



### **Abstract**

There is a belief that some English dialects are superior to others, and regional dialects that differ from the standard are often seen as corrupt forms of language. In the educational system, educators' lack of knowledge regarding linguistic diversity often results in language oppression. The purpose of this research is to inform educators about linguistic diversity in an attempt to end language oppression. The research sought to answer how students who spoke Lumbee English Vernacular navigated the transition from the high school setting to the college setting. To answer the major research question, the research also explored how educators handled linguistic diversity in classrooms and the implications of language diversity in the educational setting. To answer these questions, the researcher conducted interviews with four participants, 2 males and 2 females, who were undergraduate students at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke and had attended Robeson County Schools. These interviews highlighted the differences between participants being aware of a dialect that deviated from standard English prior to attending college and participants who became cognizant of their dialects once they arrived on campus. The analysis of the interviews confirmed that students who had knowledge of their dialects prior to attending college had an easier time acclimating to the university environment and expectations because they adapted code-switching prior to arriving on campus; however, the participants who were not aware of their dialect prior to attending college had a difficult time in the transition to the university setting because they had to learn to code-switch while learning about the expectations of the new environment.

An Investigation into the Transition from the High School to the College Setting for Students  
Who Speak Lumbee Vernacular English

I spent five semesters as a tutor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke's Writing Center. During my time there, I worked with many students from the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. The Lumbee Tribe is an integral part of the University, since the Tribe founded the school, which remains an important part of the Lumbee community. The school was originally formed as a way to promote preservation of culture (Hannel, 2015). The idea was for Lumbee teachers to attend the Croatan Normal School, which was the prior name of UNC-Pembroke, so they could teach students academics, while teaching them about Lumbee culture. Though the name of the University has since changed, UNC-Pembroke's mission statement carries some of the same values: "Founded in 1887 as a school for the education of American Indians, The University of North Carolina at Pembroke now serves a distinctly diverse student body and encourages inclusion and appreciation for the values of all people" ("Mission Statement, 2018). Though the mission statement highlights the appreciation for all people's values, linguistic appreciation is not often taken into consideration. During my time at the Writing Center, I encountered several Lumbee students who voiced concerns that they were not good writers based on using their dialects in writing. Additionally, students would ask why they have to conform to standard English and not use their own languages. A few students asked me why their language was being oppressed. Motivated by these students to explore the concept of language oppression in the educational setting, I sought to answer how students navigated the transition from the high school setting to the college setting when they had a language that

deviated from standard English, how educators in students' schools handled linguistic diversity, and the implications regarding linguistic diversity in the classroom.

In my search to answer these questions, I discovered there is a belief that some English dialects are superior to others (Lippi-Green, 1997; Wolfram, 2000; Dragojevic, Giles, & Watson, 2013); because of this, students' dialects that deviate from standard English are often oppressed in classrooms. This is especially true with regional dialect. Many times, educators do not have knowledge about language variation, and this knowledge is not often a part of the curriculum in education courses for pre-service teachers (Wolfram, 2000). This lack of linguistic education causes teachers to treat some dialects as inferior to others or mistake the dialect for a deficit, resultantly stigmatizing regional dialects. This oppression can lead students to hold negative views about themselves and can cause conflict among the students, their communities and the institutions. Instead of making language diversity a part of the classroom, teachers turn to constantly correcting students' languages, which silences the students, instead of encouraging them to adopt standard English as an additional dialect. Not only are teachers silencing students, but they are creating a conflict between the educational system and students' communities (Delpit, 2006). When educational institutions enforce students to use standard English, students are being exposed to the idea that their community languages are inferior. The ideology that standard English is the only acceptable language for the educated is instilled within students, who then go home and attempt to enforce the dominant ideology. This creates a cycle of oppression, which can be better understood by looking at Louis Althusser's (2010) work "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

Althusser explained the idea of the power of the dominant ideology in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Ideological state apparatuses, such as schools, churches, and

families, reinforce the ideology created by those who are dominant in society. Because standard English is the language of the dominant society in the United States, these apparatuses reinforce citizens to view standard English as superior to other languages, which makes it the language of power. When educators reinforce the ideology, they create a conflict within students' identities and create a cycle where students play a role in their own oppression by going home and acting as enforcers of the dominant ideology. It is essential that educators understand the process of language oppression and their own roles in the cycle, so this cycle can be prevented. In addition, it is critical that educational organizations and programs create a dialogue with educators about linguistic diversity, since this can aid in ceasing linguistic oppression.

Though the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) does have standards regarding how dialect is treated in the classroom, these standards have not been effective in classrooms. The NCTE states (as cited in Wolfram, 2000) that teachers should guide their students to “show a respect for and an understanding of diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles” (p.188). Though the NCTE has acknowledged that there should be awareness in the classroom regarding language diversity, having this standard is not enough, which is apparent from the continuation of language oppression in classrooms, especially since this standard is limited to English classrooms, instead of all disciplines.

