This is the author's version of a work that was accepted for publication after peer review. This is known as the post-print.

Citation for author's accepted version

Citation for publisher's version
Multivarietal Language Teaching

Paul Black
and Zane Goebel

1. Introduction
Dialectal variation has often been ignored in the literature on language teaching, under the presumption that only the standard variety (of some particular country) need be taught. When the question of dialects has been discussed it has often involved the assumption that only a single variety should be selected for teaching (e.g. Corder 1973: 205, Rivers and Temperley 1978: 154). Even some of the literature on world Englishes has assumed that just one variety will be taught, if perhaps a non-native variety in some post-colonial situations (e.g. Strevens 1980: 90, Bamgbose 1998: 8).

The present paper begins by reviewing a small but growing body of literature that stresses the importance of familiarizing language learners with the sorts of dialectal variation that they are likely to encounter as they come to use the language, just as first-language speakers do. It then goes on to describe research in Indonesia that suggests that it is important for learners to appreciate not merely dialectal variation, but even choices between distinct languages in that situation.

The paper then considers how familiarizing students with such variety — we’ll call it “multivarietal teaching” — might actually be implemented by individual teachers who are typically fluent in only a single dialect, whether or not additional languages. Perhaps the answer is obvious: the teacher does not need to be a model of language usage to the extent he or she can rely on audiovisual aids, such as video or other multimedia.

2. Advocates of multidialectal teaching
An early proponent of multidialectal teaching was Bowen (1965: 255-7), who recommended exposing learners to dialectal variety even at early stages in their study of the language:

> From very early in the language-learning process... a student should begin to develop receptive versatility by hearing different speakers (in person or recorded) in a variety of linguistic situations. It is my belief that this will not significantly affect a student’s chance of developing consistent dialect habits,...

> The second-language speaker needs this extra flexibility... just as much as a native speaker does. In some cases he may need it more. It is my contention that the second-language classroom should be specifically geared to provide for this need, and that the way to do this is to provide multiple standards for all the

* Paul Black’s permanent affiliation is with Charles Darwin University, while Zane Goebel is with La Trobe University.
legitimate variations of the language and to present these in a context of situations that is sufficiently varied to develop the kinds of adaptability and versatility that the student must achieve.

The reason Bowen dismissed concerns about learners developing consistent dialect habits is because he believed that “a student who can approximate any native English dialect will usually be found doing satisfactory work” (p. 253). In this regard one might note that first-language learners may similarly be exposed to dialectal variation that may influence their language development, and yet this is rarely viewed as a problem.

As for how to introduce students to such variation, Bowen alluded to the possible use of recordings. This was in the heyday of language laboratories, for those institutions which could afford them, and before video recording was inexpensive and popular. Perhaps because of the limitations in the available technology he also noted that often the teacher would be the students’ only language model, “in effect, being asked to provide vicarious experiences which will be a satisfactory substitute for growing up in a linguistic and cultural community” (p. 254).

After Bowen there seems to have been few proponents for teaching dialectal variety for some years. While Moody (1970) produced a text attempting to help advanced English learners cope with variety in general, it exemplified dialectal variation by just a few extracts from novels, by Dickens, Greene, Twain, Synge, and Hardy, introducing them with the cautious advice that, “The enlightened approach to language includes a genuine respect for all kinds of dialect, but suggests the need in a modern community for all users of a language to be familiar with the standard form” (p. 101). O’Donnell and Todd’s (1980: 143) later book on English varieties expressed a similarly begrudging attitude toward dialect.

While such linguists as Trudgill (1975) were strong proponents for dialect tolerance in other situations, we did not find another clear supporter of dialectal variety in second language teaching until Loveday (1982: 174), who advocated “the honest and important task of modeling with variety” but did not really make clear how it might be done. Subsequently Fairman (1988) pointed out how the native speaker’s ability to understand other dialects implies a similar need on the part of second language learners. Accordingly he advised introducing learners to “multidialect communication”, if “at a suitable stage above the primary, or beginners, level” (p. 124).

Such a view soon appeared in the widely used text by Harmer (1991: 28-9), who similarly suggested that intermediate students could be exposed to several accents or varieties, since competent users of the language are able to cope with them. For French, Auger and Valdman (1999) have gone further to advocate exposing even beginners to dialectal variation as a receptive skill, although they should be taught to actively use a “pedagogical norm” that draws on commonly used varieties while avoiding any common practices that native speakers would find less tolerable from non-native speakers than from each other.

In more general terms the importance of teaching variety has also been stressed by the recent Multiliteracies movement (New London Group 1996, Cope and Kalantzis 2000) along with the importance of attending to multimodel communication, e.g. communication
not just through language but also through such means as graphics and sound, such as one finds on television or the World Wide Web. With regard to variety they note that:

Local diversity and global connectedness mean not only that there can be no standard; they also mean that the most important skill students need to learn is to negotiate regional, ethnic, or class-based dialects; variations of register that occur according to social context; hybrid cross-cultural discourses; [and] the code-switching often to be found within a text among different languages, dialects, or registers;... (New London Group 1996: 69)

Perhaps the claim that “there can be no standard” is overstated considering that they themselves write in perfectly standard English. Earlier one member of the group had more realistically suggested that learners “should [also] be encouraged to develop the ability to use standard English in conventional ways when they judge it to be necessary to do so, because they will be disadvantaged if they do not develop that ability” (Fairclough 1992: 54).

The proposal that students may even need to learn code-switching among different languages might also be questioned in many English language contexts, but it is certainly relevant to some other situations, as shown for Indonesia below.

