SOCIAL DIALECTS IN DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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Research Assumptions

Developmental sociolinguistics is at this stage not a department, not a set of journals, not a bounded group of people, but rather an orientation with certain assumptions. One category of work which has received the label of developmental sociolinguistics would be better called comparative studies of language development. These are called "socio-" only because measures of language competence are employed with children who differ socially, but it is often the case that such studies differ markedly in pre-suppositions from studies of the development of sociolinguistic (or communicative) competence. This second type need not be comparative at all. Its primary focus is the systematic relationship of features of the children's language and the social milieu of speech, hearing, and talk about speech. Some of the major assumptions of this field have been developed in the work of Hymes and Gumperz, defining a field of ethnography of communication.

Comparative studies. The first category of work, comparative studies, has attracted attention because American schools so often test and compare children's performances. But there has been great difficulty in finding ways of testing children's knowledge of language without using sociolinguistically biased approaches. Most tests use communicative settings which are middle-class, middle-class interviewers, middle-class kinds of tasks, middle-class language, and middle-class scoring criteria. It is very easy to find bleak examples of ignorance of work on social dialects and on social variation in the use of language, but hard to find alternative approaches for those who think they have to test.

One approach to the linguistic issue is to test development of features common to different languages. Let us suppose, for example, that we are concerned with the concept of location or of possession. Both of these structures, and at least eight others, can be identified
in grammatical contrasts or classes in the earliest sentences of children in a variety of languages ranging from Samoan (Kernan, 1969) to Luo in Kenya (Blount, 1969). But if we are interested in the possessive, what approaches can we take?

a) The concept of possession is probably already present well within the first 18 months, but testing would require some non-verbal methods appropriate to the social group.

b) We might like to know how early these children signal possession verbally by some distinct feature, any feature. Thus we might ask how early possession is a linguistically distinct feature.

c) We might ask how early a child comprehends specific linguistic contrasts as signalling possession. The Torrey study (1969) cited below asks this question, but in a non-comparative framework.

d) We might ask how early the child signals possession with the adult linguistic contrast of his home milieu. If his parents and siblings speak a non-standard dialect of English, this might mean using order alone, or order and prosodic features, but not a suffix.

e) We might ask how early a child can systematically signal possession with a linguistic feature of some dialect or language not used regularly in his home, but sometimes heard. For English speakers in a bilingual community it might be the Spanish possessive. For lower-class blacks it might be a possessive suffix. For standard English speakers it might be the non-standard variants.

An appropriate example is the work of Osser, Wang and Zaid (1969). This was a study of rates of development in core grammatical transformations common to all dialects of English, such as relativization and passivization. The study compared middle-class whites and lower-class blacks.

Many workers in child language question the likelihood of large differences in the average age of achievement of fundamental milestones (e.g. understanding verb-object, understanding relative clauses) or in ranges of variation in different social groups. There are two reasons for their doubt. One is the evidence of a considerable biological substrate for the maturation of language-learning abilities universal to humans (Lenneberg, 1967), and the other the evidence that the amount of direct reinforcement of language training seems to have little bearing
"speech guise." Probably nobody speaks 100 percent non-standard forms, so the input language was to some extent artificial, but most of the children believed the speaker was black. The results show that whatever the artificiality of these materials, it was easier for black urban children to imitate them and harder for white suburban children in relatively segregated areas to imitate them than standard English. Her study was not aimed at all at studying development of specific grammatical features, but at a gross test of grammatical competence, and at showing that the surface structure of the test is highly relevant if one wants to make such comparisons. She is clearly right.

The Baratz test included an approximation of type d materials for both groups and of type e materials for both groups, and she showed that for both it was easier to imitate the type d materials. One could argue that until one is able to construct materials in which the minority group does better (like the non-standard section of the Baratz test) one does not understand the unique features of the skills children acquire in those groups. Out of an appropriate balance of items equally familiar to both
groups one might then conceivably construct a more culture-fair test than we now have, or in this case a language-fair test.

But sociolinguistic work has posed a much more difficult challenge to those who wish to make comparisons, more difficult than equating familiarity with dialect features. Each community, even sub-groups within communities like teen-age gangs, may develop its own pattern of language use, its own set of speech events, its own valuing of skill. To take a simple example, suppose one wants to compare fluency or active vocabulary size in two groups. Presumably one can only assess fluency by discovering the social situation in which the person talks the most. Labov (1968) has given a vivid example of a black child who was laconic with even an older black from the same community and only became talkative when arguing with a friend. Assessment of vocabulary size in a small sample of speech would require finding the speech events within the culture of the children which maximally demand vocabulary diversity. An alternative might be to train the child to a new task which interested him, and in effect "re-socialize" him, but then there would have to be some independent way of assessing success in this task. Jensen's comment (1969) that one might raise the IQ of a lower-class black child ten points by spending many hours with him suggests that socialization to the task may be involved, in a variety of ways which could be investigated.