### **Discussion of the Lumbee Tribe**

The Lumbee tribe, housed in Robeson County, has been the focus of many researchers, especially in regard to defining the Tribe, as well as tracing the Tribe's beginning; however, for the purpose of this research, it is important to focus on the Tribe's encounter with language and their struggle for full federal recognition (see Lowery, 2010 for more information regarding the

Tribe's history). It has been written that the Scotland Highlanders moved to North Carolina in the 1730s and noticed the Lumbee Tribe spoke in broken English (Hannel, 2015). Because of these findings, it was believed that the Lumbee Tribe had contact with the Europeans in the sixteenth century, which resulted in the loss of the Tribe's original language. Hannel (2015) explained that linguists "concluded that Lumbee English carries remnants of at least one Native American language" (pp. 29-30). However, because of colonization, many Native American languages have disappeared or taken a new form. Lumbee English then is "the result of indigenous languages coming in contact with English and being transformed into new dialects" (Hannel, 2015, p. 30). Though the Lumbee Tribe lost their original language, they do have their own language, Lumbee English. Lumbee English can be defined as a local dialect that consists of distinct vocabulary and pronunciation. Henceforth, this will be the meaning of "Lumbee language" in this paper.

Despite Lumbee English being seen as an official language for the Tribe by linguists, the loss of original language is problematic for the Lumbee Tribe, since it has been one argument against the Tribe gaining full federal recognition. The federal government has questioned the validity of the Lumbee Tribe because of the belief that the Tribe lacks an official language. This questioning has resulted in the lack of full federal recognition. Though the Lumbee Tribe still had not gained full federal recognition in the 1880s, the Tribe petitioned for and gained formal recognition by North Carolina's government (Wolfram et al., 2002). With the funds allocated to them by the state government in 1887, the Lumbee tribe established the Croatan Normal School, which is now known as the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (Wolfram et al., 2002). Though receiving state recognition and having the ability to establish this school benefited the Lumbee tribe, the members are still attempting to gain full federal recognition. As mentioned,

because of assimilation, the Lumbee tribe has experienced a loss of original language, which is detrimental to them receiving full federal recognition; however, though the loss of language is a factor in the Lumbee tribe's struggle to gain full federal recognition because the government wants them to have and use a tribal language, the government educational systems oppress Lumbee English because it deviates from the standard. This shows that the Tribe is punished for not having an official language and punished for using their language, which is in the form of a distinct dialect. This linguistic oppression occurs at all grade levels, from kindergarten through college. Areas such as Robeson County, which had a population of 132,606 in 2017, is comprised of 41% Native Americans, continues to house educational systems that oppress Lumbee language ("QuickFacts Robeson County," 2017). Additionally, there continues to be language oppression on University of North Carolina at Pembroke's campus, which is housed in a predominately Lumbee community and is made up of 15% percent Native American students ("Quick Facts," 2017). The Robeson County community should be an area that uplifts Lumbee English, yet students continue to face language oppression at the hands of the educational system, the same system that denies them full recognition because they are not using their language.

### **Literature Review**

There has been much research aimed at investigating and explaining language variation. For many researchers, African American Vernacular English has been at the forefront of sociolinguistic research in order to support the legitimacy of a non-standard dialect (see Trumbull, 2005; Wheeler & Swords, 2004). There has also been research dedicated to studying the varieties of American Indian English (see Cogshall, 2015). Though there has been much research dedicated to these English varieties, there have been few research studies that looked specifically at Lumbee

English. Walt Wolfram (1996), a prominent sociolinguistic researcher at North Carolina State University, has conducted much of the research on Lumbee English. He conducted a study that looked at the use of “I’m in Lumbee English.” In this study, he analyzed the use of “I’m” in Lumbee English to mean “I have.” This research displayed a relationship among Lumbee English, the antiquated form of Anglo-American English and African American Vernacular English. Additionally, Wolfram analyzed earlier versions of Lumbee English and concluded Lumbee English is always evolving, just like standard English; therefore, he made the argument that Lumbee English is a distinct language.

Wolfram, along with his colleague Dannenburg (1998), discussed a similar finding in their research article, “Ethnic Identity and Grammatical Restructuring: Be(s) in Lumbee English.” Danneburg and Wolfram investigated a comparison between the use of “be” in Lumbee English to the use of the finite verb in Anglo-American English and African American Vernacular English in order to determine whether there is a relationship between the three dialects. The researchers found that though the use of “be” in Lumbee English is similar to its use in an antiquated form of Anglo-American English, the verb shares a strong relationship with how African American Vernacular English continues to use the verb (Wolfram & Dannenberg, 1998). The researchers determined that by analyzing the finite verb “be,” one could analyze how African Americans influence the Lumbee speakers’ identities based on their influence on Lumbee English.

Along with using their research to analyze the grammatical constructions of Lumbee English, Wolfram and Dannenberg have used their research to provide a background for Lumbee English. In their book *Fine in the World: Lumbee Language in Time and Place*, Wolfram, Dannenberg, Knick and Oxendine (2002) provided background into Lumbee English by discussing its development and usage in Robeson County. The authors argued that because Lumbee English



deviates from standard English, it is often labelled negatively. To refute these claims, the authors included the breakdown of Lumbee English sentence structure and dialect pronunciation. By including this information in their work, Wolfram et al. (2002) displayed that Lumbee English is a language despite previous claims that it is only a dialect. Highlighting Lumbee English as a language is important, since it currently is not seen as a tribal language, which hinders the Tribe from gaining full federal recognition. Wolfram has used his research on the Lumbee tribe to make a case for the legitimacy of Lumbee English in an attempt for the Tribe to gain full federal recognition and to highlight the importance of the language. He has done this by looking at linguistic structures of the language and determining that Lumbee English is a distinct language.

