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### Culture Shock

I remember answering the phone last week and listening to my friend Emily whimper. She had recently returned from a trip to Seattle, for which she had studied her speech intensively. For weeks prior to the trip, she shortened syllables and trimmed her southern drawl. She streamlined her vocabulary, eradicating such words as *y'all* and *country* (pronounced "kuhntree"). I answered the phone and heard her testify that her sophisticated Seattle friends told her that she was "so cute" and that her numbers all had two syllables. After becoming flustered by her cuteness, she stammered, "Y'all stop!" From that point on, she refrained from talking in public in Seattle.

Language can serve as a stumbling block for people of all ages, races, and localities. Just as Emily and other southerners despise being labeled as unintelligent and cute, northern people sometimes despise being labeled harsh and abrasive because of their dialect.

Another scenario of language limbo comes from a personal experience. As a child, I enjoyed spending time at my grandfather's house. We would watch baseball together and stroll around the neighborhood looking for adventures. I loved listening to my grandfather talk because he had a special language all of his own. He called lunch "dinner" and dinner "supper." He also used words and phrases like *ain't no*, *plum lerapin*, and *okry*. I liked this new language, and I learned to speak it well. Unfortunately, my mother and teacher showed no interest in either learning or listening to my new language.

Anthropologists believe that language is effective as long as the speaker and the listener communicate an idea. Many English teachers and prestigious organizations disagree with this theory, believing that the only effective communication takes place when using standard American English with a Central United States dialect. Although there is a proper time and place for MLA-style English, other times there is a distinct need for a different dialect. How could the flower girl in *Pygmalion* have been properly identified without her lower-class British accent?

Dialect captures some of the soul of its speaker. The harsh diction and prominent nasal sounds of a New Yorker reflect the harshness of the winter winds and the resilience of its residents. The drawl of a southerner reflects a slower pace of life and a respect of nature. The respect of a southern individual for family and friends is illustrated in the word *y'all*. Why else would it be so prevalent in southern speech? It is a term that specifies “you all.”

Respecting and appreciating each culture’s dialect help one to understand the richness and values of that culture. Instead of teasing one another, we should spend more time seeking out the positive points of another dialect. My grandfather’s dialect and vocabulary helped me to understand some of his past. Once individuals get past the stereotypes of dialects, they can understand the ideals of a speaker more clearly. Emily’s friends, after getting past the accent, discovered the intelligent, lighthearted, and beautiful person she is. With a greater understanding of languages and pasts, Americans can start appreciating each other in a new way.