An example of such an approach occurred to me while reading Labov's engrossing account of the rule structure for sounding in Harlem teenagers (1968). Sounding requires sensitivity to syntactic patterns since success in the role of second party requires syntactic expansion, and in the role of third party some elements may remain constant but a semantic shift such as tense or an anomalous lexical change can produce a successful effect. There is constant evaluation and a high sense of skill. If one believes that verbal skills are transferable, then it should be possible to devise tests which tap the fundamental syntactic skills and the kind of restricted associations which result in highly valued anomaly. The test can be conveniently validated against the group's assessment of the rank of the boys on sounding.

The argument here is that the correction for our linguistic and social myopia in constructing measures of competence may be to draw on the speech events and linguistic structures of minority speakers. One
problem, of course, is the fact that minority group members themselves may regard their informal style as inappropriate to formal settings and tasks, which therefore makes it harder to elicit "translations" or information about speech skills, except by ethnographic work. In such cases it would be much easier to go the other way, i.e. to get materials (such as narratives, jokes, picture description) in the most informal milieu first. In test construction, the appropriate direction would be to start by searching for speech events, testing situations, and linguistic patterns familiar to the children in the non-standard English (or Spanish) speaking group. Full development and independent validation of the testing materials should take place within this group. It would be far easier to translate into middle-class and standard English materials than to go the other direction.

Our current tests are second dialect tests for lower-class and especially black children. The accusations of bias that are being made are in many cases well-founded. Whenever a test is supposed to assess fundamental linguistic and intellectual competence, it must be oriented directly to the speech community to be tested. Unless the speech skills and social performances required by the test are equally familiar to all tested groups, the test is a biased estimate of underlying competence.

**Developmental studies.** The development of tests for comparative work seems to be an example of applied developmental sociolinguistics. We have seen that adequate tests would have to draw on ethnographic developmental work. In basic research in developmental sociolinguistics, the principal assumption is that the way in which people talk directly reflects both the regular patterns of their social networks and the immediate circumstances of speech. The first part is obvious; a child's interaction network is bound to influence his values about language and the repertoire he commands. The more we study speech in natural settings, the more we find systematic variation within every speaker reflecting who he is addressing, where he is, what the social event may be, the topic of discussion, and the social relations he communicates by speaking. The regularities in these features of speech make them as amenable to analysis as the abstracted rules called grammars. Competence in speaking includes the ability to use appropriate speech for the circumstance and, when devi-
ating from what is normal, to convey what is intended. It would be an incompetent speaker who used baby talk to everyone, or randomly interspersed sentences in baby talk or in a second language regardless of circumstance. It would be equally incompetent to use formal style in all situations and to all addressees, in a society allowing for a broader range of variation.

With respect specifically to social dialects we assume that all varieties of English are alike in many underlying features. The child who lives in a community with several social dialects of English is in a very different situation from that of an immigrant. Even though he may not understand all details of standard English, those he fails to understand or use may be relatively superficial, from a linguistic if not a social standpoint. In casual discourse, intelligibility of standard English to a non-standard speaker is not likely to be the major problem, as it can be for a speaker of another language. Since gross unintelligibility is not present, motives for learning may be different.

As a result of the mass media and education, as well as pressures towards "proper" speech in many homes, we assume children who use many non-standard features may often understand more of the surface features of standard English than they reveal in their speech. In this sense a kind of bilingualism may exist at the comprehension level, as it does with those Spanish or Navaho speakers who can understand more than they produce.

Finally, we assume that social groups vary in the uses to which they most often put speech and in the value they attach to different uses, so that the range of uses of speech by a child needs to be explored. On the other hand, certain values can be found universally in every social group. We ought to discover which speech events, for example, are valued aesthetically. We assume aesthetic values are present in every society; we need to learn whether they are focused on speech, and if so, on which kinds of speech.