Similar to Wolfram et al.'s research, Natalie Schilling-Estes (2004) conducted a research study in Robeson County that focused on linguistic structures and identity. Schilling-Estes interviewed two students who attended UNC-Pembroke. One student was Black, and one student was Lumbee. During the interviews, the researcher asked the participants a series of questions ranging from family life to race relations. Schilling-Estes (2004) analyzed the phonological and morphosyntactic features of the interviews and determined that when the speakers were talking about past events, such as the civil war and how Blacks and Native Americans in Robeson County were treated during the war, certain linguistic features in their dialect changed, depending on how they identified with the culture and events being described. Schilling-Estes research conveyed that language variables in discourse can play a role in identity.

Though Schilling-Estes' study and Wolfram and Dannenberg's study focused on analyzing identity by looking at linguistic structures, there has been a research study conducted by Chris Scott and Kathleen Brown (2008) that took a different approach. In their research, Scott and Brown look at how dialect affects ethnic identity development, specifically in relation to the

Lumbee dialect. The authors formed an ethnic identity model using Jean Phinney's theory of identity development and ethnicity. The researchers set up a qualitative research study which consisted of interviews with five students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who were originally from Robeson County. The participants were asked about their Lumbee English dialect and the academic and social challenges they face on campus because of their dialect. In addition, the researchers aimed to answer how the treatment of their dialect affected participants' identities. The research found that even with formal language training, some participants had a difficult time adjusting to campus because of their Lumbee English dialects (Scott & Brown, 2008). Ultimately, this research conveyed that dialect has a direct relationship with identity.

These research studies all focused on grammatical constructions of Lumbee English, the relationship between language and identity, or dialect's effect on ethnic identity. My research aims to fill in the gap of research regarding Lumbee English and the education system. Though the prior research on Lumbee English focuses on linguistic structures and identity or forming an ethnic identity in areas outside of one's community, this research looks at the transition from Robeson County Schools to a university in Robeson County for Lumbee English speakers; this research aims to investigate the transition from the high school setting to the college setting for Lumbee English speakers, especially since this transition occurs in the same county and the same community where Lumbee English is a prominent language.

### **Research Methods**

To answer these research questions, I set up a qualitative research study with four participants. The participants were two males and two females, who were all undergraduate students at the University of the North Carolina at Pembroke and attended Robeson County schools prior to attending college. The students were between 18-to 21-years-old and all self-

identified as speaking Lumbee English. To recruit students, I had the help of a student at the Writing Center. I asked if she would be interested in voicing her opinion about the language oppression she described earlier in the semester. She agreed to participate and aided in finding the other participants. She asked members of a Lumbee organization on campus if anyone would be interested in participating in the interviews, and four students volunteered. This research took place in four interviews that each lasted for thirty minutes. These interviews were audio recorded and the recordings were transcribed. The data was analyzed using informal grounded research theory (see Urquhart, 2012). Though I had a set of questions I went into the interviews with, some of the information present in this study came about through grounded research, specifically the information regarding the cycle of oppression and the linguistic significance of homecoming, which serves as a sense of community in the Lumbee Tribe through togetherness both physically and linguistically.

## **Results**

### **Defining Lumbee English**

In the interviews, I asked the participants to define Lumbee English. Two participants discussed vocabulary and phrases. One participant remarked, “How do I define Lumbee English? Certain phrases, maybe. Certain phrases that we use... um, and our pronunciation.” When I asked him what kind of phrases can be found in Lumbee English, he responded, “A right smart. I ate a right smart a piece this morning.” When I asked him what this phrase meant, he said it meant a “big amount.”<sup>1</sup>

Another participant’s response also included discussion of vocabulary:

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Lumbee English vocabulary, see Locklear, Schilling-Estes, Wolfram, & Dannenberg (1996)

Define it... um, it's different than... um, most people. Well, of course it's really southern, but we do have different words that we say that some people when you come out of Robeson County don't know what you're talkin' about, and the way we say things are different than other people.

Though these two participants discussed vocabulary while defining Lumbee English, two other participants associated the idea of Lumbee English with home: "Um, it's just who we are. It just plays a role in our identity. When you hear somebody... even like other Native Americans talk different, but when they hear us talkin', they're like oh, you're Lumbee."

The last participant also related defining Lumbee English to her community:

I would define Lumbee English as relaxed... comforting. Um, right now I think it's easy to understand because you've grown up in it your whole life, so it's not something you're unfamiliar with. Um, so I would consider it as a part of home.

All the responses promoted the idea that Lumbee English is considered a part of home.

Additionally, the participants described Lumbee English as an identifier. Though two participants' responses were more technical when describing Lumbee English, as far as focusing on vocabulary and pronunciation, all the participants agreed that the language is important in identifying members of a community.

### **Lumbee English as Identity**

All four participants' responses revealed Lumbee English played a large role in their identities; however, two of those participants emphasized Lumbee English as an identifier. One student explained:

Well, I think [Lumbee English] plays a big role in our identity because you know when you walk around, you can spot a Lumbee based on how they speak to you. You can tell

someone that's from Robeson County and was raised here like opposed to someone that was not from here. Just like ... well, usually if Lumbees are born here, they move away. Some of them...most of them still keep a little bit of that accent. The way we speak, even if they move away, and they come back, it's just something that always sticks with us, so I think that's how we identify ourselves.

Another participant made a similar comment about how Lumbee English acts as an identifier:

When you just leave Robeson County, and you get to an area you don't know, and then you see somebody, or you just hear somebody talk...you don't even have to see them. You just hear them. You just kind of feel at home, and you just know they're from Robeson County.

These responses indicated that even if one leaves Robeson County, he or she is still a part of the community through language. This displays that despite linguistic oppression, participants still identified with Lumbee English as a part of them and viewed the language as a tool to bring each member of the community together.

