An Analysis of the Interaction of Language, Topic, and Listener

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In this paper we shall examine some of the characteristics of sociolinguistic research, and illustrate with a detailed example. The companion field of psycholinguistics (Osgood and Sebeok 1954; Saporta 1961) has concentrated heavily on individual psychology: perception, learning, individual differences, pathology. Social psychology has appeared primarily in attitude studies (Osgood et al. 1957:189-216), not in psycholinguistic research concerning socialization and acculturation, or small-group and institutional behavior. Thus, in the very fields which overlap most with sociology and sociolinguistics, psycholinguistic research is least developed.

Sociolinguists study verbal behavior in terms of the relations between the setting, the participants, the topic, the functions of the interaction, the form, and the values held by the participants about each of these (Hymes 1962:25). Verbal behavior (talk and its equivalents) is the center of this definition, but of course a complete description of the system must include gestures or pictures when they are functional alternatives to linguistic signs. Verbal behavior is everywhere structured as a highly cohesive system, and therefore it is a convenient starting point. Others might want to deal with a larger set of communicative acts including, for instance, the dance and exchange of tangible objects.

SETTING

We shall use the term setting here in two senses, that of locale, or time and place, and that of situation, including the "standing behavior patterns" (Barker and Wright 1954:45-46) occurring when people encounter one another. Thus, situations include a family breakfast, a faculty meeting, a party, Thanksgiving dinner, a lecture, or a date. Social situations may be restricted by cultural norms which specify the appropriate participants, the physical setting, the topics, the functions of discourse, and the style. Obviously, situations vary as to which of these restrictions exist and the degree of permissible variation, so that a sermon may allow less style variation than a party. By altering any of these features, one might either create a reaction of social outrage, change the situation to a new one (date becomes job interview), or enter a situation lacking strong normative attributes and allowing maximal variation.

One of the major problems for sociolinguists will be the discovery of independent and reliable methods for defining settings. The folk taxonomy of a given society (Conklin 1962:120) might provide lexical categories for the definition of settings. However, the folk taxonomy may be too gross or too fine to indicate classifications of value to the social scientist. The high degree of regularity of
TOPIC

The manifest content or referent of speech is here called the topic. Topically equivalent sentences may be different in form so that topic is maintained through a paraphrase or translation. Compare these two sentences paraphrased from Watson and Potter (1962:253):

"Every episode of conversation has a focus of attention."

"There is a single topic in each homogeneous unit of interaction." In the terms of Watson and Potter's definitions, these sentences are topically equivalent. Also equivalent are the following: "Shut up!" "Please be quiet." "Take it out!"

Topic includes both gross categories such as subject matter (economics, household affairs, gossip), and the propositional content of utterances. It is the topic which is the concern of cognitive structure studies of kinship systems which differentiate "grandmother" and "mother" but not "mother" and "mommy."

Obviously some expressive speech (ouch!) and some routines (hi!) do not have a manifest topic. Such contentless speech could usually be replaced by gestures. In traditional treatments of language, topic is considered essential and typical because of its absence in most nonhuman and nonlinguistic communication. It seems more appropriate to consider referential speech as simply one subcategory of speech. Topically dissimilar utterances or utterances with and without referential content can be functional equivalents. From a functional standpoint, the following could be equivalents in some situations:

"I'm sorry" = "Excuse me."
"Hi!" = "How are you."

FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERACTION

Within a given setting, verbal discourse may vary in function. We use "function" to refer to the effect on the sender of his actions. Skinner (1957:2) has pointed out that in its social uses language may be viewed as operant (rewarded or punished) behavior, which affects the speaker through the mediation of a hearer. The distinction between topic and function is similar to the one between manifest and latent content, as employed in content analysis. A difference is that since in many speech situations the addressee is known, and subsequent behavior of the sender is known, it is more often possible to delineate functions in ordinary speech than in the texts for which content analysis often is employed.

The following system was developed to account for the initiation of dyadic interactions. It is not intended to cover continuous discourse, but merely initiations. The criterion of classification was the hearer response which could terminate the interaction to the satisfaction of the initiator.

a. Requests for goods, services, or information.

