

FINAL PROJECT: APPRECIATING “OTHER” DIALECTS

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7 December 2004

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RATIONALE

With the surrounding in students' everyday lives—school, home, social, etc.—growing ever more diverse, it is important for them to be able to communicate effectively. A proper understanding of various dialects in addition to the basic Standard English (SE) will not only assist them in doing this, but it will enable them to categorize and apply the appropriate grammar and vocabulary in a given situation. This project will provide students with the foundation needed to gain insight to “multiple grammars,” as well as pushing them to relate this new knowledge in multiple contexts, including their own writing.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to thoroughly identify common similarities/differences between at least one “non-standard” English (NSE) and SE, and gain a more complete understanding of basic SE grammar concepts that have previously been problematic. They will also have a basic understanding of at least three grammars other than their group's, through notes taken and a handout given during each of the other presentations. At the end of the unit, the student will take a test and be able to: correctly identify various grammars, including SE; correct errors in sentences when told what grammar it is intended to be; and rewrite one sentence or passage several times, correctly exercising various grammars.

MAJOR CONCEPTS TO BE ACQUIRED

- While SE is widely believed to be the “correct” English, there are wide variations among cultures and settings that must be taken into consideration as a style of the English language.
- The various NSE are not necessarily “incorrect”; on the contrary, depending on the situation and persons involved, NSE may be much more appropriate and effective for communication.
- The students will receive clarification of SE grammar concepts they identified as previously being problematic; this will be done through their work on the actual project or their work done in class lessons corresponding to the project.
- They will be able to identify and use at least one “new” grammar, which will be chosen by their groups and elaborated during their project work and presentation.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Taped episode of “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Aire”
- Assignment handout, overhead of handout and list of “Englishes” to study
- Rubric
- Lists of books, TV shows, movies, music, etc. to give students ideas for each dialect
- TV/VCR (for use during introduction, as well as for student presentations)
- Video recorder (for student use)
- Computers with necessary programs for student projects (for student use)
- CD player (for student use)

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT (DETAILED PLAN)

1. Show an episode of “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Aire” that displays obvious differences between Carlton’s and Will’s daily use of English (a particularly good episode would be where Carlton goes to the projects with Will, and after about five minutes he picks up on their grammar and starts using it).
2. Discuss the grammar in the show: what are the differences between their spoken grammars? Is one just plain wrong, or is it wrong for that context? So would the vernacular English be the “correct” grammar for that situation?
3. Discuss what other situations might use different grammars than SE and list them on the board. (Phone, text messages, internet, e-mail, IMs, speaking with friends, family, teachers, significant others, etc.) Are these grammars necessarily wrong, because they aren’t SE? Or are they “correct” for their given situations?
4. Discuss what cultures have noticeable traits in their English (as a second language). Brainstorm a list, discuss the ESL Chapter of Grammar Alive (which they read the previous weekend) and what other cultures find the hardest about English.
5. Discuss and list what the hardest grammar parts of SE are for the students. This list will be used to decide what concepts to focus on during the unit.
6. Hand out the assignment sheet and go over it as a class.
7. Put up the overhead list of NSE grammar options for the students; ask them if they can think of another one that might be good for this project (write it on the overhead, if needed). Have students write their name on a sheet and number the grammars in the order of their preference—this will be used to create the groups. Try to give everyone their first or second choice, but don’t promise the students anything.

Possible grammar options:

- African-American English
- Latino English
- Asian English
- Middle Eastern English
- British English
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Groups will be assigned later, with a project proposal due a week from group assignments. If necessary, students can work individually, but must have a written explanation of why.

ASSIGNMENT SHEET (to be handed out to students)

Now you see that while Standard English (SE) is the “grammatically correct” language in most textbooks and English classes, other Non-Standard English (NSE) forms can be more “correct” than SE in their own specific contexts.

What your group will do is choose a form of NSE to be compared to SE, and then:

- ❑ study the NSE in some form (television shows, movies, theatre, books, music, etc.)
- ❑ **create** a project in the same form that applies both SE and the NSE correctly.
- ❑ **present** your project with a **handout** giving basic details of the NSE versus SE.
- ❑ write an **explanation** of what grammars were used where and why
- ❑ write an **individual reflection** that details how and what you learned.

You will receive 8 points of extra credit for recording your project and presenting it to the class. For instance, you might videotape your performance of the television script; record your chapter of a book as a “book on tape” (cassette, CD, or video); record a performance of your music (cassette, CD, or music video); or document it by some other technological means (web site, powerpoint, . . .). This will be turned in for me to keep.

You must choose school-appropriate examples of the grammar to study and present in class. While your projects can be humorous, you must remember that THIS PROJECT IS NOT INTENDED FOR YOU TO INSULT OR MAKE FUN OF OTHER GRAMMARS.

Due date: _____

Non-Standard English to study: _____

Group Members: _____

SAMPLE PROJECT IDEAS

1. Your group studies the television show “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Aire,” writes a ten-minute script to go with the show (using both SE and the NSE), performs it for the class, and hands out a ditto with basic notes comparing the grammars. The group then submits a script to me with SE underlined in red and NSE underlined in blue, along with an explanation of why you used each grammar.
2. Your group reads the book Parrot in the Oven, writes a chapter that either continues the book or is written in that style (and uses both the NSE and SE), reads it to the class, and hands out a ditto with basic notes comparing Latino-American English compared to SE. The group then submits a copy of the chapter with SE underlined in green and NSE underlined in purple, along with an explanation of why you used each grammar.
3. Your group studies rap music (school appropriate, of course), writes a rap or a song that uses both the NSE and SE, performs it for the class, and hands out a ditto with basic notes comparing both grammars. The group then submits a copy of the lyrics with SE underlined in green and NSE underlined in purple, along with an explanation of why you used each grammar.

For each of the above examples, you individually submit a reflection of **what** you learned (i.e. “Before I didn’t know that ‘y’all’s’ was the same as “you’re all”, but in an African American dialect; now I understand ‘you’re’ versus ‘your’ better in SE”) and **how** (“I studied these particular episodes of ‘The Fresh Prince of Bel-Aire,’ and did some internet research)—cite your sources.

Don’t forget that you can record your project for extra credit!