### **Lumbee English as a Source of Pride**

All the participants agreed that Lumbee English was a source of pride in their community. One participant exclaimed, "I really do think [Lumbee English is a source of pride]. I think it's not something not everyone has, so it's something we treasure and we appreciate." Similarly, another participant stated, "Speaking Lumbee English is something I take pride in. I guess it identifies the way I speak. It is like the identifier for who I am."

In addition to participants explaining the value of Lumbee English to their community because it is a source of pride, two other participants discussed how Lumbee English brings their community together:

It's a source of pride because no matter where you go, if you hear someone speakin' the same way you speak, you know that's a Lumbee, and they're most likely from Robeson County and know about who I am and where I come from, so um...I take pride in knowing other people can relate to me, and I can relate to others based on just how we talk.

Another participant had a similar response, but in his response, he also included one of the hardships Lumbee English speakers face:

I definitely do take pride in [speaking Lumbee English.] My grandma tells me I need to... uh watch how I say some things sometimes, which I laugh at, and I keep going about it... but, even I know a lot of people in this county who are not Lumbee and who hear us talk, but sometimes they might pick at us or make fun of us, but I really take pride in it, and I don't care what people say.

This statement conveyed that though Lumbee English speakers take pride in their language, there are some, even in the Lumbee community, who do not see Lumbee English as a language that should always be used. In addition, the response highlighted that despite harsh perceptions of Lumbee English, the participant still identified with his community and took pride in his language.

### **Noticing a Dialect**

I asked each participant when was the first time they noticed they had a dialect, and their responses varied. For two participants, they realized their Lumbee dialects in elementary school. Two interviews took place at the same time, and this question sparked a dialogue between the two participants:

**Interviewer:** So, my last question is, when did you realize you had a dialect?

**Participant one:** Maybe when we started going to elementary school.

**Participant two:** Yeah.

**Participant one:** We started noticing that there were other people there, not just Lumbees.

**Participant two:** Different races.

**Participant one:** Yeah, different races, and so... like you have the Hispanics where they have a little accent, but [the teachers] don't really critique them. They just notice the Lumbee accent.

**Participant two:** You kind of got singled out because you spoke Lumbee dialect and other people didn't. So, I guess I would agree. That's when I noticed it. As soon as we got to school.

Unlike these two participants who noticed they used Lumbee English when they began school, the other two participants did not realize they spoke in a different dialect than standard English until they began college. One participant explained that she did not think about Lumbee English until she arrived on campus and had a job interview:

Um, probably when I first began college, and I had to go to a job interview. So, I had to go to a job interview to be an orientation leader, and so I was sitting there, and I had to just remind myself that I'm actually at a job interview, so I actually had to change the way I spoke, so I can sound... uh, professional. So, I think that had to be one of the times where I had to realize, "ok, like I can't talk like I normally would if I was around some friends or my family."

Similarly, another participant declared he first noticed he had a dialect when he began college and took an English class. When I asked him when was the first time he realized he spoke

Lumbee English, he responded, “I think... maybe... yeah, coming to college. Um... English classes. Composition classes when we were actually required to talk. When we were forced to interact with others.”

These responses displayed that not all participants were aware of their dialects prior to attending college. Additionally, two of the responses highlighted the concept of the language hierarchy. According to the participants, it was only the students who spoke Lumbee English who were oppressed in the classrooms as early as elementary school. When they arrived at the educational institution for the first time, they were immediately met with the idea that their language was inferior. The other two participants’ responses indicated that they first learned that their dialects were seen as inferior upon arrival on campus. For one participant, she first noticed and thought about her dialect prior to a job interview, an interview that involved being an orientation leader to a campus that is a great part of the Lumbee community. The other response showed a lack of linguistic awareness in composition classes. The participant did not indicate that he was taught about code-switching and differing dialects; instead, he used the harsh term “forced” as a way to describe his experience in an environment that should be teaching about the different writing and language communities: his composition class.

### **Linguistic Diversity in K-12**

In the interviews, I asked each participant about his or her experiences in high school, but the participants spoke about linguistic oppression that began as early as grade school. One participant discussed her experience with language issues throughout her education prior to college:

Yeah, all through... I think elementary, middle, and high school you had to make sure whatever you wrote on paper was not what you said out loud because the way we speak,



if you put it on paper, it looks crazy, and most people are gonna be like this is not correct English, so you have to change it up, and you have to be careful about how you write. When I asked her if any educators commented on the way they speak in middle school or high school, one participant recalled an experience where she was being corrected on her dialect and taught the standard, and she brought that knowledge home with her:

I used to have teachers that...well my teachers were really strict in middle school and elementary. They wouldn't let us say "ain't," so they would say, "ain't ain't a word," or "ain't is not a word," so I would go home, and I would correct everybody else, and they would be like, "no, we say 'ain't' around here," so you don't have to get rid of that one, but yeah, a lot of teachers... you get critiqued the whole time all the way you I guess until college about how you write things on paper, and how you say things out loud.

Another participant shared a similar story. When I asked one of the participants if any of his educators in high school ever said anything about the way he spoke, he recalled a particular experience: "The only person who addressed [the use of Lumbee English] was my ninth grade English teacher. She just said, 'baby, when we're at home, we talk like this, but when you're at school, you talk like this' you know."