Research Review

Systematic correlates of variations in dialect features. In speakers with a wide repertoire of language or dialect variation, the internal
linguistic structure of that variation, and its co-occurrence with semantic and social features can be examined. Sam Henrie (1969) found that deletion of verb affixes by five-year-old black children was related to semantic features of the utterance, and was not a random feature. It has been known for some time (Wolfram, 1969) that the form be as in "He be outa school" is semantically contrasted with is, and carries meaning that standard English cannot easily translate. Henrie found that already at five, children selected be most often for habitual actions ("they be sleeping") or distributed non-temporal states ("they be blue") and least often for momentary acts.

We have learned that the frequency of standard features may increase when (a) the child is role-playing doctor or teacher (Kernan, 1969), (b) the child is in the schoolroom or being interviewed by an authority figure (Houston, 1969), (c) the child is interviewed alone rather than in a group (Labov, 1963), (d) the interviewer uses only standard English rather than variable speech (Williams and Naremore, 1969). Labov noted, for example, that in formal style black children used the plural suffix more, though the redundant third person verb marker remained infrequent. Since none of these studies except Labov's has focused on fine detail, we might be willing to pool all the findings as indicating a kind of formal-informal dimension. Fischer (1958), for example, noted that New England children increased their use of "-n" suffixes over "-ing" suffixes in the course of an interview, presumably relaxing into more casual style. Fischer noted, as others have, that girls in his group used the more formal variant more; Kernan's examples of formal features in role-playing were usually of girls.

This kind of variation corresponds to what Blom and Gumperz call situational switching and Houston (1969) calls "register", where the primary determinants appear to be setting, situation, and addressee or topic. Overlaid on these features, which in bilinguals often generate sharp switching of languages, are feature variations which may or may not form coherent styles. These may be viewed as reflections of changes of function or intent within the particular interaction, and the variations between dialect features can be considered linguistic devices for realizing intent. In a given conversation, different foci or speech episodes and different speech acts or structural units within the conversation often may be
demarcated by changes in the frequency of socially significant speech variables. Blom and Gumperz (in press) describe these phenomena with respect to dialect variation between a village dialect in Norway and standard Norwegian. The phenomena are analogous to American dialect feature variation.  

An example of a simple analysis of classroom interaction with these concepts may illustrate what I have in mind. Mary Rainey (1969) studied a teacher in a black Headstart class. She selected the alternation between "-ing" and "-in" suffixes for observation, since they are related both to formality (Fischer, 1958; Labov, 1966) and to dialect. The teacher regularly used "-ing" in formal teaching and story reading, but in these same situations she used "-in" when she was trying to get attention or closeness. Rainey calls "-ing" the unmarked or usual form for formal teaching. On the other hand, the unmarked form for informal or casual interaction was "-in", and "-ing" was used for marked emphasis in these situations. ("Where are you going, Ezekiel Cato Jones?")

The notion that formality lies on a simple dimension seems well-founded empirically in Labov's studies. With addressee and setting constant, he was able to accomplish style changes in "-ing" and in phonological alternatives by topical changes (e.g. to a more emotional topic) or by task changes (to reciting a childhood rhyme, to reading). He has commented also that when auditory feedback is reduced by broad-spectrum noise, the most informal style results (Labov, 1970, in press). Labov found in his lower-east-side study that a full range of style variation was not adult-like until around 14 or 15, but there is evidence certainly that some variation exists before that time. Typically the children use the more informal forms more often than adults (Wolfram; Shuy, et al; Labov, 1966) as one would expect from their exposure to informal home situations.

Labov's view of monitoring is unidimensional; in contrast, Claudia Kernan has used this term in speaking of "monitoring black" and "monitoring white." These terms refer to speech which veers away from the normal expected, or unmarked vernacular. This monitoring is analogous to Blom and Gumperz' metaphorical switching. What are the social factors that go along with monitoring black? They are exemplified by parodies of the speech of quoted persons to indicate their social characteristics,
on other occasions, speakers' allusions to shared ethnic identity. (Dick Gregory is skilled in such monitoring.) Labov has commented that if a speaker masters a fully consistent standard register, he may be unable to switch to the vernacular except through the use of markers whose frequency is not like that in an unmarked vernacular. He loses his fine sense of context-defined inherent variation. In some of the black monitoring observed by Kernan, forms were used that were caricatures and do not occur in any vernacular style.

This notion of marking has been formally developed by Geoghegan (1969). He has found, in working on alternations in address forms, that one can identify a regular, expected, reportable, unmarked form which is predictable from social features such as setting, age, rank, sex, and so on. Deviations from the unmarked alternatives carry social information such as positive and negative affect, deference, and anger.

It should be clear from this discussion of registers, styles, marking, and monitoring that these concepts are still being developed and changed and that attention to them will be fundamental in any research on children's understanding of the social aspects of language. Since work has been done largely with adults, we do not know how young and under what social conditions it is possible for speakers to show register or style variability in their speech.

