

# Language Varieties' Influence on Letter Sounds

We are committed to teaching all students to read. To better understand students' instructional needs, we recommend taking their language backgrounds into consideration. This includes students who may speak other languages (e.g., English language learners and dual language learners) as well as those who may speak other language varieties. Language variety is another term for dialect; each language variety follows complex, rule-governed phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical systems. There are many different variations of the English language, which may be spoken by students in the classroom. The one used in mainstream print media, business, and education is General American English (GAE). Our goal is for students to encode their oral system into a written system; by helping students extend their oral language knowledge to include GAE, they will be better prepared to learn the written system of GAE.

Letter sound correspondence in GAE can be influenced by the student's language variety due to different rules in the phonology of non-GAE language variations. This can happen in the following cases:

	Vowel and diphthong sound variations in other language varieties	Consonant and consonant digraph sound variations in other language varieties
<b>Explanation</b>	<p>In General American English (GAE), each of the five vowel graphemes has its own specific short and long sounds, and diphthong graphemes (e.g., <i>oy</i> and <i>ow</i>) have their unique sound, which comprise the 44 sounds of the English system.</p> <p>In some other language varieties, two different vowel graphemes may produce the same short vowel sound. This is typical of the short /i/ and short /e/ in certain words. It can also occur with r-controlled vowels, and diphthongs. In such cases, children may use the phoneme pronunciation used in their speech when they decode words and/or read letters in isolation.</p>	<p>In GAE, there are 44 phonemes (sounds). Each phoneme can be represented by one or several different graphemes (written letters); graphemes can stand for one or more sounds, e.g., the letter <i>m</i> only has one sound (/m/) but the letter <i>c</i> can have two sounds (/s/ or /k/). The same applies to digraphs, e.g., <i>th</i> can stand for /th/ voiced (e.g., <i>that</i>) or unvoiced (e.g., <i>thing</i>); but most digraph graphemes only have one phoneme.</p> <p>In some other language varieties, a consonant or consonant digraph grapheme may be pronounced differently, and stand for a different phoneme based on its position in the word. For example, <i>th</i> may be pronounced as /f/ at the end of a word (e.g., a person may say <i>maf</i> for the word <i>math</i>) or as /d/ at the beginning of a word (e.g., a person may say <i>dis</i> for the word <i>this</i>). In such cases, children may use the phoneme pronunciation most similar to their speech when they decode words and/or read letters in isolation.</p>

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<p><b>Example – how does this affect letter sound recognition?</b></p>	<p>Students may say /i/ when reading e or /e/ when reading i because they pronounce the short /i/ and short /e/ the same way (e.g., <i>pen</i> and <i>pin</i> sound the same in their language variety). This variation may be apparent in their writing as well. (AAE, AppE, MAE, and SoE)</p>	<p>Students may say <i>maf</i> for <i>math</i>, <i>muv-uh</i> for <i>mother</i>, or <i>dis</i> for <i>this</i> in their language variety; so when they encounter <i>th</i> in a word, they may read it as /f/, /v/, or /d/ depending on the placement of the <i>th</i> grapheme. (AAE and MAE)</p> <p>Students may say /v/ when reading <i>b</i> or /b/ when reading <i>v</i>. (MAE)</p> <p>These variations may be apparent in students' writing as well.</p>
<p><b>Applicable language varieties</b></p>	<p>African American English (AAE) Appalachian English (AppE) Mexican American English (MAE) Southern English (SoE)</p>	<p>African American English (AAE) Mexican American English (MAE) Southern English (SoE)</p>
<p><b>Instructional tips</b></p>	<p>To determine whether or not students can recognize or produce letter sounds in GAE, familiarize yourself with your students' language varieties phonetic systems. Writing opportunities will also help make this clear, e.g., if a student writes <i>pin</i> for <i>pen</i>, this confirms their perception that /e/ may be represented by the grapheme <i>i</i>.</p> <p>Students may need explicit instruction with many opportunities for modeling and practice to support their pronunciation and writing of certain letter sounds in GAE that are either different from or do not exist in their language variety.</p>	<p>To determine whether or not students can recognize or produce letter sounds in GAE, familiarize yourself with your students' language varieties phonetic systems. Writing opportunities will also help make this clear, e.g., if a student writes <i>wif</i> for <i>with</i>, this confirms their perception of /th/ in the final position of words as /f/.</p> <p>Students may need explicit instruction with many opportunities for modeling and practice to support their pronunciation and writing of certain letter sounds in GAE that are either different from or do not exist in their language variety.</p>
<p><b>More on...</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Vowel and diphthong sound variations</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Consonant and consonant digraph sound variations</a></p>