The overt behavior of the hearer is manipulated. E.g., "What time is it?" "Please pass the potatoes." "Slow down!"

b. Requests for social responses.

The desired hearer reactions are often not explicit or even consciously known to the speaker. The subcategories often used are those derived from Murray's need system (1958:315) which includes recognition, dominance, self-abasement, nurturance, affiliation. Behaviorally, overt hearer responses which might be elicited are applause, sympathetic words, laughter, a hug, or an angry retort; but often hearer reactions are covert. E.g., "What a gorgeous dress you're wearing!" "A weird thing happened to me today." "You're a fool."

c. Offering information or interpretation.

Spontaneous instruction evidently based on the belief that the hearer would be gratified to learn. Analogous to spontaneous offer of goods or services. E.g., "That's Orion." "Did you hear about the fire?"

d. Expressive monologues.

Expressions of joy, sorrow, anger; talking to oneself, muttering. The sender reacts to an external stimulus, a feeling, or a problem without attending to the hearer's comments, which may be minimal or absent.

e. Routines.

Greetings, thanks, apologies, offers of service by waitresses and salespeople, where the alternatives are extremely restricted, and hence predictable.

f. Avoidance conversations.

Conversation is started only because the alternative activity is unpleasant or the sender is satiated; any hearer will do, and topics are highly variable. Water-cooler conversations in an office, coffee breaks during study sessions, bus-stop discourse.

A somewhat similar system was developed by Soskin and John (1963) to classify all the utterances in natural conversations. Their system, for instance, differentiates "signones, in which the speaker describes his own state or opinions, from "regones," in which he tries to influence another's behavior. They point out that "signones" such as "I'm still thirsty" or "that tasted good" may in a benign and nurturant environment be used "as a consciously manipulative act." In purely functional terms, such "signones" are requests for goods, services, or information. Thus Soskin and John's classification seems in part to be formal. It is important to treat form separately from function just because there may be systematic discrepancies between manifest and latent function, as indicated in these examples. This point will be discussed further in the next section.

Because functions may not always be explicit, one way to discern latent functions is to examine the sender's reaction to various outcomes. The reason
we know that “Got a match?” is sometimes a social demand rather than a demand for a match is that the speaker may go on chatting even if he fails to get a match. If he primarily wanted a match he would go elsewhere for one. Avoidance conversations are typically masked in the manifest content of other function classes. Small children at bed time may make plausible requests; these could be unmasked if a functionally equivalent alternative response were given—for instance, if one brought a cracker in response to a request for a glass of water. Certain conversational figures must always be masked in a given society; others must be masked for certain receivers or in certain settings. Masking permits functional ambiguity. A woman’s remark to her escort, “It’s cold outside tonight,” might be either an expressive monologue or a request for his coat. Presumably such ambiguity may lead to social embarrassment because of differences in interpretation by speaker and hearer.

**FORMAL FEATURES OF COMMUNICATION**

The form of communication may be viewed as having four aspects. The *channel* might be spoken language, writing, telegraphic signals, etc. As we have indicated, gestural signals on occasion may be systematic alternatives to speech and in such cases are part of the significant exchange. The *code* or *variety* consists of a systematic set of linguistic signals which co-occur in defining settings. For spoken languages, alternative codes may be vernaculars or superposed varieties. *Sociolinguistic variants* are those linguistic alternations linguists regard as free variants or optional variants within a code, that is, two different ways of saying the same thing. *Nonlinguistic vocal signals* include the range of properties called paralinguistic (Trager 1958; Pittenger et al. 1960) which lack the arbitrary properties of linguistic signals.

Linguists have been concerned primarily with codes rather than with the other three classes of formal variation. A discussion of code distinctions especially pertinent to social variations can be found in Gumperz (1961, 1962). He distinguishes between the *vernacular* (the speech used within the home and with peers) and the *superposed variety* (“the norm in one or more socially definable communication situations”). Supersoaped varieties include many types, from occupational argots to koinos used for trade and regional communication, such as Melanesian Flögin and Swahili. A special type of vernacular-koiné relationship exemplified in Greece, German Switzerland, Arab countries, and China, has been called *diglossia* by Ferguson (1959). These all are illustrations of code variations.