3. Multilingualism in Indonesia

While Indonesian (or Bahasa Indonesia) is the national language of Indonesia, most Indonesians also speak one or more of the various regional languages of the country. These are generally ignored by programs for learners of Indonesian, since Indonesian is widely believed to be the only language needed for inter-ethnic communication.

There is increasing evidence that this is not quite so, however. For one thing, recent research by Goebel (2000, 2002a) found that even non-Javanese residents of central Java learn to use the local Javanese language as they develop friendships with others in that area. To the extent people use Indonesian alone, it tends to implies unfamiliarity or social distance.

The social implications of language choice are also evident in some Indonesian television programs, which may involve switching between Indonesian and local languages depending on the degree of social distance; examples can be found in Black and Goebel (2002), Goebel (2002b), and Goebel and Black (2001, 2003). For example, a character in one sitcom is heard to use some Jakartenese (or Betawi) forms to the Jakartenese mother of his girlfriend in an apparent attempt to signal solidarity, even though this is not his own local language. To talk to a customer who enters the mother’s shop, however, he simply uses Indonesian alone.

This is just one of a number socially significant parameters of language use in Indonesia, since other details of language use can also depend on such other factors as setting, religion, and relative age and/or social status (see e.g. Goebel 1996). In any case, however, if the average Indonesian television viewer appreciates the social significance of language choice as one aspect of code choice more generally, one might hope for similar social awareness
from successful Indonesian learners overseas, whether or not they actually want to learn any of the regional languages.

4. Practicalities

If it is thus desirable to expose language learners to multiple dialects, or to the social significance of language choice in such settings as Indonesia, how can teachers actually do this? The individual teacher, after all, generally speaks just one particular dialect. As for multilingual situations, even if a teacher is multilingual, how can he or she alone possibly model multilingual interactions, much less the social context behind the choice between the languages?

In some situations it may be possible to draw on the range of varieties found in the local community and/or amongst the teaching staff, as Youssef and Carter (1999) have described for an innovative, multivarietal approach to English in the West Indies. More generally, however, the solution is to exploit modern technology to provide models other than the teacher.

For English there is in fact some audio-visual material specially designed to introduce learners to dialect variation. One example is a text with an accompanying audiotape by Gass and Lefkowitz (1995). This provides a good basis for introducing students to dialectal and other variation in English, although it is actually presented as simply one option in a series for context-based instruction (CBI), along with such other alternatives as literature and readings in business, ecology, and healthy living. For other examples, Rickford (1996: 164) noted that at least three films on English dialects were produced in the 1980s, two for American varieties and one for a worldwide range. He also suggested that students might investigate dialectal differences in local classrooms and the community, as well as in literature.

While specially designed materials are valuable, they are not actually necessary for familiarising students with dialectal variation to the extent such variation is also found in material developed for other purposes. For example, in teaching English listening skills in Japan the first author (Black) followed a colleague by relying heavily on videos of American television programs, supplemented by occasional audiotapes. Even just the American videos involve dialectal differences that he could discuss with the students, such as the mild Black English of the *Bill Cosby Show* and a sample of Cockney in an episode of *Kojak*, not to mention occasional non-native varieties. By using audiotapes as well he was able to expose students to some other British and Australian varieties.

To the extent English teachers have already been exploiting such audio-visual material, of course, they may well be exposing learners to dialectal variety without thinking about it. But it is better to actually think and talk about it to help the learners appreciate the nature of the variation. In terms of Multiliteracies pedagogy this is an aspect of “Critical Framing”, in this case helping learners become conscious of the nature and social implications of language variety. As with first-language speakers, it is this awareness of social values that helps them avoid adopting stigmatized dialectal forms as their own normal speech, just as it sensitizes them to aspects of register and (if you distinguish it from register) style.
For the Indonesian situation there is currently little teaching material designed to introduce students to the social significance of language choice, although informed teachers might exploit Indonesian television programs for his purpose, and this was in fact done in an external course prepared by Goebel (1996) for prospective Indonesian teachers. Elsewhere we have described how such programs could also be used to create a computerized multimedia database of video clips that students could use for self study according to their needs and interests (Black and Goebel 2001, Goebel and Black 2003).

5. Some broader considerations

Bowen’s (1965: 254) comment about the need for the teacher “to provide vicarious experiences which will be a satisfactory substitute for growing up in a linguistic and cultural community” reminds us of how limited a language teacher is without such audio-visual aids as video and other multimedia. Leaving the question of variety aside, even the best individual teacher can seldom expose learners to fluent interaction without such aids; generally the only spoken language he or she can authentically model is that of a single fluent speaker trying to communicate with non-fluent learners in a classroom situation.

Authentic multimedia is thus important for helping learners see and hear how the language is actually used in communication, with the way it can expose learners to variety as an additional benefit. And to the extent teachers exploit it, any advantages of native over non-native teachers become even more questionable — all the more in multivarietal teaching, since nobody is a native speaker of all the varieties learners should be exposed to (Black and Goebel in preparation).

As personal computers have come to have the memory and speed to cope easily with multimedia we can expect them to increasing replace language teachers for many purposes. At the Fourth Conference on Foreign Language Education and Technology (FLEAT IV) in Kobe in 2000, one plenary speaker (we regret we do not recall which) went so far as to suggest that language teaching technology would eventually take over the teaching of language for general purposes, so that language teachers would need to become increasingly specialized in order to survive.

5. Conclusion

This paper has briefly surveyed reasons and prospects for teaching dialectal variety and, for such situations as Indonesia, even the social implications of language choice. Since first-language speakers can and do cope with such variety, certainly learners should too, and the increasing availability of multimedia makes it easier for teachers to help them do this.

References


Black, Paul and Zane Goebel. In preparation, Nobody’s a native speaker of everything.


