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The term standard English generally refers to the variety of English used by the formally educated people who are socially, economically, and politically dominant in English-speaking countries. Although the term is widely used, it is difficult to define precisely because of the variation that exists within what is considered **standard**, even within one country. Standard English is that variant which is generally taught in schools and is regarded as the "prestigious" dialect in many English-speaking societies. Non-Standard English, on the other hand, is spoken by groups of people who have been isolated from the standard dialect, who have not had the opportunity to acquire the dialect of the social elites, or who see value in preserving their own group dialect. The term non-standard English refers to any variety of English which does not conform in pronunciation, grammatical structure, idiomatic usage, or choice of words generally characteristic of formally educated native speakers of English. A distinction can be made between oral and written standard English, the latter varying less within countries, yet still varying somewhat from one English-speaking country to another. We can see that as the English language spreads to different societies in its oral form, it changes through contact with different cultures, so that there are different Englishes in different parts of the world (e.g., Indian English, Singapore English, Scots English, etc.). Written varieties of English, on the other hand, tend to become more standardized. A primary characteristic of any written standard English is the absence of socially-stigmatized features (e.g., multiple negation) which are associated with nonstandard English dialects.

1. Standard English in Multicultural Contexts

Demographic changes worldwide increasingly have illuminated the multicultural nature of many English-speaking societies. Although the recognition of this multiculturalism has become particularly salient in recent decades, the reality of such pluralism no doubt has existed throughout human history. The identification of individuals with particular population groups (e.g., those based on socioeconomic class, gender, age, ethnic origin, or region of a country) is often reflected in their use of particular linguistic items (e.g., a particular pronunciation or lexical item) in their speech and, sometimes, in their writing. Such variation has significant implications for educational policy (Farr and Daniels 1986).

A few definitions will illuminate the following discussion. The term **mainstream** is used to refer to those people in societies around the world who are characterized as literate, school-oriented, aspiring to upward mobility through success in that society's dominant, formal institutions, and looking beyond the primary networks of family and community for behavioral models and value orientations (Heath 1983). In English-speaking countries, these are the people who are generally associated with `standard' English. **Nonmainstream**, then, refers to those groups who do not conform to the above characteristics, and who speak dialects or non-prestige varieties of English that are considered **nonstandard**. A dialect (see the articles on DIALECTOLOGY and SOCIOLINGUISTICS) is either a regional or a social variety of a language; it is distinguished by specific phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features. The latter area, pragmatics, involves the culturally-embedded uses of language that characterize a particular group, whether that group is mainstream or nonmainstream. Culture is defined here primarily as a system of knowledge shared by a group of people which both gives rise to behavior and is used to interpret experience. Thus, both dialect and culture involve cognition, i.e., both linguistic and cultural competence, or what Hymes (1974) has termed communicative competence.

2. Differences in Communicative Competence

All normal human beings, having been enculturated into one group or another, have communicative competence, i.e., the knowledge to speak the language of their group in ways considered appropriate to that group. Communicative competence, however, can differ from group to group and, thus, problems may arise in inter-group communication (Gumperz 1982a, b; Kochman 1981; Tannen 1986, 1990). School, of

course, is a primary institutional setting for such inter-group communication. Even if students in a particular school are primarily from one population group, schooling itself, in Western English-speaking societies, is part of mainstream culture, and the communicative competence expected in schools closely resembles that of mainstream, middle class groups. Students from nonmainstream groups enter school with their own set of linguistic and cultural resources; however, these resources may differ from--even conflict with--those of the mainstream school culture (Farr 1993). It is important to understand that such differences in communicative competence are simply differences, not deficits in either a linguistic or cognitive sense, since teacher expectations and attitudes can influence significantly the achievement of their students.

A substantial body of sociolinguistic research has documented the linguistic characteristics (phonological, syntactic, and semantic) of a variety of nonmainstream English dialects in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia (Amstae and Elias-Olivares 1982; Ball 1998; Farr 1986; Ferguson and Heath 1981; Labov 1972, 1980; Zentella 1997). A primary finding of all this work is that such dialects are as complex and as regularly patterned as other varieties of English which are considered more standard. That is, contrary to the common belief among many mainstream groups, speakers of nonstandard dialects do not have linguistic deficits; rather, they often have linguistic rules in their grammars which simply differ from those of standard Englishes.

Other sociolinguistic research has described the culturally-embedded aspects of language use, rather than grammatical characteristics, among nonmainstream groups. Such studies, carried out within Hymes' framework for the ethnography of communication, primarily have focused on the contrast between language use at school and in home/community contexts. These studies have noted that norms for language use, quite apart from the linguistic characteristics of the dialects involved, can differ considerably from one cultural group to another. For example, silence may be considered appropriate in certain contexts for one group, while speaking is the norm in those contexts for another group. Moreover, norms for particular styles of speaking, e.g., with differing levels of directness or indirectness (often indicating degrees of politeness), can vary dramatically from group to group, even when those concerned are speaking the **same** language (see article on LANGUAGES). In addition, research on the uses of written language among various groups has shown that different cognitive styles underlie different uses of literacy. Thus, there is considerable opportunity for miscommunication between speakers (and readers and writers) from different groups, based on differences in language structure, language use, and literacy practices.