My guess is that the first social features that will appear are major setting and addressee contrasts, since we find very early that bilingual children change language according to locations and persons. Martin Edelman, for example, examined the relation between reports of the expected language for given settings, and dominance as judged by fluency in emitting words in a particular language associated with a given setting. The children were Puerto Rican bilinguals in New York, age 6 to 12. The pattern did not change with age, merely the amount of English dominance. Children knew significantly more English words for education and religion, than for family and home. Church, school, and home are unambiguous settings, for which dominant language was reportable by the children.

In addition, when children role-play they often adopt consistent speech patterns in accordance with the social categories involved -- mothers and babies, doctors, cowboys, teachers, puppets. These situational patterns are relatively stereotyped but do reveal quite early
use of language with consistent feature changes. What we do not know is what features change and what social cues can be generalized beyond particular persons.

We know that consistent code changes in second languages can be learned very rapidly early. Edward Hernandez, in Berkeley, has been studying a three-year-old Chicano monolingual who became relatively bilingual within six months from nursery school exposure, though his English at that time was considerably simpler than his Spanish. We do not know how early or under what social conditions completely consistent control over the situational selection of two social dialects can be mastered. Part of the problem is that we know relatively little about the linguistic features of such competence.

Stylistic consistency. In the more formal types of situations, bilinguals can learn relatively separated codes. Even metaphorical switching tends to be at fairly high syntactic nodes, if both lexical alternatives are available to the speaker, i.e. he doesn't have to use vocabulary from one variety because he lacks words. Some bilinguals even have a range of formal to informal styles in both codes (Cumperz, 1967, 1968).

One of the major differences between the variation found in bilinguals and in speakers with forms from various social dialects has been forcefully argued by Kernan (1969). She points out that there seems to be a lack of co-occurrence restriction in the samples of black speech. One monitors or changes register by increasing or decreasing the frequency of certain variables, sometimes categorically. But an examination of the variables indicating stylistic variation reveals that the variants are side-by-side, without many contingent relations between them. In lower-class black speakers, in the same clause one finds "be" and a possessive suffix, copula deletion and consonant clusters.

Labov, who has examined both individual and group styles in teen-age and adult speakers in Harlem, has been impressed by the inconsistency of their formal style features, especially in the formal test situations typical of schools. "Whenever a subordinate dialect is in contact with a superordinate dialect, answers given in any formal test situation will shift from the subordinate towards the superordinate in an irregular and unsystematic manner" (1968). Claudia Kernan also has found, in classroom
correction tests, that students have no stable notions of what the standard alternative is among the alternatives in their repertoire. Labov, McKay, Henrie, Kernan, and indeed everyone who has collected considerable samples of speech of dialect speakers have found that the full range of most standard forms will appear some time in their speech. That is, the problem of acquiring standard speech is in most cases not that the form is outside the repertoire but that the speaker cannot maintain a consistent choice of standard alternatives. There is inadequate co-occurrence restriction between the standard forms whether they are dialect borrowings or not (Wolfram, 1969).

This is what we would expect if in fact the features that standard speakers use to identify standard and non-standard speech are often used for metaphorical signalling by non-standard speakers. They may hear a higher density of standard features as carrying a particular connotation in a given situation. But some features are not varied for this kind of meaning, and since various combinations of features co-occur there is no strong sense that any consistent style is required. In addition, there is, according to Labov's work, considerable "inherent variation" which may not carry any connotations at all. In standard English this inherent variation is not heard as marking the speaker as incompetent in standard English, but since in non-standard English the variation includes features which are criterial to listeners' judgments of standardness, it appears socially to be inconsistent.

In advising parents who rear bilingual children one usually points out that they should maintain consistency of speaker, occasion, or setting so that the child can be aided in predicting which form to use. But in the case of non-standard English the great bulk of the informal styles heard in the community by children contain a high degree of variability between standard and non-standard features, since the variability is inherent in the dialect. A child who is to be able to make a consistent choice of the standard alternative must mark it categorically in his storage, or at least have some linkages between forms which will make sequential occurrence of standard forms seem normal for him. If the child heard pure standard or non-standard forms this learning would not be a problem. He would learn the standard style as a second language with as brief and trivial interference as we normally find in immigrant children.
But this is not what he hears. He hears highly variable speech lacking in co-occurrence restrictions or predictability from segment to segment, at least at the grammatical level. Small wonder that many speakers are very uncertain as to which is standard, and therefore cannot do classroom correction tests comfortably.