A speaker in any language community who enters diverse social situations normally has a repertoire of speech alternatives which shift with situation. Yet linguists have generally focused on relatively pure codes. They do this by trying to control the speech situation with the informant and to keep him from using borrowed forms without identifying them. They also may seek out monolinguals who have mastered only one vernacular, and whose speech constitutes therefore a recognizable norm (though not necessarily a highly valued norm in the larger community). Language communities label some alternative varieties, especially those which either are different enough to interfere with intelligibility, or are identified with specific social groups. “Folk linguistics” of dialect perception and of classification into language and dialect taxonomies bears on the values attached to speaking in a certain way. As Weinreich has pointed out, “accent” perception is systematically biased (1953:21).

It may sometimes be difficult to isolate the features of superposed varieties, because they normally coexist in a single speaker and therefore may interpenetrate. One must seek defining situations demanding rigid adherence to a code (as in prayers) to isolate the features of the code. These may be hard to find in societies like our own with great tolerance for stylistic variability in a given situation. Where the formal difference in varieties is great, as in some diglossias, interpenetration may be more effectively inhibited. Obviously, where code-switching and interpenetration or borrowing are permissible, they become available to mark role and topic shifts within a setting (Gumperz 1964a).

Sociolinguistic variants have received very little attention. Examples are the systematic array of deletions available in answers and requests, as in “Coffee,” vs. “Would you give me some coffee, please?” Request sentences provide some excellent examples of formal variation with functional and topical equivalence. If we use Sokoln and John’s six categories (1963), we find that requests could take any form, as in the following examples:

- “It’s cold today.” (structonic)
- “Lend me your coat.” (regnione) (Also “would you mind lending . . . ?”)
- “I’m cold.” (signone)
- “That looks like a warm coat you have.” (metrone)
- “Br-r-r.” (expressive)
- “I wonder if I brought a coat.” (excogitative)

We could also classify these utterances by more conventional grammatical terms, as declarative, imperative, and interrogative.

It is clear that the selection of these alternatives is not “free” but is conditioned by both situational and personal factors. Student observations have shown that the imperative form is used most often to inferiors in occupational settings, and more often for easy than difficult or unusual services. The yes-no question is the most typical request form to superiors. Informants regarding cross-cultural differences have reported great variation in the “normal” request form to employees in such cases of alternatives as:

- “There’s dust in the corner,” vs. “Sweep the dust from the corner.”
- “It’s haying time,” vs. “Start the haying tomorrow.”

Morphological as well as syntactic options may be available as sociolinguistic variants, as illustrated by Fischer’s analysis (1958) of the alternation between the participial suffixes /-in/ and /-in/. Obviously the choice of referential synonyms (Conklin 1962) is socially conditioned, as anyone reflecting on English synonyms for body functions will recognize. In fact, the number of referential synonyms may be indicative of the complexity of attitudes towards the
referent. Brown and Ford (1961) have observed that the number of terms of address in America is usually directly related to intimacy, nicknames and endearments permitting marking of attitude variations.

The intercorrelation of these variables has been demonstrated in a variety of studies. The following are illustrative:

1) *Particpant-function-form.* Basil Bernstein (1962) has discovered systematic differences between middle-class and working-class adolescent conversation groups in England. These may be summarized as greater emphasis on offering information and interpretation in middle-class groups and on requests for social responses in working-class groups. The effects on form of these function differences were great. The middle-class boys used fewer personal pronouns, a greater variety of adjectives, a greater variety of subordinate conjunctions, more complex syntax, and more pauses.

2) *Participant-form.* Charles Ferguson (1964) has pointed out that in many languages there is a style peculiar to the situation of an adult addressing an infant. The common formal features may include a change in lexicon, simplification of grammar, formation of words by reduplications, simplifying of consonant clusters, and general labialization.

Brown and Gilman (1960) examined many aspects, both contemporary and historical, of the selection of "tu" and "vous" in French address, and the corresponding terms in Italian and German. They found that the selection was based primarily on the relation of sender and receiver, and that historically the selection had been based on relative power, whereas currently relative intimacy is more important. They found national differences, such as greater emphasis on kin-intimacy in Germany and on camaraderie in France and Italy. They also found that personality and ideology influenced individual differences in the sender's selection.

