

Raising Awareness of English Varieties in EFL

by [Trey Erwin](#)

With the continued expansion of English used as a professional and international language, English learners should anticipate coming into contact with English varieties other than Standard American or British English (Kachru & Smith, 2008). In the fall semester of 2015, my colleagues and I at the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, Colombia, designed and implemented a series of tasks and assessments to raise our students' awareness of a wide range of English varieties, as well as expose them to written and verbal samples of other varieties.

Project Description

Rather than compiling samples on our own, we decided to involve our students. We named it the English Variety Project, whereby students chose an English variety from Kortmann's and Lunkenheimer's (2013) [Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English](#) (eWAVE) database to research and describe in an informational report and a minipresentation. The project was originally designed for international business students at the university level with a B1 level of English. The aim of this article is to describe our project and the lessons we learned from our first implementation in order that instructors who are also looking to raise their students' awareness of and exposure to English varieties may have a model to draw ideas from.

The English Variety Project targets four student learning outcomes:

1. Read for main ideas and details (the research component)
2. Write an informational report using sentence variety and APA style (the report component).
3. Speak spontaneously on a given topic (the presentation component)
4. Develop intercultural communication skills (all components)

The first component involves student research on the selected English variety pertaining to the following areas: history, region, importance/status, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The second component involves outlining, writing, peer editing, teacher editing, and revising the informational report. The final component consists of a brief student presentation highlighting some of the important features of the selected English variety, including a 30-seconds (maximum) video or audio clip demonstrating the English variety in use.

Implementation

Introducing the Project

Introduce the English Variety Project to your students by asking them to share examples of differences between their first language and other varieties of their first language that they are aware of. End the discussion by telling students that English has many varieties depending on region and socioeconomic status, just like their first language. Then show students a brief video produced by Cambridge English (2013) on the differences between [Standard American](#).

[Australian, and British English](#). During the video, task students with listening for main areas of difference between the varieties. At the end of the video, have students report back the four areas that distinguish every English variety, as explained by the narrator in the video: vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and pronunciation.

Provide Context and Examples

In order to provide students with more context for understanding and describing English varieties, as well as English as an International Language, guide students through a reading of “The Karmic Cycle of World Englishes” by Kachru and Smith (2009) by using the reading guide, which contains a series of tasks to encourage skimming for main ideas, scanning for details and vocabulary, guessing vocabulary from context, and inferring the author’s sentiment.

Planning and Writing

Once students complete the reading guide, begin the planning phase of the writing process by demonstrating an example outline of the written report. The project follows a basic set of steps:

1. **Demonstration and analysis:** After outlining, demonstrate an introductory paragraph and guide students through a brief analysis of four essential elements an effective informative report: general statement, reader relationship, purpose statement, and list of main ideas.
2. **Provide scaffolding:** Provide students with two to three sentence starters, which they could use for each of the four elements.
3. **Monitor during production:** Have students begin drafting their introductions in class while monitoring and providing feedback.
4. **Peer Review:** Once the class has completed or is near completing the introduction, instruct students to exchange introductions with a partner for peer review. Partners read and identify the four parts of an effective introduction by underlining and writing in the margins.

Follow a similar process of demonstration, analysis, writing, and peer review for the body paragraphs. Share the writing guide with the students and guide them through each part for the paragraphs on vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, as these parts prove the hardest to write.

In order to give students feedback, have them submit a rough draft before the final draft. Feedback may consist of a series of editing symbols, as well as comments and questions in the margins. Promptly return the students’ rough drafts so they can use the feedback to revise and prepare the final draft.

Presentations

Upon completing the report, have students prepare and deliver a 3-minute presentation highlighting a few of the most important aspects of their English variety that they have described in their reports. Students may use PowerPoint, Google Slides, and/or Prezi, as well as a short video or audio clip showcasing their English variety. To involve the audience, give each student

a copy of the presentation note-taking guide. As students present, encourage the class to take notes on the most useful or interesting parts of the presentation. Remind them that their notes can be used for studying or as a resource for future reference.

Student Reflection

To conclude the English Variety Project, invite students to reflect on the project by writing a response to each of the following questions. You may wish to hold discussions so students can share their reflections.

1. How has your knowledge/opinion about English varieties expanded or changed through the English Variety Project?
2. What was the most useful part of the project?
3. What would you like to remember from the project?

Alternatives

Brochure

A shorter version of the project could involve students creating brochures outlining the characteristics of their selected English variety. Upon completion, students share their brochures with the class, while briefly summarizing the information it contains. This alternative might be used for younger learners or in classes where there is not enough time to devote an entire unit to English varieties.

Blog Posts

Writing the report in the form of a blog post allows students to share their written work with everyone in the class, as well as a wider audience. The posts could be shorter than the informational report, and could take a less formal tone. Furthermore, blogging allows students to receive comments from their peers and other readers, opening up online discussions, whereby teachers and students can observe and practice discourse strategies specific to online media.

APA Style

Depending on your students' level, context, and learning outcomes, you may wish to include the use of academic sources and APA style as a part of the report, as I did with my mine. Many of my students were unfamiliar with APA style, so I created two tools alongside the resources provided by the [Purdue Owl](#). The first was a [screencast](#), created with the free software [Screencast-O-Matic](#), where I demonstrated how to paraphrase, directly quote, and create a reference page citation in an example report. The second tool was an APA style quiz where I provided students a quote from an online source along with all the information they would need to make an in-text and reference page citation. However, the information was given in an arbitrary order, and I provided some irrelevant pieces of information as distractors, requiring students to choose the pertinent information and format it correctly.

Considerations

During my first implementation of the project, I noticed that students struggled to explain the linguistic features of their variety, especially pronunciation. Although I instructed students to write generally and focus only on two or three significant distinguishing aspects or examples, students tried to write with the same level of complexity as they found in their research, and as a result produced unclear sentences with misused vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. I recommend demonstrating examples of paraphrasing aspects of an English variety's grammar and pronunciation, and giving direct feedback in those areas on students' rough drafts. You could compile a list of quotes that students use in the rough drafts, project the list in class, and have students paraphrase the quotes in their notebooks, and ask for volunteers to come to the board and show the class their work.

Students will sometimes try to produce the pronunciation features from their selected English variety during their presentations. Before the presentations, you may wish to work with each student on correctly explaining and/or pronouncing the feature they wish to present. If the feature proves to be too difficult, suggest that the student show a video clip or play a sound bite of a speaker of that variety using the feature.

Conclusion

One of the most successful outcomes of my first implementation of the project was the discussion on the importance and status of each English variety. Students shared how some varieties are given priority in business, education, international relations, or politics, but that every variety has intrinsic value by virtue of belonging to a speech community, and is, therefore, worthy of equal respect. Those discussions were student led, with little interference from me, by those who wrote and presented on varieties that have historically been treated with less importance, such as African American Vernacular English, Black South African English, and Jamaican Creole. I was proud to listen to my students advocating for traditionally undervalued varieties of English, and my hope is that this project will continue to yield this kind of awareness and advocacy.

**Note: A version of this article appeared in the January 2016 [HEIS News](#).*

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