This line of thinking leads me to what may seem like an outlandish proposal. If the problem is to identify "pure styles" and to store them with sufficient separateness to permit stylistic consistency, might it not be appropriate to help identify them by using "monitoring styles" of a sort, by having children role-play, parody, or use narrative styles in which a relatively extreme non-standard without inherent variation on key features might seem appropriate? The other children could then call them on failures. The converse would, of course, be role-playing journalist, doctor, legislator, and so on in standard English grammar. The social appropriateness of such a move in a school might very well be questioned by parents who believe the school is the place for standard English, but such games might enhance maximum adeptness in style switching. There is, of course, some precedent for permitting and encouraging a range of styles in dramatic play, even in school.

In courses helping adolescents in mastering register changes, Waterhouse (1968) has found that even students who did not regularly speak standard English were, as a group, critical of press releases in a role-played press conference if they contained non-standard features like copula deletion. The group itself, without pressure from the teacher, exerted constraints on role-players to keep a consistent register. The method releases the actor from teasing about talking standard English, and potentially may be transferred to situations where the teacher is not present.

The practice of giving students drills in standard English, which has developed in some schools, is based on the assumption that the variants do not exist in their repertoire. Where the variants do exist in the child's repertoire already, and where some already are markers of social meaning, the teacher has a special problem, quite different from that of basic second-language learning. The teacher needs to find the most effective way to give a child training in situational switching which will allow him to use the forms in writing, and in speech situations
where he may be affected by fatigue, fear, and by concentration on the content of what he is saying. That seems to be what parents want to happen.

Comprehension of features. One underpinning of studies of the possibilities of variation in produced speech is better evidence on what features children can hear. Because of the evidence that many variants occur freely, if unpredictably, in children's output, it is sometimes assumed that all children understand all features of standard English. Jane Torrey's work (1969) is a model in studying these problems. She found that sibilant suffixes had markedly different probabilities of being understood or produced depending on their grammatical functions. Almost all the black children in her Harlem sample understood a plural suffix and produced it regularly; almost none understood or produced a verb suffix marking number, as in the "the cat scratches" vs. "the cats scratch"; about half understood and produced the copula, the possessive, and the verb suffix denoting tense, as in "the boy shut the door" vs. "the boy shuts the door". Torrey has not reported the performances of children who usually hear standard English to see if some developmental factors are present. This study, of course, isolates the features from contextual redundancy, as one must to discover whether a particular linguistic cue can be interpreted alone. The kind of evidence that Labov, Kernan, Baratz, and others have obtained showing that in imitation tasks children translate into their own dialect, may be insufficient tests of comprehension of particular features, since the sentences contain redundancy. For example, Baratz found that white children translated "I's some toys out there" into "there are some toys out there," and black children often did the reverse. But this does not indicate that either group "understood" the first words, rather that the rest of the utterance made this form obligatory in their output. Error analysis of imitation materials with less redundancy would discover what syntactic and morphological features are employed. Torrey's findings are not inconsistent with the important fact that in everyday situations most standard English may be intelligible grammatically to black lower-class children, since in many situations language is redundant.10

A recent study by Weener (1969) attempted to separate phonology from whatever semantic and syntactic sequential probabilities are tested by
memory for "orders of approximation" to English. From the standpoint of syntactic differences, this method gives rather gross results and is unlikely to be sensitive to whatever syntactic differences occur in the formal output of lower-class black and middle-class white informants. The interesting finding in this study was that when asked to remember these strings of words, the lower-class black children and middle-class whites did equally well with the materials read by a middle-class speaker, but the whites had trouble remembering the same materials read by a black speaker. That is, just as we might expect on social grounds, black children have more exposure to middle-class white phonology and can interpret it more easily than the suburban Detroit white children could interpret southern black speech.\(^{11}\)

The Wener results remind us that the critical factors in adjusting to phonological differences, as in adjusting to "foreign accents," are likely to be experience and attitude toward the speaker. Studies of the mutual intelligibility of speakers in varieties of social settings allowing for differences in contacts, in types of speech exposure, and social attitudes towards the other group would inform us about factors causing changes in intelligibility in our pluralistic society. These studies need to focus on comprehension as such, not output measures like the Cloze procedure, and it would be helpful if they would distinguish fine-grained feature interpretation (as of the plural marker in Torrey's work) from grosser referential intelligibility and the understanding of allusion and metaphor.

