

IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING DIALECTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

Dialects can be defined as the unique variations of a language that arise from speakers in a specific geographical region, social or economic class, or ethnic group. Dialects can include differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and syntax. These variations often exist within a common language and can sometimes result in communication barriers between speakers of different dialects. Taking all mentioned above into consideration, this research investigates the importance of the dialects and its implication in teaching English language.

Keywords: Dialects, regional dialects, social dialects, learning approaches, American English, British English, Australian English and South African English.

Introduction

When teaching the English language, understanding the different dialects can provide valuable insights for both educators and learners. English dialects have evolved through historical, geographical, and social factors, resulting in a rich tapestry of linguistic variation. Educators can use this diversity to enhance language learning and promote cultural understanding. One key aspect to consider when teaching English dialects is that they represent variations within the language, rather than incorrect or inferior forms. Recognizing and respecting dialectal differences can help students appreciate the cultural and historical influences that have shaped the English language. These dialects can sometimes create challenges for learners of English as a second language, particularly if they are trying to understand or communicate with speakers of a different dialect than their own.

Teaching English dialects is essential for helping students develop a well-rounded understanding of English language and culture, improving their communication skills, and enhancing their opportunities for success in academic and professional contexts.

Literature Review

Improved understanding of different types of English: English is spoken in various dialects, and learners need to understand the differences between them. When ESL learners are taught these variations, it helps them to understand and communicate more effectively with native speakers of English, regardless of their dialect.



Jenkins (2015) states that English dialects can also be categorized into regional dialects and social dialects.

Regional dialects are variations of English that are spoken in specific geographic locations, such as Yorkshire dialect or Cockney dialect in England, and Southern dialect or New England dialect in the United States.

Social dialects are variations of English that are used by specific social groups or communities, such as the dialects of African American English, Cockney rhyming slang, or Australian slang. (Nelson, 2001)

Different dialects can often reflect different social, economic, and cultural realities. For example, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and race can all influence dialect variation. As a result, dialects can be a useful tool for exploring social justice, equity, and inclusion in language and language education.

Another interesting aspect of English dialects is their evolution over time. Many different languages and cultures have influenced English, and as a result, its dialects have grown, merged, split, and evolved in different ways over the centuries. For example, the English of the Middle Ages was quite different from the English of today, with different vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. (Pakir, 2011)

All, English dialects are a fascinating and complex aspect of the English language.

Understanding the different dialects can help learners of English develop greater proficiency and appreciation for the richness and diversity of the language.

Discussion

According to Nelson (2001), there are numerous English dialects, and learning approaches can vary depending on the specific dialect a learner wants to acquire. Here are a few examples:

1. *American English*: American English is the most common dialect spoken in the United States, and it is the standard dialect for many English language learners around the world. To learn American English, learners often use textbooks or online courses that focus on its unique pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure.
2. *British English*: British English is the most common dialect spoken in the United Kingdom and is known for its varied regional accents. Learners can use listening exercises, watching TV shows or movies, and speaking with native speakers to improve their understanding of British English's unique features.
3. *Australian English*: Australian English has unique vocabulary and pronunciation, and it is the dialect spoken in Australia. Learners can watch Australian TV shows, movies or even engage in some cultural exchange programs to gain exposure to the language and culture of Australia.
4. *South African English*: South African English is influenced by both British and Afrikaans languages. The dialect has unique pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax. Learners can use online resources like podcasts, videos or workbooks to learn South African English.



Studying dialects is crucial in teaching English as a second language (ESL) for the following reasons:

- **Improved understanding of different types of English:** English is spoken in various dialects, and learners need to understand the differences between them. When ESL learners are taught these variations, it helps them to understand and communicate more effectively with native speakers of English, regardless of their dialect.

- **Practical communication skills:** Many English speakers use regional accents or dialects in informal settings. By introducing these variations into the ESL classroom, students can develop practical communication skills, enabling them to communicate effectively in a range of real-life situations.

- **Cultural competency:** English dialects are often associated with specific cultures and social groups, and by teaching these variations, students can learn more about the cultures and customs of English-speaking countries. This can help learners to become more culturally competent and adaptable when interacting with native speakers in various contexts.

- **Career and academic advancement:** Knowledge of English dialects is important for those who want to pursue careers in fields such as translation, interpreting, linguistics, and teaching English as a foreign language. It is also vital for students who want to study abroad, work in an English-speaking environment, or undertake higher education in an English medium institution.

- **Dialects facilitate communication:** Dialects are a fundamental aspect of language variation, and by teaching dialects in ESL, we equip our students with the linguistic skills necessary to communicate effectively with speakers of different dialects. Exposure to different dialects can help students develop the ability to comprehend and adapt to different language varieties, which can be invaluable when communicating with speakers of non-standard English.

- **Dialects reflect social and economic disparities:** Language differences often reflect social and economic disparities, such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and geographic region. By teaching dialects in ESL, we can raise awareness of these disparities and promote social justice and equality in the classroom.

- **Dialects enhance language creativity:** By exposing students to different English dialects, we foster language creativity and encourage students to think outside the box. Studying dialects can help students explore different ways of expressing ideas and communicating in English, which promotes language proficiency and versatility.

- **Dialects prepare students for real-life communication:** Students learning English as a second language may encounter English dialects from various regions, social contexts, and language backgrounds. By introducing dialects in ESL, we equip our students with the necessary linguistic and cultural knowledge to communicate effectively in real-life situations, such as job interviews or social situations.

Incorporating dialects in teaching English as a second language is essential for students to become more familiar with the rich diversity of English language use, understand cultural nuances, and develop critical thinking skills that enable them to communicate effectively with speakers from different backgrounds. The study of dialects is essential for teaching English as a second language. It prepares students for real-life communication, expands their language



comprehension, fosters inclusion and cultural understanding, and promotes language creativity and versatility.

Teaching English dialects can present some challenges for teachers and students alike. (Brown, 2014) Here are some issues that can arise when teaching English dialects:

1. **Standardization:** Without a standardized curriculum, teaching English dialects can be difficult. For example, there are approximately 24 recognized dialects of English in the United States alone. This means that teachers must decide which dialect to teach and which standard to follow.
2. **Accent:** Understanding English dialects can be difficult for students who are not familiar with the accent. This can cause confusion and frustration for both teachers and students. Teachers need to consider how they can help students improve their accents, tone, rhythm and intonation.
3. **Vocabulary and grammar:** English dialects can differ in terms of vocabulary and grammar usage, which can hinder student's comprehension. It is therefore necessary for materials to be tailored to the specific dialect and for teachers to ensure that students are exposed to the appropriate vocabulary and grammar usage.
4. **Culture:** Language and culture are inextricably linked, so teaching English dialects involves understanding the culture that goes along with them. For example, if teaching British English, the culture of the United Kingdom should also be understood and communicated to students where necessary.
5. **Bias and prejudice:** Learning and teaching English dialects can be influenced by personal bias and prejudice. For example, some dialects are viewed as more prestigious than others, and students might be resistant to learning a dialect that is not associated with higher status.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching English dialects requires careful consideration and planning from teachers. They must be prepared to deal with the challenges that arise while making sure that students have access to the appropriate materials and resources needed to understand a dialect effectively.

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