Joan Rubin (1962) found that the choice of Spanish or Guarani for address in Paraguay was describable in terms of the set of dimensions—"solidarity" and "power" or status, and sometimes setting. She gives the example of the use of Spanish by men courting women, and the switch to Guarani with marriage. Thus in a multilingual society a code shift can mark the same contrasts as a sociolinguistic variation in a single language.

Another kind of participant-form study is illustrated by Putnam and O'Hern's analysis (1955) of the relation between social status, judged by sociological indices, and linguistic features of speech in a Negro community in Washington, D. C. This study has many similarities in method to dialect geography, but adds a procedure of judge's blind ratings of status from tapes, to make a three-way comparison possible between objective status, perceived status, and specific features. Labov (1964) gives a sophisticated analysis of a status-form relation.

3) *Function-setting.* A comparison of interactions of a nine-year-old boy at camp and at home, by Gump, Schoggen, and Redl (1963) showed systematic functional changes even in such a subcategory as interactions addressed to adults. The percentage of "sharing" (which was primarily verbal) was higher at camp, and the percentage of "submissive" and "appeal" behavior toward adults was higher at home. Sharing included asking opinion, playing with an adult, competing, telling a story. The child's shifts in behavior may have been effects of the variations in adult-initiated interaction.

Soskin and John (1963:265) used a set of categories which were partially functional in analyzing tapes of a couple on vacation, and showed significant variations with setting. Explicitly directive utterances were most frequent by the wife in the cabin, and by the husband out rowing, where he gave her instructions. Informational utterances were most common for both at meal times.

4) *Topic-form.* In a study of New England children, John Fischer (1958) collected evidence of several factors related to the alternation of the participial suffix /in/ vs. /in/. He found the selection to depend on sender ("typical" vs. "good" boy), and on topic of discourse. He heard "visiting," "correcting," and "reading" vs. "swimming," "chewin," and "hittin.' The topical distribution suggests that behind the alternation by topic lies an alternation by participants, with /in/ being heard from adults, especially teachers, and /in/ being heard from peers.

John Gumperz (1964b) describes the effects of topic on the alternation in Norway between a rural dialect and standard North Norwegian. He found that the type of formal alternation depended on the social properties of the group of addressees.

5) *Setting-form.* Changes of form with setting have been frequently described. Some excellent examples of a shift between a spoken dialect and a superposed variety are provided by Ferguson (1939), for example the shift from classical to colloquial Arabic which accompanies a shift from formal lecturing to discussion in a classroom. Herman (1961) has given a number of examples of the influence of setting on code selection in Israel, pointing out that immigrants speak Hebrew more often in public than in private situations.

Sociolinguistic variations and paralinguistic features were noted by Andrea Kaciff and Camille Chamberlain who compared children's speech in a pre-school playground with their role-playing in a playhouse. The material was reported in an unpublished term paper. They found certain lexical changes, such as the use of role-names in address: "Go to sleep, baby, say goo-goo." They found that the children playing the role of the mother adopted a sing-song intonation especially when rebuking the play child. This intonation was not used by the children except in imitative play, and had been observed by another student in a study of adults' speech to other people's children.

In ordinary social life all of these interacting variables tend to vary together. The public setting of the Israeli immigrants included a different audience than the private setting; the address of adults to children is different in participants, topics, and form at once. In using naturalistic situations, we can discern the critical factors in determination of alternations only if we can find in nature com-
parsisons in which other possibly relevant factors are held constant. An example is lecturing vs. class discussion in diglossia, where the topics, participants, and functions may remain the same but only the situation changes, and with it the form. Where it is not possible to find such orderly experimental situations, an appropriate sequel to the ethnographic method is the social experiment. We shall describe one below.

A JAPANESE BILINGUAL EXPERIMENT

Bilingual speech is convenient to study because the formal changes are vividly apparent. There are many forms of social relation between two language communities. American immigrants, for example, range through a wide spectrum in the diversity of function-language distributions. At one extreme might be an old storekeeper in Chinatown. He rarely needs any knowledge of English except to ask limited-response questions of his customers, or to tell the cost of an item. On the whole, he is like a tourist with request forms and a vocabulary limited to the goods or services exchanged. If he employs English in restricted settings, he may succeed in communicating with a minimum of knowledge of English grammar or phonology.