Unlike this participant, when I asked one participant if any of her teachers made comments about her dialect in high school, she responded, "Um, I feel high school was kind of laid back compared to college. So [the teachers] were kind of like on our level." Additionally, the participant discussed how she went to a diverse school, so everyone spoke differently, which was accepted by all the educators at the school.

These responses conveyed that some participants were exposed to language oppression at a young age. Only one of four of these participant's responses conveyed any mention of using

language in different contexts, such as speaking a language at home and speaking a different language at school; however, though the teacher made the statement about speaking differently at home than at school, she did not give any explanation.

## **Linguistic Diversity in College**

### **Educators' responses to language**

When asked about their experiences with language use in college, the participants had mixed experiences. Two participants had positive experiences on campus. These same participants claimed they were aware of their dialects prior to college; for the two participants where college was where they learned about having to change their language from Lumbee English to standard English, they reported a more negative experience. One participant, in the biology department reflected on his language experiences:

I haven't heard anything [about speaking differently]. I have a lot of um...most teachers... I'm in the biology department, so I have foreign teachers. There's a lot from India, so we kind of just go back-and- forth I guess trying to figure out each other's accents and then I have some Lumbee teachers, so of course they don't care 'cause they know they were raised here. They went to school here, so they know.

Another participant had a similar experience regarding dialect at UNCP: "I have some [teachers who] don't disrespect it. They just think it's pretty cool. Like [one professor]. He's just like, "I want to be Lumbee." When I asked him how it felt when professors made those types of comments, he explained, "It makes me definitely feel prideful that not everybody has this chance. Living in Robeson County, yeah, sometimes it is a disappointment in some things that we lack, but we still have a big opportunity knowing we're Native American and Lumbee." This response

conveyed that in a setting that is not always appreciative of linguistic differences, the participant took pride in the idea that someone outside of his community wanted to be a part of it.

Despite this positive experience on campus, the same participant also discussed the negative comments his professors made when he first came to campus:

Well, I took my English [classes] online in high school because I did not like English, so when I got [to UNCP], I definitely had that problem [being told not to speak Lumbee English]. My English professor said, “you have to quit talking like this...” or not to talk like that but to write like that, and I was like, “what are you talking about?” because I didn’t realize it until she forced it out, so it was kind of hard at first and then after I got used to it, it was like “okay, whatever.”

When asked if she had an experience with a teacher on campus who said anything about the way she spoke, one participant recalled a similar experience with using dialect in the college classroom:

Um, not necessarily the way I spoke about my dialect but the way I write papers. A lot of people can tell, “okay, you type the way you speak.” Um, so I got that a lot, so I had to learn to change that, and um I guess that is a positive criticism. That’s how I see it. They said I need to do better. Like I’m in college now, so I can’t necessarily... like type that way because you know it does have a lot to do with grammar.

After she recalled this experience, I asked her if she had similar encounters with teachers in high school. Her response emphasized the difference in her encounters with teachers in the high school setting and the college setting:

Never. Never. And I think that has to do with ... um... the people you come in contact with when you come to college. Like there's different professors that are not used to us speaking that way or even typing that way.

The responses highlighted the differences between being aware of a dialect at a young age and learning about dialectal differences at college. The same participant who stated she did not experience language oppression in the biology department was the same participant who stated she used code-switching prior to attending college because she was aware of her dialect. The two participants who experienced language oppression for the first time on campus were not yet aware of their dialects and explained that they begin code-switching upon arrival on campus, once they discovered their dialect differed from standard English.

#### **UNCP students' responses to Lumbee English**

The topic of professor's responses to Lumbee English on campus was not the only topic that came about when I asked the participants about their experiences on campus. One participant described his encounter with students on campus regarding Lumbee English. When I asked if people had a difficult time understanding the way he speaks, his response was the following:

I noticed a lot of freshman when they first get here or transfer, students have a problem with [understanding Lumbee English] and then you notice later as they continue through the years here, they kind of understand it better than when they first got here.

This response displayed the reasoning behind the standard English debate. Those who promote standard English believe it must be used so everyone can properly communicate with one another; however, the response shows that over time, students who cannot typically understand Lumbee English do have an easier time comprehending the language after being exposed to it.

Though standard English is important for clear communication, this response shows that it is possible to use dialects on campus that do not conform to standard English and still be understood over time.

### **College Contexts for Linguistic Diversity**

Sororities, fraternities, religious organizations and rooms on campus were all considered safe areas on campus by participants. One participant explained that she felt comfortable speaking in Lumbee English on campus if it was an event with her sorority: “So, I’m in a sorority, so I feel like when I’m around my sorority sisters, most of us are Native American, and so we can talk the same. We talk the same, and you know they understand.” In addition to seeing her sorority as a safe space to use her language, the participant described another area on campus, Old Main, which houses the Museum of American Indian studies, as a safe space:

There’s a room in Old Main that a lot of Native American students use. So, a lot of Native American students here are a part of the Lumbee tribe. And so, we go there, and we kind of just chill and hangout, and so it’s kind of like a comfort space.

After this statement, I asked her if she felt free to use her dialect in this area, and she responded with the following comment:

Mm-hm, and there may be some staff. There is actually some staff that have like the same uh Lumbee language, so when I’m talking to them, it’s like okay, they understand. That’s also when I feel comfortable, too. I don’t have to speak in a different dialect.

There are places on UNCP’s campus where students feel more comfortable using their language. Fraternities, sororities, religious groups, and particular rooms on campus were all described as safe spaces for these students. Though some participants faced language oppression in classrooms, there were some contexts on campus that uplifted Lumbee English use.