One of the most significant findings in Kernan's work and in recent studies of John Gumperz is that there is considerable informational or connotative content in choice among referential equivalents in the speaker's repertoire. A full competence in comprehending the speech of others includes these social interpretations. So far, most research on information transmission has been focused on shapes, colors, and locations rather than on the equally systematic communication of hostility, affection, and deference. It is possible that the latter matters are of greater practical significance, for example in the classroom where teacher and pupil need to communicate respect for each other. If teachers cannot understand when a pupil makes a conciliatory move, for instance, disaster could follow.
Subjective reaction tests. Along with studies of comprehension, we need more information about children's attitudes towards speech varieties and their sense of norms of register and style. There have been numerous studies in which people rate voices out of context (except of topic) by Labov (1966, 1968), Tucker and Lambert (1967), and Williams (1970), for example. Such ratings necessarily tend to be of people or categories of people, since this is all the information the listeners can discover. It turns out to be the case, when specific features used in ratings are examined, that listeners tend to give "categorical" judgments, as Labov first pointed out. They will judge intelligence, ambition, and honesty just from "accent." They do not react to frequencies reliably, but as June McKay (1969) has suggested, tend to pick out the "lowest" ranked social feature (even if it is rare) as an indicator of the speaker's social ranking, provided, of course, it is not contextually accounted for as "marking," such as parody, irony, humor. Williams has found that teachers tend to judge race from a few features. Triandis, Loh, and Levin (1966) and Lambert (1967) imply that teachers will then treat the children by their group stereotype. From a practical standpoint, knowing which features are perceptually critical might help those who aim at giving the children the option of not always being ethnically identifiable from phonology.

One of the fundamental ideas in sociolinguistics, as emphasized earlier, is that speech in fact and in its norms is context-sensitive. We accept baby-talk to infants but not to adolescents. As a measure of children's development of style norms, judgments of the sort just discussed need to be made where the social context is clarified in some way. It remains to be seen how children react to anomalies -- by laughter, criticism, imitation perhaps. Children as young as five will criticize others doing role-playing for using the wrong terminology for the role, e.g. "You can't say 'honey'; you're the baby." Such studies are the judgmental analogue of the role-playing method of studying actually produced style and register changes, and the two kinds of studies should be paired to permit study of the extent to which judgments are finer than ability to produce the forms critical to the judgments. Labov (1965) has found that by the mid-teens speakers who did not themselves produce the most formal alternatives in New York phonology shared the opinion of the rest of the population on what variants were socially higher.
Kernan has commented that certain genres of folk literature, such as songs, poetry, narratives, would be ludicrous in standard English, and Labov (1966) found that childhood rhymes forced use of the most casual vernacular. It would be of great value to know how sensitive children are to these social co-occurrence constraints, especially on genres brought in from outside the school to enlarge the children's fluency in the classroom. If they react to some kinds of performances as sounding wrong in standard English, or vice-versa for those that do require standard English, then efforts by the teacher to mismatch these types of discourse with the wrong style may make the children uncomfortable and silent. For these reasons studies of judgments may help guide teachers toward culturally appropriate varieties of language.

**Functions of language.** One of the major issues that has come to the fore in sociolinguistics and in applied work in education has been the question of varieties of language function. Bernstein (in press) has pointed out that in England middle-class parents train children in a considerable amount of explicitness about referents, as though they were talking to a stranger or blind person, and no shared assumptions obtained. The result of this training (possibly through the use of known-answer question drills) is that children perform verbal tasks very well in test situations with minimal verbal stimulation. The difference in stress on over-elaboration of detail versus terseness of description, based on shared assumptions, shows up in a variety of studies. Hawkins found that lower-class English children described pictures with many "exophoric" pronouns, which required that the listener see the picture, as indeed he did. Middle-class pupils elaborated nouns and adjectives which specified information the examiner must already have known from seeing the picture. Williams and Naremore (1969) found that when children were asked to be specific, class differences disappeared. But when terse questions were asked, the middle class assumed they should give complicated elaborate answers; the lower class that only minimal necessary responses were needed. Labov has cited examples illustrating the bewilderment of a child taken into a room by a tester and told to "say what is in front of you" when both the tester and the child can see quite well what it is.

The implication of course is that children may have learned that the
Function of such communication is to convey information. If they have not been brought up on "known-answer" questions and taught to display their vocabulary and disregard whether the hearer knows the information, they may not understand the intent of such questions.