At the opposite extreme are immigrants who have married Americans and raised families here. They typically vary widely in the functional distribution of their use of English, frequently employing English for as many uses as their native language at home before. The limitations in their use of English occur in certain aspects of the code. They may have gaps in their English vocabulary, reflecting differential exposure, for instance, to rural life in the two countries. They may have difficulties learning a new sound system after adolescence; it is clear that aptitude, personality, and perhaps willingness to lose one's identity as a foreigner vary. Japanese women, for example, often do not respect Nisei, and may not wish to be taken for Nisei. Yet it is common to find women who have extensive mastery of the vocabulary and grammar of English, and whose English dominance is so great that they may be unable to speak their native tongue without intrusions at all levels from English.

The first step in the experimental study of Japanese-American speech in terms of the topic-audience-language correlation was an ethnographic description of their covariance, based on informant interviews. Thousands of Japanese women marry Americans every year, and come to this country to live and to raise their American offspring. In the San Francisco area, they are generally isolated socially from the American Japanese who seem un-Japanese to them, from the immigrant Japanese, who are older and of rural backgrounds, and from the temporary officials and business personnel from Japan. Usually they do not live in areas with Japanese shops. As a result of their isolation, they use Japanese in three situations: visits to Japan; jobs (for some) in Japanese restaurants; and talks with bilingual friends. The women who took part in the study usually had friends who were also "war brides." These were their confidantes, their recourse when worried. With these friends, in Japanese, they reminisced about

Japan, discussed news from home, gossiped; Japanese was the language of social interchange and expressive monologues.

By contrast, the functions of English covered a varying range for different women. For all, it was the language for talking of goods and services, for shopping. In a few marriages, the husband was a companion and confidant, teaching a large variety of English words, teaching about American activities and values, discussing many topics. Such women had learned the subtleties of social interchange in English. In other families, the absence of the husband at sea, or his silence, left the wife with little occasion to use English at home. One woman who spoke little English at the time of her marriage reported that the couple "spoke the language of the eyes." It is quite clear that there was not an equivalent distribution of functions for Japanese and English for most of the women interviewed.

The women spoke English primarily with their husbands, children, and neighbors. We would expect that when they spoke English the content would reflect the objects, experiences, and points of view encountered in this country. With their Japanese friends, language shifted with topic—American food, clothing, and husbands being discussed in English, and matters Japanese, or personal concerns being discussed in Japanese. Some reported never using English with Japanese friends except when the husbands were present, a situation presumably altering the topical distribution of conversations.

LANGUAGE AND CONTENT

Our first hypothesis is that as language shifts, content will shift. This hypothesis was tested earlier for French and American content (Ervin 1964; Lambert 1963). In this case, we have the explicit hypothesis that whatever monolingual American women and Japanese women tested in Japan differ in content, the bilingual women will tend to show an analogous content shift with language, even though the situations are otherwise identical. A Japanese interviewer saw each woman twice in the same setting, and tape recorded the sessions. At the first, only Japanese was used, and at the second, only English. Verbal materials employed were word associations, sentence completions, semantic differentials, problem stories, and Thematic Apperception Tests.

Here are some illustrative examples, the speaker being the same for the Japanese and English. Where the American and Japanese monolingual comparison groups gave a particular item uniquely or more frequently than the other language group, the word is marked with (A) or (J).

MOON: (Japanese) moon-viewing (J), zebra-grass (J), full moon (J), cloud (J)
(English) sky (A), rocket (A), cloud (J)

NEW YEAR'S DAY: (Japanese) pine decoration (J), rice-cake (J), feast (J), kimono (J), seven-spring-herbs (J), shuttlecock (J), tangerine (J), foot-warmer (J), friends (A)
(English) new clothes, party (A), holidays (A)
nese women are very tolerant of interpenetration of the two languages. We had found with French in the United States that those who had frequent discourse with other bilinguals had the highest incidence of borrowing of each language in the other (Ervin 1955). Thus we can say that bilinguals who speak only with other bilinguals may be on the road to merger of the two languages, unless there are strong pressures to insulate by topic or setting.

