

# Pedagogical Application of Appalachian English Conducted in the Classroom

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**Abstract:** *In the course of second language teaching, teachers often encounter students with different cultural backgrounds with different dialects. In order to demonstrate the process of dialect teaching, the study selects a specific English dialect which is Appalachian English by conducting some background research with its history, grammatical features, relationship to standard English. The research also involves the code-switching theory to explore the influence of social identity on dialect. According to the investigation, a 45-minute lesson plan is created centering around Appalachian dialect involving grammatical component, literary component and writing component. The design of the lesson conducts multi-genre aspects such as letter and short story to explore the details of writing assignments. It is suggested that English instructors may consider the selection and influencing factors of dialects in class.*

**Keywords:** *dialects, appalachian English, code-switching*

## 1. Introduction of Appalachian English

Appalachian English is one of American dialects in the United States. According to the research of Meyerhoff (2011), "Dialect means a term widely applied to what are considered sub-varieties of a single language and it focuses on pronunciation" (p.31) [7], which means that the dialect is a sort of variant of a language which has its particular lexical and grammatical features. Also, it has the specific accent. Curzan and Adams (2014) point out that accent refers to a language variation that spoken by groups of people and has the structural differences between other variants such as phonological features [1]. Region is one of the most crucial elements that affects the language variation which is divided by the dialect boundaries. Regional dialects exist and extend all the time no matter in business, traveling or learning, and there are some different quantitative and qualitative features among dialects. Generally speaking, dialect regions are divided by state boundaries, geographical boundaries and historical boundaries, which consist those elements that make a dialectal map. Curzan and Adams (2014) give five elements that cause the features of regional dialects: retention, naturally occurring internal language change, language contact, coining and social factors. American English was originated from the British colonies, and it has experienced a long history. "In the history of United States, settlements have divided regional dialects mainly into four parts: Northern, Southern, Midland, and Western. European colonies and native Americans deeply impact regions of American English from phonetic, phonology, morphology and syntax." (Curzan and Adams, 2014, p.391) [1]. Among those dialects, Appalachian English was isolated from other regional dialects so that it had some significant features in American history, and its users are distributed along the Appalachian mountain.

There are several features of Appalachian English that differ from the standard American English in different aspects. In the phonological features, Appalachian English speakers prefer to pronounce [n] instead of [ŋ] such as coming, running and singing. The morpheme "ing" is spoken as comin', runnin' and singin'. Another phonetic example is the sound /ð/ which is interpreted as voiced lingual-dental fricative such as they and them, but /ð/ is swallowed by local speakers especially connected with bought (bought'em) and caught (caught'em). In addition, the Appalachian speakers like to exchange /r/ to /o/. For instance, "I rode the roller coaster". The roller would be read as /rolo/. There are some features in the morphology and syntax either. The prefix "a" is always added between a verb and a gerund like go a fishin' and go a walkin', and in the syntax, "whatever" is replaced by "everwhat". In the Appalachian history, the word forms and meanings have changed a lot, but some people still use the old words such as afeared (afraid) and airish (cool). At last, on the aspect of grammar, the expression of "to be" is conducted in the past tense frequently, and some collective noun groups follow the singular verb: Some people was to be saved.

American dialects are strongly related to social justice issues. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) suggests that the instructors should be trained in order to understand and respect cultural and dialectal diversity of students. On the other hand, teachers usually hide their dialects in the class. For example, in the ESL language institution of America, most of the instructor speak Appalachian English as their dialects, but they are not willing to use dialects during the job interviewing or in the classroom. The first reason is that dialects are sort of informal language in the English education, so dialects won't be shown their English proficiency if they use them. Another reason is that their students are non-native speakers, so they need to be taught by a very standard English in the ESL classroom. That is to say, the environment may decide the choice of language variations. Wheeler and Swords (2006) stated the proper language is not the politically correct codewords of standard English. Inappropriate language is not the watchword of informal English or everyday community speech [10]. "Local group preferred to use Putonghua in formal situations and in official contexts such as in class, talking to teachers and strangers, and to people who do not speak Cantonese. Cantonese, on the other hand, was the preferred variety in informal situations and unofficial contexts such as at home, after class and talking to friends who also speak Cantonese" (Limei & Ladegaard, 2008, p. 68) [4]. The reason why people use dialects due to the perceptual dialectology, and the language borders are depended on the perceptions of speakers. Iannaccaro and Dell'Aquila (2001) have shown that the way that speakers perceive linguistic borders depends on the specific social contexts and their own social behavior in linguistics [3]. In addition, language attitudes also affect the social justices. "Language attitudes research in sociolinguistic communities can reveal the dynamic identificational and relational forces at work within them" (Garrett, 2001, p.630) [2]. For example, people in Appalachian area have a positive attitude that Appalachian English can be still preserved and developed for another century, and they never mind speaking it in public in order to save the dialectal culture.

