# Articulating Language Diversity

Andrew Durand

## Introduction

After looking at several examples of student writing, I noticed a misunderstanding surrounding the building of complete sentences.  I wanted to address an issue that I knew would lead professors in other disciplines to misunderstand the student's writing ability. There is a balance to be sought between instructing students about the "accepted" mechanics of grammar and encouraging them towards inventional heuristics that will allow them to carry writing knowledge into other contexts. The following lesson aims to build an awareness in the students about grammar conventions and then swiftly move into a discussion on the diverse contexts rhetoric adapts to.  I wanted students to leave the class understanding that their language belongs to them and that they possessed the agency to use it effectively within their various discourse communities.

## Semester Timing

This activity came as an introduction to the *Genres in the Wild* unit. I was in the process of grading their Literacy Narratives, and during this grading process noticed grammar trends in the student's writing. This was the first time I formally brought up grammar in the classroom. I wanted to use this topic to transition into a discussion of discourse communities and the use of genres within those communities.

## Lesson Context

I did a quick grammar lesson at the start of the class period. This lesson lasted about 15 minutes total. I selected pieces from their writing and displayed them (anonymously) on the projection screen. We discussed ways to edit the various sentences in light of the readings they were assigned for homework out of *Writing in Action* (Sections 28-30).

I transitioned from this quick lesson into a discussion on discourse communities. This discussion was prompted with a couple questions. Why is this grammar considered correct? Who makes this decision? The goal here was to get the students thinking about power structures surrounding discourse.



*Figure 1:PowerPoint Slide*

What followed was a short presentation on the concept of discourse communities. This included providing a simple framework explaining how discourse communities are formed as well as an explanation on how we move in-between these communities. To better illustrate these concepts, I showed the students the TED talk, *3 ways to speak English*, by Jamila Lyiscott (https://youtu.be/k9fmJ5xQ_mc). After watching this video, I then introduced the gallery crawl activity.

## Discourse Activity

There were a couple differences between this activity surrounding discourse communities and the literacy maps. I noticed that the students were, for the most part, uncomfortable with drawing activities, so for this assignment I kept the drawing to text. I asked them to be creative with the letters they wrote and provided an example of block letters. Ultimately I wanted an artifact that could be read.  What I had them do was illustrate how they communicate with a close friend or family member. I posed a hypothetical situation for discourse. On the board I wrote, "Hello. What are you doing? I'm doing _____." The object they were to produce was a translation of this exchange into a form of discourse they felt comfortable with. I asked them to write these words in a creative way with colored paper and markers. After finishing, they taped the posters on the wall. I had them go around and respond to their classmates with post-it notes. I also reminded them to spread the responses around equitably so that everyone received several responses. Once they were finished responding, they could leave for the day.
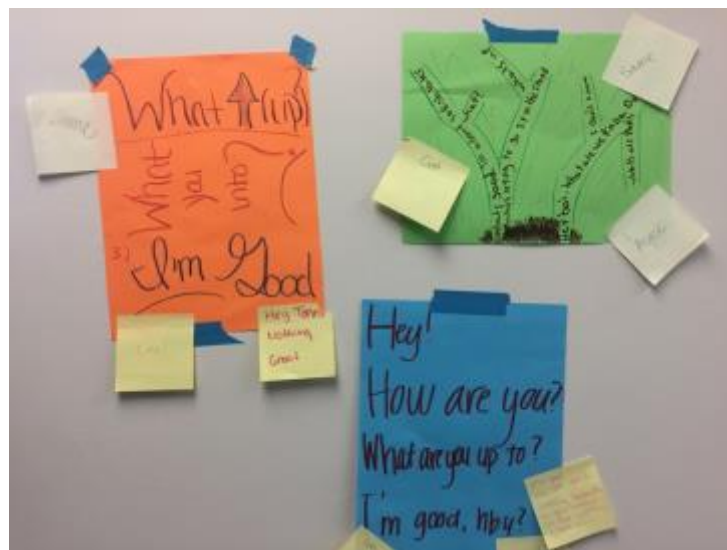


*Figure 2: Student Examples*

# References

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