Kernan described such an incident during her study of the speech of Oakland black youngsters. She asked one child "Where do you live?" and got a vague answer: "Over there" with a vaguely waved thumb. Shortly later Kernan's husband asked the same question. The answer he got was "You go down the stairs, turn left, walk three blocks..." What was the difference? The husband had never been to the child's house, but Kernan herself had picked the child up there.

Social class differences in transmission of referential information may be a function of "set". If so they can be easily changed by instruction or brief training. Studies by Cowan (1967), and Coulthard and Robinson (1968) and Robinson (in press) suggest that they are to some degree the effects of socially different ways of viewing the function of the act asked of them, or the "rules of the game." It is possible of course that skill in the particular domain of vocabulary or previous experience with materials might aid in such performances too.

Of considerable value to sociolinguistic work are studies of language skills developed by children. For example, children often spontaneously play with sounds in the pre-school years, and invite games transforming songs by simplified transformations like Pig-Latin. Where these skills become socially organized, they may develop into identifiable speech categories: nursery rhymes, songs, sounding, toasting, rifting, or rapping. These, in some cases, include oral traditions, knowledge of which is part of the developing competence of children. They may include not only general stylistic features but sequential rules as well. Children's skill is repeatedly evaluated by their peers and good performance is highly appreciated. Houston (1969) has argued that lack of toys among the rural poor whom she studied resulted in more story-telling, language games, and more value on linguistic creativity, spontaneous narrative, and improvisation. Having recently seen a group of forty highly-educated adults and their children around a campfire without even one person skilled enough to carry on story-telling, I can believe education can produce cultural impoverishment!
Analysis of the structure of communication within communities could make us better able to draw events from children's repertoire into the schools, better able to use them in testing competence, in identifying biologically-based retardation, and better able to understand how children interpret tasks they are given to do. Within these speech categories, stylistic variations involving the standard-non-standard dimensions are important carriers of emotional significance. The ability to convey meaning depends on this range of variation. We can expect that as children have contact with members of varied social groups they will learn skill in a wider range of speech categories, learn each other's oral traditions, and learn devices for conveying information about social intent from each other's dialects. Labov has pointed out that the black children he studied valued language highly for cleverness in besting others; this attitude, if fully understood by teachers, could, he proposed, be a basis for enlarging language competence.

Suggestions for Research

1. Tests were developed in schools to predict success in schools as they were constituted, and to assess achievements of the school. The need to compare the achievements of school entities, and to pass the blame for failures onto the child, will unfortunately probably guarantee that tests will continue to be used even when they are not needed for fundamental diagnosis. Diagnosis of biologically based retardation, assuming we have means of pedagogically treating such retardation, is an important function of tests. If this is to be done well, there is a need for tests of basic milestones in competence which contain materials equated in dialect and social biases for the populations to be tested.

In contrast to previous attempts at culture-free testing, sociolinguistic research gives hope of finding how to create communicative settings, tasks, language, and scoring criteria that are fully compatible with the experience of the tested children and are validated within their own social group in cases of fairly clear group differences. Of course, ethnic and class categories do not bound homogeneous groups, so it is not clear in a diverse classroom which test it is appropriate to choose from a package of tests labeled lower-class black, middle-class black, Chicano, and so on. But at least such a pluralistic set might take us beyond the current middle-class white package.
As an example of the improvements of testing and teaching materials which might be gained from a realistic orientation to children's language use, we might cite the weaknesses of reading workbooks and tests. Items which rest on "comparing initial sound" or "rhyming words" depend on the probabilities that children will produce a very specific item of vocabulary for a given picture. They don't work as teaching materials or as valid tests unless the children do in fact "mediate" with these vocabulary items. Sensitive teachers have noticed repeatedly that a large proportion of these items do not elicit the expected names. The differences may be even larger where environmental and social differences exist. Such items are useless for teaching or testing. Another example is the section, in reading-recognition tests, containing word lists which are to be matched to pictures. Even if the words are read aloud, the items in some cases cannot be matched. But in this situation children rely on a single mediated name of the picture more than adults do.

Probably such tests are not tests of reading. In paragraph comprehension items, the syntax and content are often such that even if the paragraph were read aloud the child could not understand it. Such a test is not a test of reading skill. The evidence that children speaking social dialects cannot read may be largely based on invalid measures of reading ability. Of course, the effects of this evidence may be self-fulfilling, if teachers believe dialect speakers have trouble learning to read.

2. We need much more work on the social conditions which alter the frequency of social variants in speech. We need work with children to see what the social factors are which increase and decrease ethnic identity markers in their speech at different ages. It is not clear whether the monitoring of ethnic solidarity which Kernan describes has parallels in social categories like "working class" where there are no sharp socially-defined boundaries. But there probably are parallels in all groups to the increase in vernacular usage under excitement that Labov has found.

