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Language Diversity

Language lives inside all of us. It is more than words. It is the way we express our feelings, our history, our culture, and our memories. It is something we carry everywhere, whether we think about it or not. Language is the sound of home. It is the laughter of a family. It is the rhythm of our community. It is our comfort zone, the place where we don't have to pretend. And because language is emotional and personal, language diversity becomes emotional and individual as well.

Every day, especially in college environments, people speak without realizing the many varieties



of English around them. In classrooms, hallways, dining areas, and group discussions, we hear accents, tones, rhythms, and styles shaped by the lives of those around us. Some students grew up hearing English every day, while others learned

English as teenagers or even adults. Some grew up bilingual or trilingual. Some grew up

we slow down and listen, we discover a beautiful truth: language diversity is not a problem. It is an opportunity to learn.

Even so, celebration alone is not enough. Communication must also be clear. It is possible to honor language diversity while recognizing the need for some shared rules, enabling people to communicate effectively with one another. If a classmate cannot understand your point, the meaning is lost, even if your identity remains strong. Misunderstanding can create confusion, frustration, and conflict. That is why language diversity must be celebrated *and* balanced with responsibility. Our voices and our message matter. We do not need to erase our identity to communicate well. However, we do need to consider the listener.

Amy Tan explains the emotional side of this issue in her essay "*Mother Tongue*." She describes how people mistreated her mother because of her English. Tan writes about doctors who ignored her mother's questions and restaurant workers who pretended not to understand her (Tan 8). Her mother was intelligent, but others judged her based on her accent. Tan explains that people did not take her mother seriously because of her "broken English," and this disrespect had a profound impact on Tan's childhood.

Many multilingual students relate to this. They have watched a parent struggle to be understood. They have seen their family judged unfairly. Tan also writes about how she uses different Englishes depending on the situation. With her mother, she speaks one way. With her readers, she says another. She does not pretend to be someone she is not; she simply adjusts to be understood. This shows that adapting language is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of awareness and care.

Langston Hughes expresses similar feelings in his poem "Theme for English B." Hughes writes about the complicated relationship between identity and expectations. He reflects on being the only Black student in his class and wonders whether his experiences are suitable for academic

writing. He writes, “I guess being colored doesn’t make me not like the same things other folks like who are other races” (Hughes 390). This line illustrates how language, identity, and connection intersect. When Hughes says, “I learn from you, you learn from me,” he teaches a powerful lesson: communication is not a one-way street. People must understand each other, not force each other to speak the same way.

Jamila Lyiscott’s spoken-word performance “3 Ways to Speak English”

(<https://share.google/fuOfpVWqlc22taKCa>) brings energy and emotion to the topic. Her poem is multimodal; her voice, gestures, rhythm, and facial expressions all contribute to expressing her message. Lyiscott switches between different Englishes confidently. She tells the audience that she is “articulate” in each version (Lyiscott). Her performance challenges the idea that only one kind of English is “correct.” She proves that people can carry multiple voices inside them. Watching her speak feels empowering because she refuses to shrink herself to fit someone else’s idea of what is correct.

Vershawn Ashanti Young makes a bold argument in “Should Writers Use They Own English?” He says that forcing students to use only Standard English is unfair and damaging. He writes that “there is no such thing as ‘bad English’” (Young 111). Young believes students should mix Englishes and write in their natural voices. His point is powerful, and I agree that students should not be shamed for their language. But I also believe communication must remain clear. If the message becomes confusing, the purpose of writing is lost. So again, balance becomes key: respect identity, but maintain clarity.



A 2023 study in the *Harvard Linguistic Review* found that students learn better when teachers respect their natural voices while also teaching clear communication strategies (Harvard Linguistic Review 47). Another study from the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* found that students participate more when teachers focus on meaning before grammar (JOLLE 2020). This indicates that when students feel safe to express themselves, they speak more, write more, learn more, and form stronger connections.

A BBC Worklife report highlights accent bias and its impact on people's social and professional lives. The report included audio examples where listeners judged certain accents as “more professional” or “more intelligent” (“Accent Bias”). When people listened to certain voices, they made quick judgments, often without realizing they were being influenced by bias. These audio examples show how accents influence people emotionally. This multimodal approach makes the message stronger because people can hear their own bias.

In workplaces, language diversity also affects confidence and teamwork. The *Journal of Global Communication* published a study showing that workers with strong accents often feel anxious or pressured to change the way they speak (Global Communication 63). Some said they felt invisible in meetings because their ideas were ignored. This emotional stress affects performance. Clear communication can reduce this stress by making people feel understood and respected.



UNESCO warns that many languages worldwide are at risk of disappearing. When a language dies, a culture loses part of its identity (“Languages and Cultural Identity”). UNESCO

shows images of multilingual classrooms where children learn in two or more languages. These images show pride and unity. At the same time, UNESCO explains that having one shared language helps people connect globally. This supports the idea that diversity and unity must work together.

My own life experiences have taught me the importance of patience and empathy in communication. When someone speaks with an accent, I refrain from judging them. I listen. I try to understand their perspective. I remember how difficult it can be to talk in a second language. I know the courage it takes. I see the fear of being misunderstood. I know the frustration of having to repeat yourself many times. I know the feeling of wanting to say something essential but being afraid that your words will come out “wrong.” Because I understand these feelings, I listen with patience and empathy.

Language diversity teaches us to be more human. It teaches us to slow down, to listen carefully, and to look beyond grammar. It teaches us to see people’s hearts, not just their words. In classrooms, this can transform the educational experience. Students who feel respected become more confident. Students who feel seen become more motivated. Students who feel safe become more willing to share their ideas.

And clarity makes these connections possible. Clarity does not mean perfection. It does not mean erasing your accent or hiding your identity. It means making an effort to be understood while staying true to yourself. It means meeting others halfway. When two people try to understand each other, communication becomes strong and meaningful.

Some people believe that language diversity creates problems because it introduces too many differences. But I think the opposite. Problems happen when people refuse to listen or refuse to adjust. Miscommunication is not caused by diversity; it is caused by impatience. When people take time to understand, diversity becomes a source of strength.

Language diversity builds creativity. When students from different cultures share their perspectives, new ideas emerge. In my own classes, I have heard students explain concepts in unique ways because their first language shapes how they understand the world. Sometimes a single phrase from a different culture can explain something better than ten sentences in formal English. This is the beauty of diversity.



Language diversity also builds community. When people hear others speak with accents, they feel less alone. They recognize their struggles in someone else. They see courage, not weakness. They see connection, not difference.

In the end, language diversity is not something we should try to “correct.” It is something worth protecting, especially in college classrooms where learning depends on many voices coming together. But protection alone is not enough. Students, professors, and educators all share a responsibility to make communication clear so ideas can travel across cultures and backgrounds. Clear communication does not require perfect English. It requires patience, openness, and the willingness to meet others halfway. When a professor listens carefully, when a student tries to express their thoughts honestly, when classmates give each other time instead of judgment, understanding becomes possible.

For those who teach, this means creating space where students feel safe to use their real voices while still guiding them toward clarity. For students, it means speaking bravely and learning how to express ideas in ways others can understand. For everyone

in the academic community, it means remembering that our different Englishes are not weaknesses; they are sources of insight, creativity, and connection.

Language diversity is not a barrier to learning. It becomes a barrier only when we refuse to listen to one another. When we choose patience, clarity, and respect, language diversity becomes a bridge, a bridge that connects students to professors, cultures to ideas, and people to one another. That is the kind of classroom, and the kind of world, worth building.

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