

## Teaching Language Variation in Primary School

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This presentation reports the scope and sequence of a 4-week unit that attempts to meet the need for K-12 linguistically-informed curricula, designed for and taught to Spanish-English bilingual fifth graders attending public school. This unit targets bilingual students because they are often victims of “linguicism” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000), i.e. English is valued more highly than Spanish. Furthermore, many bilingual students speak a stigmatized variety of their native language (e.g. Spanglish) and acquire “informal” language patterns of English-speaking peers (e.g. *gonna*, *ain't*) in order to succeed socially, thus facing a double barrier of language discrimination and the threat of being labeled “semilingual” by educators. Fifth graders are an ideal group to target because they are about to enter the crucial life stage of adolescence, which shows strong linguistic effects from peer-group speech, and the highest level of non-standard language usage for many individuals (Labov 1965, 2006; Rickford & Price 2013; Romaine 1984). Upon learning basic facts of language variation, students may feel less pressure to abandon intrinsic aspects of their identity as expressed via language.

There has been a growing push to incorporate modern linguistics into K-12 classrooms in order to confront issues such as accent prejudice, a standard language ideology, and low academic performance in Standard English (Denham & Lobeck 2010; Razfar & Rumennapp 2014; Reaser 2006; Rickford 1999; Sweetland 2006; West Brown 2009). Consensus among researchers conclude that the major components to a successful dialect awareness curriculum should include (1) building respect for different language varieties across the curriculum and school-wide; (2) a sociolinguistic component that explains language variation and core sociolinguistic concepts; and (3) a contrastive component that gives students explicit compare/contrast practice between home language varieties and the school language variety (Charity Hudley & Mallinson 2011; Siegel 2007; Wolfram 1998; Wolfram, Adger, & Christian 1999).

Topics investigated in the unit of study include the diversity of human languages, accent prejudice, style-shifting, and the lexical, phonological, and grammatical differences that distinguish dialects. Lesson objectives, for example, asked students to identify *languages* versus *dialects* of a language, compare slang words among different generations, list academic jargon encountered in school texts, and discuss greetings that would be considered “appropriate” to a certain context. Lesson activities asked students to watch YouTube videos of different speakers, listen to different accents on iPods, and complete pencil-and-paper group-work to help them achieve the unit objectives of (1) awareness of language diversity; (2) patterning of dialects; and (3) style-shifting one’s language to fit contextual needs.

Successful lessons will be presented alongside less-than-successful lessons to underline the challenges and triumphs of teaching sociolinguistic concepts to students who have been primarily exposed to prescriptivist concepts of language correctness and purity. Pre and Post-Tests, student workbooks, lesson materials, and a teacher’s planning guide will be presented.