

Topic	Linguistic autobiography: we are the languages we speak	Duration	120 minutes
Type	Lesson Plan		
CEFR level	B2		

GOALS/PURPOSE/AIMS

- Understand linguistic diversity in the classroom.
- Understand the differences between standard variety and vernacular variety.
- Reflect on personal experiences with language/accent discrimination.
- Inspire empathic behaviour towards non-native speakers of the national language of the country.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES USED

- Excerpts from novels, films (in English and in different languages) presenting reflections on languages and linguistic autobiographies, which serve as an invaluable tool in fostering students' self-awareness regarding (a) their linguistic identities and experiences; (b) the variety of linguistic influences, whether familial, educational, or societal, that shape an individual's perception and use of language.

- Newspaper article: Dina Nayery, “Foreign mothers, foreign tongues: “In another universe she could have been my friend” *The Guardian*, 9.03.2023 (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/mar/09/foreign-mothers-foreign-tongues-in-another-universe-she-could-have-been-my-friend>).
- Film: *Belfast* (2021) written and directed by Kenneth Branagh, from minutes 57 and from minutes 61.
- Novels: excerpts from Douglas Stuart, *Shuggie Bain*; Douglas Stuart, *Young Mungo* [the ones devoted to Glasgowian accent vs. British accent].

PROCEDURES (STRUCTURE)

1. Warm Up: Introducing the topic (10 minutes):

The teacher asks some questions to spark the conversation in the class: *How many languages do you think we have in this classroom?*

The teacher writes the number(s) on the blackboard, then asks/writes:

- Are all languages on the same level? Why?
- Are the labels ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ synonyms?
- What is a ‘linguistic autobiography’?

Introducing key vocabulary:

- The teacher assigns a student to read the related vocabulary from the table: *Language, Dialect, Vernacular, Linguistic variety, Accent*.
- The teacher asks students to define the words they know with examples/definitions.

2. Presentation of a selection of linguistic autobiographies/reflections from materials section (10 min)

3. Setting up the writing task (a personal linguistic autobiography) by providing (a selection of) the following prompts (20 min):

- **Personal background:** personal data (name, age, gender), birthplace, family migration history, changes in place of residence.
- **Family language dynamics** (immediate or extended family):
 - Parents' linguistic backgrounds, mother tongue(s), and professional domains.
 - Grandparents' linguistic heritage, job (if any) and their role in linguistic transmission; i.e., mother: Place of birth, relocations, mother tongue, professional occupation, speaks language X with person A and language Y with person B.
 - Household linguistic practices: primary language(s) spoken at home, intergenerational language use, code switching/code mixing tendencies or monolingual ones (i.e., At home, we normally speak X. Grandfather speaks Y with Z because ... At the dining table, we speak ... When we go to Z, we speak more often in...).
 - Other possible points that can be described: early linguistic environment, exposure to multiple languages or dialects, memory linked to language, how a word or sentence that was misunderstood marked a turning point, linguistic humor or strict linguistic rules within the family, complexity of multilingual or monolingual communication.

- **Personal analysis and daily linguistic practices:**
 - Taxonomy of languages, dialects, and varieties used throughout a typical day: i.e., what is your mother tongue? What other languages have you learned, where, from whom, and why? How many languages (dialects, vernaculars, or varieties) do you use in a day?
 - Differences in linguistic choices across different contexts: home, school, public spaces, and peer groups; i.e., In which contexts do you use one language instead of another? Which language (dialect, vernacular, or variety) do I use at home? At school? In shops? In social settings (cafés, gyms, churches, clubs)?
 - Contexts in which code-mixing occurs (switching languages within a single conversation, i.e., Do I ever use different languages in the same environment?)
 - A personal linguistic ritual: a language-specific greeting, a phrase that brings comfort, an expression that feels untranslatable and unique.

- **Family language attitudes:**
 - Explicit or implicit linguistic ideologies (i.e., purism, dialect stigmatization, pride about being multilingual).
 - Hidden linguistic practices (i.e., transgression of dialect use or secret codes among siblings; “grandparents’ deviations” i.e. speaking local and traditional varieties despite family disapproval).
 - A family debate or anecdote about language (i.e., a parent insisting on “proper” speech; a grandparent lamenting a lost dialect).

- Regional language perceptions (i.e., linguistic confidence that non-standard varieties are considered privileged. “In region X, dialects do not exist, we speak “the standard language”).
- **Personal milestones in linguistic awareness (from childhood to adolescence):**
 - Early encounters with linguistic variation (i.e., interactions with relatives from different regions or nations, childhood holidays in linguistically diverse settings).
 - Encounters with linguistic prejudice or appreciation (i.e., school, holidays, relatives, any other kind of setting).
 - Changes in self-perception due to linguistic identity shifts (i.e., moving to a new region or country).
 - A moment when language felt like empowerment (i.e., cultural pride, personal expression of oneself, the first time in which you understood a secret conversation, the first use of a new language to solve a problem).
 - Educational experiences and language policies in school (role of formal education in shaping linguistic self-awareness):
 - Experiences of language suppression or encouragement in school (e.g., dialect and variety repression or multilingual support attitudes and initiatives).
 - Influence of specific teachers or methodologies on linguistic development and its consequences on oneself or peers.
 - Judgments on language learning in school contexts and outside of school (i.e., extracurricular language learning experiences, experiences abroad in the country where the foreign language studied is actually spoken).

- A breakthrough moment in language learning (i.e., the first successful conversation, a word that finally made sense, a book or film that opened new linguistic doors).
- A defining moment in school when language played a crucial role (i.e., an unexpected difficulty, a teacher's encouragement, an exam where language itself became the challenge).
- **Peer group influence and socio-linguistic identity:**
 - Conservation or abandonment of dialects and informal linguistic practices within peer groups. Reflection on how conversation or abandonment depends on the linguistic habits of your social group, i.e., playful, cryptic, or identity-driven uses of dialects or multilingual expressions; instances of dialectal or linguistic resurgence for comedic or cultural solidarity purposes.
 - A linguistic in-group moment (i.e., a nickname with a special meaning, a slang term only understood within a group, a language "game" played among friends).
- **Linguistic perceptions and preferences:**
 - Your own ability to identify different accents, dialects, or languages (i.e., I can identify dialect X, because it is part of my mother's language heritage).
 - Personal affinities or aversions toward specific local dialects/languages or foreign languages (i.e., I like language X, because it sounds Y; I dislike dialect Z, because it seems...).
 - Influence of media, literature, and music on linguistic identity formation (i.e., I learned English while listening to music X...).

4. Writing activities (30 min):

Each student writes his/her own linguistic autobiography.

Reciprocity and professional deontology: educators can choose to share their own linguistic autobiographies, demonstrating the exercise's depth and significance, as well as connecting and putting themselves on the same level as students, who are about to share their personal data and sensitive experiences. It is also advisable to reassure students that they are not obligated to sign their paper submissions, if they don't feel comfortable with sharing certain personal events or situations.

5. Feedback activities (on a different day, 60 min):

A selection of the linguistic autobiographies produced is presented to the classroom. The teacher is invited to structure the feedback process around thematic discussions, ensuring that all students' experiences are represented while maintaining anonymity. Key excerpts from their narratives are extracted and categorized on the basis of recurring themes such as multilingualism in the household, dialect retention, school language policies or more creative and personalized categories (it depends on the data received). To visualize trends, color-coded text might be used to distinguish diverse perspectives.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Ability to speak about the self via the languages we speak.

ASSESSMENT/REFLECTION

- How many languages are in the classroom?
- No one is monolingual.
- Every language matters.