On the other hand, the dialect such as Appalachian dialect is the reflection of social identity. "Social identity theory is a theory of intergroup relations in which language is one of many potent symbols that individuals can strategically use when testing or maintaining boundaries groups" (Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 73). Social identity is a sort of attitude that reflects the ethical belonging of speakers. Dialect is a way that people show their belongings and identities. In the context of Indonesia, Wati (2018) investigated undergraduate students showed their behaviors related to their cognitive attitudes, and they had high positive conative attitudes towards English, and had neutral negative behavioral attitudes towards English [9]. Limei & Ladegaard (2008) states that local group of speakers feel superior to the non-local group when they speak Cantonese because this is the hometown of local speakers [4]. Marlow and Giles (2008) conclude that using Pidgin can symbolize the culture and the history of Hawaiian speakers [6]. During this process, speakers conduct a strategy which is called code-switching. Meyerhoff (2011) explains that code-switching is the changing of languages between sentences and clauses [7]. For instance, Appalachian people speak Appalachian English to the Appalachian people, but they speak standard American English to those who are not in the Appalachian area. Another example is about international students, Muthusamy et al (2021) explores international students in Malaysia, according to the research, the main factor behind code switching among the students was incompetence in the second language [8]. Other factors that could account for code switching were maintaining privacy, the ease of speaking in the first language compared to speaking in English. Luo (2019) explores college students' perceptions of teacher code-switching in EFL speaking classrooms, the result shows students prefer Chinese teacher of English owing to better understanding [5]. Thus, it can be seen from the previous researches the code-switching theory has an important role on language teaching in terms of standard language and dialects.

## **2. Pedagogical design of teaching Appalachian English**

The design of the lesson plan aims to teach students the differences between Appalachian English and standard English from the perspective of grammatical, literary and writing component. The setting of the class is the college students. Students are expected to make a comparison between the target language and standard language through the language features reflected in lexical, phonological and grammatical features. The period of the class is 45 minutes and here are the details of the lesson:

### **2.1. The history and features of Appalachian English (10 mins)**

The instructor is going to briefly introduce how Appalachian English developed and list some distinct features which are mentioned in part 1 such as "go a fishin'", "bought'em" and "afeard". During this process, the teacher can give some examples at first, and then the students will brainstorm their experiences to show how the dialect is applied in the real life. The historical part is shown on the power

point slides.

### **2.2. Reading, Discussion and Group Activity (15 mins)**

In this part, students are going to read excerpts that the instructor select from chapter 11 and chapter 12 of “How English works: a linguistic introduction” by Curzan and Adams (2014) to understand some theories related to the dialect like language variation, dialectology and code switching. Then, the teacher will show a chart which involves a standard language and two variants which are Appalachian English and British English in the four specific contexts: class, home, work and social media. Students are going to work in the groups, and the teacher will give them a sentence as their target. For instance, the sentence can be “Can I make an appointment with you tomorrow?” Then, they have to use the different expressions in the four contexts according to the three variations. If the time required, another example would be conducted. They need to collect all the expressions to complete the chart. Then, they are required to share what they have done in the groups.

### **2.3. Writing Assignment (20 mins)**

In the last part, students are required to finish a writing assignment on the class. They need to write three dialects in different genres: a dialogue in Appalachian, an e-mail in standard English and a poem in British English. The contents have not to be same in the three genres, but each of them should be involved the particular features of the target language. The sequence of the class schedule could be flexible based on the current situation in the class.

#### **2.3.1 A Dialogue in Appalachian English**

A: Howdy (How are you doing)?  
B: Hey! Wazz up?  
A: Whacha into? (What are you doing now?)  
B: Nothing but drinkin’  
A: Whacha drinkin’?  
B: Pop.  
A: D’ju eat yet?  
B: I been eatin’ for days.  
A: You busy? I’m a fixin’ to go a swimmin’.(I plan to go swimming).  
B: I’m afeard not cuz I can’t swim.  
A: How about goin’ a fishin’?  
B: Cool! But I ain’t got no pole.  
A: I got plenty. We can go by my house and get’em (get them).  
B: Deal!

#### **2.3.2 A Poem in British English**

Shall I compare thee to the summer's day?  
You are the centre of my life.  
I ain't forgot every moment to be with you!  
The blue sky is saying hi to me but you are brighter than her.  
Shall I compare thee to the shiniest star in the darkness?  
You taught me to be yourself and to be more positive to your life.  
You never know how much you've changed me.  
Shall I treat thee as one in a million?  
Your charming smile likes a sweet biscuit.

You are such a girl, brilliant, intelligent, excellent!

I can't /kən't/ get you out of my mind.

All I want is for you, you are the best I ever /evə/ had.