### **Linguistic Diversity at Home**

As shown in the interviews, the participants have pressure placed on them to speak standard English in school. To do this, they must go from speaking Lumbee English to using the standard dialect; however, the participants explained when they leave campus and go back home, there is another expectation placed upon them: to speak Lumbee English. All the participants shared the experiences they had with their family's view of their use of standard English.

One participant recalled several experiences with her eleven-year-old sister, who would ask, "Why are you talking like that?" when she spoke standard English at home. She also explained that at home, it was lenient. She was not expected to speak the standard, but she was expected to speak Lumbee English. Similarly, another participant explained, "When I'm at home, I have to change the way I speak to make sure I'm speaking Lumbee English. If I don't, I'm talking white...If I say 'water' instead of 'wutur' yeah, I'm talking white." Additionally, the participant explained that he had to find a balance between using Standard English and Lumbee English at home, which is a concept the other participants did not discuss:

That's another thing... You can't be too white, and you can't be too Lumbee. Does that make sense? Because if we, I, say something that my great grandma or my great aunts the way they would have said it, my little brother would say "no, that's not the way you say that," and so it's kind of like Lumbee English is fading even at home.

This participant was not the only one to discuss the limits of Lumbee English use placed upon them at home:

[My family tries] to tell us not to sound so Lumbee, like we're from the back country or something like that, but uh... I mean you can't actually help how you talk. You can change it up as much as you can, but it's not going to completely go away.

When I asked her to elaborate on her experiences of speaking at home, she recalled:

During high school, I use to dance in Charlotte, so Charlotte's completely different from here, so I would go to Charlotte... Uh, and I would switch up how I talk because if I went there and talk how I talk [in Pembroke], they would say "hm, you sound different," and most people when they hear a Southern accent, they think you're dumb automatically. And then I would come home and then I'd speak... I would speak how I spoke in Charlotte, and they would say why do you sound like that... you know funny... like you sound like you're trying to be somebody else, so it just... I think it goes wherever you go they're going to ask why you sound different.

The participants all had to navigate using a different language at home than at school or in areas that oppress language. Participants described the difficulties of finding a balance between speaking standard English and Lumbee English, as well as knowing when to use a particular language. Additionally, these responses show that there is pressure for the participants to speak in one language at home and one language at school. Though one participant explained that there was more leniency at home, she, along with the other participants, actually described quite the opposite. Just like at an educational setting, the participants are being forced to speak Lumbee English at home. This highlights the conflicts the participants face because of linguistic oppression.

### **Code-Switching**

When I asked the participants if their language has changed since attending UNCP, a common theme that came about was code-switching. Some participants used the term code-switching and others implied they were code-switching from their responses. When asked if the

way she speaks has changed since attending UNCP, one participant explicitly stated she used code-switching as a result of attending college:

**Participant:** Do you mean do I think I try to sound more professional?

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Participant:** Um, I think in a sense. Like I know how to code-switch. It's just you know, it comes natural. After so long, it's like okay, this is how I have to be here, and this is how I can be here.

This participant adapted code-switching after attending college; however, this was not the case for all participants. When asked how the transition from the high school setting to the college setting was with a dialect, one participant discussed her transition from high school to college, and how she had already utilized code-switching:

Um, I think in high school it was... um... I guess harder because I was younger, so I didn't know you take English all through your entire life pretty much but you don't really understand like all the rules and stuff until high school. They got really hard on us about how we wrote, and what it was and all that. So, when I got to college, it wasn't really that difficult for me because I knew exactly what I was supposed to say, and what I was not supposed to say on paper.

Later in the interview, I asked the same participant if she believed the way she has spoken has changed since attending UNCP. She immediately described code-switching in her response:

“Yeah, so if I'm at home just chilling, I'll... I'm not trying to impress anybody, but if I'm up front of the class like presenting, I have to turn it on just to like... like my professional speaking.”

Another participant explained that since coming to UNCP, he had to change the way he spoke on campus:



Sometimes you have to turn it on and turn it off. Since I'm an orientation leader, if I talk... like Lumbee slang to new students when they come here, they're not going to understand a word I say. And I still have parents say, "What did you just say?" And I'm still trying to talk proper, or what they classify as proper, so it's kind interesting that you still have to do that whereas other people don't really see it as that. They just see it as you're not talking proper.

Once they found out about their dialect being viewed as inferior to standard English, all the participants began code-switching in order to fit in to their varying communities. Though code-switching is a recommended way of navigating between language communities, these responses show that the participants believed that standard English was superior to Lumbee English. This is displayed through their use of referring to standard English as "the professional language."

### **The Language Hierarchy**

In the interviews, participants' responses often implied the concept of a language hierarchy. For instance, when participants were asked, "Do you think that educators should allow you to speak in your dialect?" One participant's response highlighted the idea of a language hierarchy:

I think to a certain extent because you know when you have foreign teachers come in, you're not... I don't get on to my teachers about their accents, so I don't see why another teacher should get on me about mine. I feel like, um, you just can't help where you were born and how you speak, so someone from India of course, and someone from Spain... of course they're going to have an accent because that's where they're from, and that's how they speak. So, we are from here, and we learned to speak here, so it's in us. You can't take it out.

This response highlighted the concept of a language hierarchy. The situation the participant described conveyed the idea that some dialects are not seen as inferior even if they deviate from the standard. Furthermore, the response shows that Lumbee English is a part of the participants' identity and community.

