Grounded in Personal Experience

You will see a vignette about the language experience from the documentary *Voices of North Carolina*. Before you watch the video answer the following questions:

1. Do you ever feel that you have to change the way you speak? Why?
2. When you change your speech, is it mostly conscious or unconscious? That is, do you have to think about it or does it just happen naturally?
3. List 5 situations where you are likely to change your speech. Rank these situations from 1 to 5 with 1 being the situation where you have to be most careful about the way you speak and 5 being the situation where you can be most casual.

Now we will watch the video. As you watch, think about the following questions:

4. Could you hear differences in the speech of individuals in different situations?
5. Are these African Americans aware of the fact that they change their speech or not?
6. Why do you think that they feel as though they must change their speech in different situations?

12. The Dividends of Language Awareness Programs

- Authentic knowledge of language differences
- Language history reinforces the significance of major historical events
- Understanding language analysis as a type of scientific inquiry
- Understanding the essential connection between language and culture
- Confronting language prejudice and stereotypes
- Challenging dominant linguistic ideologies (under the radar)

13. Pedagogical Considerations in Developing Language Awareness Curricula

- Lesson plans that mirror appropriate language and style for teachers and students
- Relate directly to the format and language of the NC State Standard Course of Study and preferred lesson planning methods, e.g., *Learning Outcomes* must be measurable or testable: cf. "the student will be able to explain the factors that contribute to dialect diversity in North Carolina" with "the student will be able to list 5 factors that contribute to dialect diversity in North Carolina."
- Making lesson plans easily adaptable for teachers working with different levels of students
- Making the curriculum readily teachable by classroom teachers with no linguistic background
- Integrating video/audio/multimedia support material
- Developing presentation and evaluation methods that are sensitive to multiple learning styles (see below) or intelligences (verbal, musical, logical, visual, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal)
 - visual**: examining settlement/migration maps
 - verbal**: listening to speech samples
 - inductive**: deducing a linguistic pattern from specific examples (*r-lessness*)
 - deductive**: applying information about language patterns (habitual *be*)
 - active**: cooperative learning in groups
 - reflective**: individual work
 - sequential**: examining lexical differences multiple dialects, then phonological and grammatical ones
 - global**: examining an set of structures for a specific dialect simultaneously
- Evaluations should be easy to average (5, 10, 20, 25, or 50 questions, e.g.)
- Provide answer keys with explanation, e.g., "*she was a-remembering the game* is ungrammatical because the primary stress in *remembering* occurs on the second syllable, thus violating the stressed-syllable rule (rule 3, exemplified in LIST C) for *a-prefixing*"

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