**TOPIC AND FORM**

In this experiment, it is possible to compare topics within each interview. In the word-associations, a stimulus word might be considered a topic. We know that some topics are more closely connected with life in the United States, others with Japan. For example, “love,” “marriage,” and “kitchen” have American associations for these women. On the other hand, “mushroom,” “fish,” and “New Year’s Day” are strongly associated with Japanese life. When we weighted the English responses according to their frequency in the monolingual norm groups in Japan and the United States, it appeared that the war brides were closer to American women when associating to “love,” “marriage,” and “kitchen” but closer to Japanese women for the other three topics. This was true even though, as we have seen, these “Japanese” topics elicited less characteristically Japanese content when the language used was English, not Japanese.

In one part of the interview, the informants were asked to explain or describe, in English, a set of 14 topics. The topics designed to be associated with English were the husband’s work and leisure activities, American housekeeping, American cooking, and shopping for food and clothing here. Another set of topics was designed to be more frequent in Japanese: Japanese festivals, Japanese New Year’s Day, Japanese cooking and housekeeping, Doll Festival, and street story-tellers. The last two topics in each set were accompanied with photographs of the event to be described.

From this procedure we found that it was not the receiver alone, nor the topic alone, which affected speech but a specific combination of the two. When the informants were instructed to speak English, they had difficulty only when they spoke of Japanese topics. The combination of a Japanese receiver and a Japanese topic almost always demands the use of Japanese in a normal situation. The effect of artificially violating this rule was that the women’s speech was disrupted. They borrowed more Japanese words, had more disturbed syntax, were less fluent, and had more frequent hesitation pauses. Thus a simple change in the topic and listener had a marked effect on the formal features of speech even though the most obvious formal change, a switch of code, was not allowed.

In the analysis both of content and form changes, we had assumed that a bilingual is like two monolinguals with a single nervous system. The differences in two settings or audiences of a bilingual are viewed as extensions of the differences in monolinguals. But there are limits to this simplified assumption. One is a cognitive limit. There are reasons to believe that it is very hard to maintain in one nervous system two category systems with only slight differences between them. This is true whether it be a semantic system such as color terminology...
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(Ervin 1961) or a phonemic system (Gumperz 1962). Thus there are pressures constantly towards a merger of the two systems of the bilingual. Also, the very fact that a larger repertoire of alternative behavior is available to the bilingual makes him a victim of the special signs of response-competition, such as hesitation pauses and less fluency.

The second limit to this assumption lies in the very functional specialization we mentioned before. No bilingual, however fluent in two languages, has exactly equivalent experiences in both language communities. One may have been learned at home, one at school. One may have been learned in childhood, the other in adolescence. Perhaps now one is used at work and one in the family. Even in multilingual communities such as those of India and Switzerland, some specialization exists. Robert Lowie, who grew up in a German-speaking family in the United States, reported a deliberate effort to keep an equivalent vocabulary (1945). He failed, for he could not control the difference in frequency or social context for the lexicon he acquired.

Thus, we cannot expect that a woman whose direct experience as a wife and mother was entirely in the United States would have, even when speaking Japanese, quite the same content as a woman in Japan. Her familiarity with these domains of life will be second-hand in some sense. In the same way, a woman who has never raised children in the United States will have most of the domain of meaning involving childhood much more fully developed in Japanese.

Finally, to the extent that the norms for Japanese and American monolingual behavior are current, they misrepresent the realities of contact, for these Japanese women know the Japan of five or ten years ago, not rapidly-changing contemporary Japan and its language.

METHODS IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

If we examine the research which satisfies our definition of sociolinguistic, we find the methods used appear to be of four general types:

1. Studies of the speech of social groups. It has long been a practice among linguists and sociologists to study certain properties of the speech (usually the code) of predefined classes of speakers. We have, for example, studies reporting homosexual jargon (Cory 1932:103-113) and thieves' jargon (Sutherland 1937). Dialect atlas studies have selected speakers by geographical criteria and mapped the distribution of selected code features such as special lexicon (e.g., spider vs. frying-pan) and pronunciation (e.g., /gryzly/ vs. /gryzly/). Traditionally, none of these studies takes the larger social community as a unit; speakers are selected out of context, and we may not know whether their speech varies with setting or receiver. We might expect, for instance, that "criminals" might use different speech to judges, parole officers, patrolmen, and cell-mates, and Sutherland reports that this is the case (1937).