Schools, of course, as well as other formal institutional settings in modern societies, are a focal point for such cross-cultural communication, especially in regard to the use of literacy. The standard written language, whether in textbooks or on institutional forms (e.g., from banks or government agencies), often reflects more closely the ways of speaking, writing, and thinking of the dominant institutions and groups of the society. Regarding the learning of literacy, many students from nonmainstream cultural groups are faced with a conflict between their own cultural and linguistic systems (and their identity as members of their **home** groups) and those of the standard written language. The difficulties inherent in resolving such conflicts provide one explanation for low literacy levels among these populations. Other explanations trace the low literacy levels to lack of access to excellent instruction which emphasizes **higher order** thinking processes, as opposed to **lower order** literacy skills. The focus of instruction, whether on critical **literate** thinking or on alphabetic skills, is, of course, guided by teacher preparation, teachers' attitudes toward students, and expectations for students on the part of educators and policy makers.

3. Educational Policy

Recognizing the differences that exist between the sociolinguistic resources of students from nonmainstream groups and those that currently are needed for success in formal schooling leads to the need for educational policy regarding the perspective that should be adopted concerning the teaching of oral and written language to multicultural student populations. Three positions can be assumed in this situation: eradication, biloquialism, and appreciation of dialect differences (Fasold and Shuy 1970).

Eradication, the traditional policy in the English profession, assumes the undesirability of language patterns associated with nonmainstream groups and attempts to replace these patterns with more desirable mainstream ones. This, in fact, describes the current, although tacit, policy in most schools, a policy which, many would argue, has not succeeded.

Biloquialism, often termed bidialectalism or biculturalism (as parallels to bilingualism or multilingualism), encourages the learning of mainstream language patterns without eliminating or denigrating nonmainstream ones. The goal of this kind of instruction is to enable students to switch from one linguistic style (or dialect or language) to another according to norms of appropriateness to the context in which the language is used. Since all speakers shift among more or less formal styles depending on context, this position is a natural one, and has, moreover, the advantage of providing a compromise position between the two other positions.

Appreciation of dialect differences is the logical opposite of eradication. This position maintains that, since research clearly has shown all dialects to be linguistic and cognitive equals, it is unjust to insist on replacing nonstandard dialects with standard ones. Moreover, many have argued (Sledd 1988) that the time and effort spent on eradication (with remarkably unsuccessful results) would be better spent enlightening mainstream groups about the naturalness of variation in language and eliminating prejudices against nonmainstream groups.

Although each of these positions has their advocates, the most pragmatic position seems to be that of biloquialism, which advocates the teaching of mainstream patterns as an expansion of students' linguistic repertoires, not as a replacement for their original ways of speaking. Since bilingualism and bidialectalism exist in societies around the world, such a policy clearly seems to be natural and attainable. Why, then, have nonmainstream students in English-speaking countries not become biloquial in the natural course of events? Research (Ogbu 1990) has shown that some nonmainstream groups maintain their indigenous language patterns as symbols supporting an oppositional identity which resists the mainstream forces which denigrate their vernacular culture. This argument, however, lacks explanatory power for those vernacular speaking minorities in modern urban industrial societies with strong, supportive and collective ethnic identities who excel academically and who have no difficulty crossing cultural/language boundaries. Other research (Erickson 1984) locates the problem in the micropolitical communicative processes between individuals from different groups. The implication here is that the micopolitical processes reflect more macro ones from the larger society; sociolinguistic differences either can be used to escalate conflict between differing individuals or can be put aside in the effort to communicate. For biloquialism to be an effective policy, then, it will have to be supported by a larger social context which respects rather than denigrates linguistic and cultural differences. Changing the status quo to one of tolerance toward such differences requires social change beyond the scope of English language arts teaching, but education can contribute to such social change by teaching both teachers and students that such differences are not deficits. Rather than using differences as resources for conflict, they can be used as a basis for improving instruction in standard language and literacy to multicultural student populations.

4. Instructional Approaches

Ethnographic studies of community uses of language and literacy have been used to improve instruction in two ways: by modifying instruction to be congruent with local ways of using language, and by involving students themselves in doing, and writing up the results of, ethnographic research in their own communities (Au 1980; Au and Jordon 1981; Heath 1983; Moll and Diaz 1987).

Classroom studies have provided an understanding of principles underlying effective language arts instruction to nonmainstream students (Ball et al 1997; Heath and Branscombe 1985; Lee 1993; Staton et al 1988). The most important principle of effective instruction for such students is ethnosensitivity, rather than ethnocentrism, on the part of teachers and educational administrators. That is, because communication between student and teacher is central to learning, it is crucial for educators to understand the extent to which they are interpreting nonmainstream students' behavior according to their own cultural

and linguistic patterns, which they see as more **natural** and **logical** than those that are alien to them.

A second principle involves providing all current and future teachers with information that presents the results of sociolinguistic research on the differences in communicative competence among culturally and linguistically diverse groups in order to explode the myths of cultural and linguistic deficits and to provide a clearer understanding of the resources that diverse students bring into the classroom.

A third principle involves structuring instructional activities that comprise functional and interactive communication; language that is intended as authentic communication, rather than as an artificial exercise, is more likely to call forth the full range of students' linguistic capabilities and to stimulate them to acquire new ones.

A fourth principle concerns the provision of abundant experience with and exposure to standard oral and written English. Such experience provides multiple examples of the linguistic patterns and the cultural assumptions of academic culture; it also provides opportunities for learning other ways of reasoning, those presumed to be necessary not only for schooling, but also for participating fully in modern societies.

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