### **Educated Versus Uneducated**

The concept of language use of the educated versus uneducated was a topic that came out of the participants' interviews. When asked whether family members made comments about language use at home, one participant explained, "As far as my mom, my mom is kind of educated. She went to a community college, so she understands..." A similar comment came about when I asked the participant how she defined Lumbee English:

I'm going to a primarily Native American church, and so a lot of people there are uneducated. Like the older people are uneducated, and so they talk in a slang. Their grammar is not as well and also their accents. Even when I go out of town, people can automatically tell, "okay, you must be from North Carolina, or you must be from Lumberton or Fayetteville."

The participants' remark conveyed that though she is a speaker of Lumbee English, she views her language as inferior to standard English. This statement promotes the belief that if someone speaks a language that deviates from the standard, he or she is uneducated.

### **Home-Coming and Identity**

Throughout the interviews, the discussion of homecoming came up for three participants. When I asked one participant "Do you think your dialect is a part of your community/your identity," her response was

Yeah, of course...like when we go to Pow-wows. So, the Lumbee tribe and other tribes, like the Haliwaa-Saponi tribe... Like their dialect is so much different than ours, um. So, I think it's something we take pride in of course. Because not everyone has it, you know? When I posed the same question to another participant, he also discussed the Pow-wow/homecoming:

**Participant:** When we have um, have you ever been around here for Homecoming? Like fourth of July with the 50,000 Lumbees?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** That's like one of the happiest moments in the year for me when all those people... I don't know. It just makes me happy

**Interviewer:** So, when you're at homecoming, is everyone using the same language?

**Participant:** Yeah, and it just feels good. Yeah, thousands of people around who are just like you. It just makes me happy.

**Interviewer:** So, the people who come back to Pembroke... do they still have their dialects when they come to homecoming?

**Participant:** Um, I don't know. That's a good question, and I don't know. I feel like even if you've been gone for years, and you kind of lost it, when you come back, and you start hearing things, you think "Oh, my God! Yeah! That is the way we used to say that."

### **Using Language on Campus**

When I asked participants if they believe there should be more opportunities on campus for dialect use, they all responded that they should have more opportunities to use their language:

Yeah, I think there should be more opportunities. I think that comes with professors' teaching styles. Some want to get to know you, and some are just there for strictly like

the work, and I really wish there were more opportunities. Like even maybe a mini orientation or an ice breaker or something.

Another participant explained that he did want to use his language on campus, but he also realized the importance of standard English:

Because classrooms are so diverse, I think that students should speak Standard English.

Before I began actually putting effort into speaking Standard English, it would sometimes be very difficult for people who weren't familiar with my dialect to understand what I was saying.

The participants' responses showed they believed that standard English is important on campus; however, one of the participants described the need for more opportunity to use Lumbee English on campus. Through "Some [professors] want to get to know you, and some are just there for strictly like the work, and I really wish there were more opportunities," the participant equated educators' views on the use of Lumbee English to their interest in students. This conveyed that the participants noticed the way the educators viewed their dialects, and they believe that by allowing them to speak in their own language, the educator truly wants to know his or her students.

### **Discussion**

The participants' responses in the interviews displayed that language oppression began as early as elementary school for some. In schools, even with a Lumbee teacher, one participant was made aware by his teacher that Lumbee English was not seen as acceptable in the classroom. The results showed that educators did inform students that they must use standard English rather than Lumbee English, yet they did not provide an explanation to the participants about why they could not use their first language in the classroom. The participants' responses showed they all

use code-switching because of the feedback they received from their instructors, yet the responses did not indicate they knew why they had to change their dialect based upon the context. Furthermore, the participants did not mention any occurrence where they learned about linguistic diversity. Instead, when they started school or arrived at the University, they quickly learned that Lumbee English was not viewed as acceptable.

For some participants, the transition from the high school setting to the college setting was not difficult because they already experienced language oppression in high school; however, as the participants pointed out, there were professors who took interest in and valued their dialect in college, whereas that was not the case in high school; for the other participants, going to college as a speaker of Lumbee English was difficult because it was the first time someone explicitly said they could not use their language.

Once students became aware of their dialects, they began code-switching. Though code-switching is an effective means for communication in varying communities, it can become problematic, as the participants reported. All the participants expressed the difficulties that accompany code-switching. They described having to find a balance between not talking “white” and not talking “too Lumbee.”

Additionally, two of the participants mentioned that once they learned they were supposed to use standard English instead of Lumbee English, they went home and began correcting family members on their own uses of language. This exemplifies Althusser’s concept of ideological state apparatuses. Once participants are influenced by the dominant ideology, they attempt to enforce the hegemony of standard English on others, which makes the oppressed play a role in their own oppression because they, too, see Lumbee language as inferior. The idea of the oppressed becoming the oppressors is highlighted when the participants’ responses indicated

they view Lumbee English as inferior to standard English. This was shown when participants labelled standard English as the “professional language.” When they view standard English as professional, it reinforces the idea that standard English is equated to power.

As the participants explained, Lumbee English played a large role in their identities. Their language is more than an English dialect. Instead, their language conveys their ability to persevere. It is a reminder of the Tribe’s strength and resilience. Wolfram et al. (2002) explained that the Lumbee language “is about the linguistic creativity, flexibility, and resiliency of a cultural group that has shaped and reshaped its identity through available language resources, in this case, mainly through English” (p. 3). As participants defined Lumbee English as vocabulary and pronunciation, they also discussed the ideas of home and togetherness. Through Lumbee English, the Lumbee Tribe is able to overcome the barriers placed upon them. The Tribe’s language should be uplifted and their resilience should be admired instead of simply ignored or oppressed because their language symbolizes the challenges the Tribe has overcome. This can be accomplished by creating awareness about linguistic differences, especially in educational settings where there is power to change the belief that some regional dialects are superior to others. Educational settings are responsible for sharing knowledge with others, and knowledge regarding linguistic differences should be valued and shared in academic communities.

