

Teachers and educational institutions play a crucial role in creating, maintaining, and challenging linguistic prejudice. They are central to shaping attitudes toward different language varieties and can either reinforce harmful stereotypes or promote linguistic diversity and respect.

## Creating and Maintaining Prejudice

Educational systems can unintentionally contribute to prejudice through several practices:

- **Focusing on a Single Standard:** By promoting only one variety of English (e.g., British Received Pronunciation or General American English) as the correct or "proper" way to speak, schools can implicitly stigmatize other accents and dialects. This teaches students that their own natural language is "wrong," which can lead to feelings of inadequacy.
- **Correction Based on Accent:** When teachers correct students for pronunciation or grammar that deviates from the standard, they may be reinforcing the idea that certain varieties are inferior. This is particularly harmful when a student's non-standard speech is a fundamental part of their cultural or regional identity.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Many educators are not trained to recognize or address linguistic prejudice. They may hold unconscious biases that influence how they perceive and evaluate students' abilities, mistaking a non-standard accent for a lack of intelligence or a poor grasp of the language.

## Challenging Prejudice

Conversely, teachers and institutions can actively challenge linguistic prejudice by adopting more inclusive and equitable practices:

- **Promoting Linguistic Diversity:** Educational institutions can incorporate the study of different English varieties into the curriculum. By teaching students about **World Englishes**, dialects like African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and regional accents, schools can help students understand that language is diverse and that no single variety is superior.
- **Valuing All Varieties:** Teachers can create a classroom environment where all students' linguistic backgrounds are respected and valued. Instead of correcting a student's speech, they can focus on clear communication and understanding. For example, a teacher can explain that while a standard variety is used for formal writing, the student's spoken dialect is just as valid for everyday communication.
- **Implementing Inclusive Policies:** School and university administrators can implement policies that combat accent-based discrimination. This includes training teachers to be more aware of their biases and promoting hiring practices that do not penalize applicants for their accents. By embracing linguistic diversity and educating students on the social nature of language, teachers and schools can transform their role from maintaining prejudice to actively fighting for linguistic equity.