2. Ethnographic studies. A form of study discussed in detail by Hymes (1962) would employ traditional methods of observation and interview to study when speech is used at all, and variations according to setting and participants.

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Naturalistic observations such as those of Barker and Wright (1954), Barker (1963), Watson and Potter (1962), Coser (1960) and Newman (1955) have ranged widely over the intercorrelational problems we have mentioned earlier. However, the drawback of such studies is that normally there is so much variation at once that we can find descriptive information about distributions but little definitive knowledge of which of the co-varying features may be effective. Gump, Schoggen, and Redl (1963), for instance, compared a child's behavior in two social settings—but the settings involved different participants, different activities, and different physical surroundings. The authors point out that the child changed his forms of interaction, but it is not clear that this would have happened had his family been transported to a camp setting.

3. Experimental studies. Inevitably, experiments set up artificial situations. That is just their purpose, for they allow artificial constraints on normal covariance, permitting us for example to control the social composition of juries (Strodtebeck et al. 1957), the size of a group (Bales and Borgatta 1955), or the power relation of participants (Cohen 1958) without varying any other significant features. Such studies would normally be based first on ethnographic research to explore the distribution of speech in the natural community so that extrapolation might be made to the artificial situation.

4. Distribution of forms. One can start with the analysis of formal alternatives and employ any of the above methods to study the determinants of the alternation. Fischer (1958), Brown and Gilman (1960), and Brown and Ford (1961) have done just this. This kind of study lends itself to a form of analysis we might call the description of equivalence patterns. For example, in some languages, the stylistic alternation which occurs when a man speaks to his superior rather than to a peer is similar to the alternation which occurs when a woman speaks to a man rather than to another woman. This is just a fragment of what is undoubtedly a wider set of corresponding alternations. If we looked at all societies in which such sets of correspondences occur, they might have common features, such as inferior ascribed status for women.

Another example is suggested by the distribution of the features of baby talk. The alternation which accompanies speech to adults vs. speech to infants has some similarities to the alternations between neutral vs. affectionate speech between intimates. Should this relation turn out to be universal, we might hunt for manipulable variables to test the psychological basis of the correspondence. If it is not universal, we need to know what systematic differences between societies are related; frequently such societal differences have individual analogues that can be studied (the baby talk user vs. the non-baby-talk user).

These equivalence structures in verbal behavior are similar to the lexical classes which so interest cognitive theorists, for similarity in formal verbal behavior implies testable similarities in other types of behavior such as perception, memory, or emotional response.

This treatment of sociolinguistics has placed the face-to-face verbal encounter at the center of the definition. In contrast, a macroscopic approach to
sociolinguistics might consider codes rather than finer formal contrasts, societal functions (such as education or law) rather than individual functions, institutionally classified settings (such as churches and mass media) rather than finer differentiations of setting in local communities, and values about language use as expressed in administrative actions and political behavior rather than merely in community norms and attitudes toward speakers of particular languages or dialects.

If one examines the generalizations in the studies we have cited, one finds that frequently they are special instances of more general social or psychological propositions. Brown and Ford (1961), for instance, note that changes in address forms are expected to be initiated by the higher status participant; probably all respect behavior is so. Herman (1961) explicitly couched his study of multilingual code-switching in a broader framework of a theory of choice behavior.

Yet language is distinct in certain respects. Unlike other formally coded social behavior it can have semantic content. The internal imitations of external speech constitute a kind of portable society, both the voice of conscience and a categorization system, promoting socialization even of private behavior. Most of the uniquely human forms of social behavior are dependent on shared language, so that the structure of language use in society may be related to societal functioning in unique ways. If this is the case, sociolinguistics will contribute a new dimension to the social sciences rather than provide further exemplifications of the otherwise known.

NOTES

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