### **Implications for Educators**

Though it is important for students to learn standard English, since it is often necessary for societal success, it is essential that educators also display the value of linguistic diversity in the classroom. It is not only imperative that educators have knowledge about linguistic differences, but they must teach students about dialectal differences in order to change the way society views dialect. By showing the value of dialect in the classrooms, not only would

educators be taking steps toward ending language oppression in the classroom, but they would aid in changing society's outlook on dialects that differ from standard English.

If students are aware of dialectal differences at an early age, they will be more likely to successfully navigate the transition from the high school setting to the college setting. This is why it is essential educators are aware of ways they can implement language diversity knowledge in the classroom. Currently, subtractive or additive approaches are being deployed in classrooms as a way to deal with linguistic diversity (Looker, 2016). For subtractive approaches, the ideology is that standard English should be the sole dialect used in the classroom. This approach does not account for linguistic diversity, nor does it place value on one's home dialect. This is a problematic approach in the classroom because as Delpit (2006) explained, when students have to choose between a home language and a school language, there is potential for conflict. This conflict could be in one's identity, or it could create a student's negative view toward the school, which could cause a decline in students' achievements in learning. Delpit highlighted this idea through her explanation that if a student has a conflict in his or her group identity, he or she can experience difficulties in the oral production of the target dialect. Further, Delpit argued students become aware of their group memberships by ages eight or nine; therefore, they also become aware of negative attitudes toward their language. If they experience negative feedback regarding their languages, it could cause students to develop an affective filter, where they shut down completely, or it could cause them to feel forced to choose between their school communities and their home communities; therefore, this could cause issues with identity development. Though language is an important part of one's identity, allowing students to only speak in their language is a quixotic idea. Standard English is important because not

teaching students standard English will only set them up for limited opportunities. It is possible to teach students standard English while showing them that their languages are valued.

Samantha Looker offered a way for educators to respect and incorporate linguistic diversity in the freshman composition classroom. Looker suggested the implementation of a language autobiography as a major writing assignment. In this assignment, students will compare their language to other language use in various contexts. By completing this assignment, students will learn that language varies depending upon the context.

Like Looker, Delpit (2006) offered a synthesis of other solutions to language oppression, which are currently being implemented in classrooms across the United States. For younger children, Delpit asserted that using cartoons in the classroom and highlighting linguistic pluralism in cartoons is a good way to create dialogue about diversity. In addition, literature can play a large role in understanding linguistic diversity. Parents can bring in songs, poems, and other types of literature to share with the class that highlights different dialects (Farr & Quintanar-Sarellana, 2005). Also, linguistically diverse children's books can serve as a useful way to promote language diversity. For older students, there are activities instructors can implement in the classroom that promote critical thinking about language diversity. Educators can have students create bidialectal dictionaries of their own language and Standard English (Delpit, 2006). If educators have a difficult time finding activities for teaching linguistic diversity in the classroom, using information and activities from English as a second language courses is a great way to discover ideas. Though the information is written for classrooms in an attempt to understand the various backgrounds of ESL students, the idea is the same for teaching language diversity. Implementing these activities in the classroom is critical for teaching



linguistic diversity. Discussing language diversity, though important, is not sufficient for making students truly understand language diversity.

Though I offer a synthesis of solutions for educators to use in the writing classroom, it is pertinent for educators to understand that language diversity awareness should not just take place in the English classroom but all classrooms. This can be achieved if all educators are aware of linguistic diversity. Also, it is essential educators understand the complexities of language differences; educators must hold the ideology that all languages are important and are tied directly to students' identity and community. In order for educators to understand this, it is important that preparation programs for educators explicitly teach pre-service educators about linguistic diversity; however, this is not currently a requirement, nor is it common, in educational programs.

UNC-Pembroke is represented as one of the most diverse universities in the UNC-system, yet until 2015, there was a requirement that each student pass a speech test as a General Education requirement ("General Education Requirements," 2018). This course, titled "Fundamentals of Voice and Diction," had the following course description: "Introduction to the fundamentals of voice and diction for the beginning student. The course consists of practical exercises designed to introduce the student to General American Speech" ("General Education Requirements," 2018, para. 3). Aimed at speakers whose languages deviated from the standard, this course forced students to use standard English in speech, since there was a speech test that students were required to pass. Though the speech test has since been eliminated, the course shows the linguistic oppression students faced on campus. Eliminating the test was a positive step to end oppression, yet linguistic diversity is still not being valued across campus. Though some professors incorporate linguistic knowledge in their own classrooms, UNC-Pembroke's

Education Department does not have any instruction or course in place to educate pre-service teachers about linguistic diversity in the classroom. Because of this lack of instruction, there will be a cycle of instructors going into classrooms, unknowingly oppressing language. This is true for most education programs. There needs to be more research on how to properly teach pre-service and in-service educators on how to handle linguistic diversity in classrooms to aid in ending language oppression. Educating those who work at educational institutions that influence students' minds will aid in ceasing language oppression in classrooms. This type of education will also have the power to change the way society views language, which will help eliminate the idea of a language hierarchy and linguistic prejudice.

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