

What's all this talk about "multiple" grammars? Isn't there one correct way to speak and write English?

While Standard Edited English (SE) is widely considered the correct form of English and used in formal settings, the concept of multiple grammars or dialects has emerged in recent years. This idea behind this is that students need to be aware of multiple dialects of grammar that are used in different contexts as an audience appropriate tool. While a person from Alabama may speak differently from a person from New York, the concept of multiple grammars is to say that both dialects are acceptable. Similarly, the slang used among African-Americans or a mother speaking to her child, for example, varies greatly from SE, and applying the concept of multiple grammars, their dialects are situation-appropriate. Basically, those who speak SE vary their language based on their audience. For example, a student speaks incredibly different to people he/she may encounter on a daily basis going in and out of different dialects, including speaking to his/her teacher, friends, and parents. In a classroom discussion, the following points are of use:

- Imagine talking in one dialect in every avenue of your life
- Language is changing every day, and has changed throughout the years; if students are to truly study the English language, they must learn to acknowledge and adapt to multiple grammars/dialects.
- When students tie themselves to the rules of SE, they hinder themselves from learning about the world by confining themselves to thinking there is only one way to speak.
- Multiple grammars are very useful as a stylistic tool when writing creatively. For example, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* would be completely different if everyone in it talked in SE.
- "If our language is living, always in a state of flux, changing over time from region to region and from one social situation to another, we are obligated to make these issues part of the curriculum for our students." ("The Changing Discourse of Language Study", *English Journal*, Marilyn Wilson.)

Additional resources regarding dialects or multiple grammars:

<http://www.paulmeier.com/index.html>. This is a website that offers lessons on various dialects. It includes sample sound bites to give an idea of what the dialect is.

<http://www.maec.org/cross/6.html>. This site describes the teaching of SE to students who were not raised with SE and discusses teaching SE from a cultural perspective.

*learning different dialects in the classroom through listening and reading examples in the classroom

Dialect map: <http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/1906/dialects.html>