No matter you are getting old, I never care because you are always my little princess.

My dewty (duty) is to protect you and love you forever!

### **2.3.3. An E-mail in Standard American English**

Dear Kim,

I didn't want you to think I forgot about what we discussed. I have met with coordinators and the Academic Director here at INTO two or three times this past week.

We are trying to come up with a way to approach Dr. Liu about working with us to create an elective class that would involve students co-teaching with a mentor teacher. Everyone on the INTO side is agreeable, and several teachers have volunteered to participate as mentor teachers. We are just trying to decide on the best way to approach the English Department.

Sincerely,

Professor Kelly West

### **3. Samples Analysis and Pedagogical Application**

The previous sections have introduced the whole process from the research to pedagogy of Appalachian dialect. The research part is a sort of literature review of the concepts about the dialects such as language variation, dialectology and the dialectal region which are the foundational elements to understand the dialects. Then, the paper points out several features of Appalachian English from the perspective of phonetic, phonology, morphology and syntax. Those features would be the elements for students to create their own writings and see the differences between dialects and standard language. Next, having known the historical background of the dialects, students also have to know the social background which is connected with social justice and identification. Dialects are the reflection of the society which can be a bigger context of the language variants. The research reports that some people are not willing to use their dialects on the public occasions such as working place and school, which shows the issue of social justice in the society. The reason may be involved in a lot of factors such as genders, ethnical groups, social class and social community. For instance, the person in the middle class may not use dialect when he or she speaks to an upper class' person because he or she does not want to get the judgment or prejudice by that person. As for the student's identity, some cases also happen at school. Students who are from the different regions from the majority may not show their dialects to others due to that fact that they want to be treated equally by their classmates and teachers.

In the common, it is evitable of the student diversity in one classroom especially in the ESL classroom. Therefore, 2010 NCTE Annual Business Meeting suggests that the teachers should teach about social justice and discrimination based on the gender, race, ethnicity and culture in order to make a better social environment. One of an international students said, "I feel that I am fully respected in the classroom as an international student in the U.S. Every time I ask a question or stated my opinion in the class, my instructor and classmates usually listened to me patiently and nicely. Sometimes they gave me a useful and a warm advice without any discrimination and prejudice but more encouragement. When I got confused with some English words, they were so willing to help me figure them out." Therefore, it is essential for schools to appeal people to accept and respect diversity and inclusivity in the classroom.

The second part is the teaching pedagogy of different dialects. The aim of the pedagogy for students is to be familiar with the history of Appalachian English and make a comparison with other language variants. To be more specific, the first 10-minute lecture is a general introduction to the theory and the background, which is the preparation of the following steps, so the instructor will dominate this section. The reading and discussion activity is not just a group work but an approach to teach students the meaning of code-switching. Code-switching is an important theory to the dialectical learning, and students will not understand very well if they just read it from the textbook. The design of the activity is an effective approach that students can realize how the code-switching works in different language variations and contexts. The mini- lesson plan has set four backgrounds that students can do the code-switching based on them, which is a comparison that shows a distinct difference. Having done this activity, students will

know the application of code-switching especially the word choice when they talk to different people in the different situations. Meanwhile, they start to recognize the cultural and regional differences in the classroom in order to get on well with their classmates.

The last section is a writing assignment, and the writing samples are shown in part 3 which entails the rationale. The purpose of this plan is to demonstrate the language features based on the lexical and grammatical structure. In the Appalachian dialogue, the mode is a daily conversation between friends. That is to say, there are a lot of oral and informal expressions that reflect the phonological features. For instance, in the sentence of “D’ju eat?”, the words “did” and “you” are pronounced together so that two syllables are combined into one, and the pronunciation has to be changed. Another example is the changing of nasal stop sound from [ŋ] to [n] applied in the suffix “ing” like fishing to fishin’ and waking to walkin’. What’s more, Appalachian English has the particular word choice like soda which is called pop. During the process of making a dialogue, students are expected to gain more and more features of Appalachian in order to show it well. By contrast, the genre of the British English is a poem which emphasizes the lexical factors. There are abundant differences between the word choices in American English and British English such as cookie/biscuit, center/centre and elevator/lift. Therefore, the choice of genre will affect which language features that the instructor wants to emphasize on.

#### 4. Conclusions

Regarding to the teaching design, this study provides a teaching plan based on the language features of Appalachian English and the theory of code-switching. In terms of pedagogy, the research of Appalachian dialect is deserved to do a deeper research and design an effective teaching pedagogy. Teachers are suggested to keep a balance between standard language and dialects, and all of the language variations and cultural diversity should be respected in the classroom. The limitation of the study is that it does not take into account the diversity of students' backgrounds. Thus, the further research is expected to engage with issues of diversity and inclusivity in the classroom and in society.

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