3. We need to extend sociolinguistic work to a wider variety of groups. The problems of urban schools have, for practical reasons, led to a focus on black, Puerto Rican, and Chicano groups. However, developmental sociolinguistics is appropriate to any child; upper-class children have stylistic variation in their speech too, and can be studied to gain
basic information about age changes in the structure and function of speech variation. Any groups speaking non-standard English are equally appropriate for the study of the relations between standard and non-standard; areas of regional migration allow for group identity marking through speech variables (e.g. southern white migrants in various social classes in Detroit). Since the social and the linguistic factors are slightly different in each of these groups, better generalizations about basic processes would be available if the range of groups studied were extended. There is a practical factor; such work is always contingent on collaboration or principal direction by in-group members.

4. We need to explore teaching methods for increasing competence in code-switching and to find out the ages for which different teaching methods are suitable. At present, unfortunately, most research on second-language learning has been so a-theoretical and ad hoc that we know very little of basic relevance to questions of how different features of language can be learned. Role-playing, developing of tasks with appropriate registers that the children themselves recognize and reinforce (e.g. Waterhouse) are examples of possible methods to use. It is not clear when formal instruction, drills, individual tutoring, peer group learning, or teaching by older children from the same social group might be most effective. How does one learn appropriate frequencies where there is inherent variation, vs. the learning of categorical features?

One of the problems in suggesting changes in educational methods is the lack of close study of actual classroom interaction. Teachers are not conscious of the methods they use. Tapes and videotapes can provide a way to locate the effective features of current methods, methods chosen post hoc as most effective, or methods used in experimental studies. Since communication is not merely verbal, videotapes may considerably enrich our ability to interpret what happens in the classroom.

5. We need far more studies like Torrey's exploring fully the range of comprehension of specific features of various types of English to various types of listeners. It would be of value to know whether teachers understand their pupils, for example, in terms of specific grammatical features.

6. We need to explore the place of reading and writing in the linguistic life of the child. Labov found many Harlem teen-agers did not
know if their close friends were literate. Literacy was not necessary for the activities of the boys. Exploration of children's values about language might lead to ways of devising uses of language, and specifically reading for beginners, that are relevant to interests they already have; later one hopes new interests arising from what they read will carry them further.

It is not clear how important type of language is in reading; adults frequently have strong attitudes that only a standard English is appropriate for reading. Navahos have not been especially receptive to efforts to make a written language of Navaho; English is for writing. Schools, of course, are not immune from adult community pressures; if it could be shown that literacy in the vernacular clearly aids literacy in standard English then the adults might be persuadable.

7. We need to explore in detail the structural relations between the child's oral comprehension skills, his speech, and reading and writing. I know of no evidence that learning to understand written language (as contrasted with reading aloud) is generally affected by the child's dialect of English. Labov has pointed out that the underlying form is in many cases the same for standard and non-standard words and merely deletion rules apply. All children need to learn the relation between deletion and the spelled form; all English speakers learn there is no one-to-one relation between spelling and sound, and learn to depend to some extent on some sight vocabulary or contextual guessing. In other parts of the world where children speak a highly valued local dialect, learning to read a standard is no problem.

Two directions of research need exploration. One might be to explore the issues of comprehension apart from reading aloud. If part of the problem is the social one of punishment by teachers who do not recognize when speech is the child's equivalent of what is written, the teacher's judgment either must be changed or by-passed. In effect one would teach children to decode written symbols to their meanings by having them hear the written material before reading it aloud themselves. Children would, of course, engage in sotto voce articulation while reading but they would not be directly punished or rewarded for this vocal behavior.

A second possibility would be better investigation of the relation between standard English and the child's comprehension and production.
We could test the child's specific feature knowledge as Torrey has done, and build materials related in systematic ways to this knowledge. I am not persuaded that dialect speakers are unique in having difficulties decoding inflectional suffixes in listening or reading. Labov has evidence that white boys as well as blacks do not readily interpret the -ed suffix in reading as a past tense indicator, especially in early adolescence and pre-adolescence. In cases where such grammatical features are not readily understood, they may not normally interfere with comprehension, given the redundancy of most texts, but they clearly are important in marginal cases and in writing. Specific instructional materials could focus on these issues.

Joan Baratz and William Stewart have proposed that children will learn to read faster if the grammatical structures used in primers are derived from or are structurally similar to the children's own output (Baratz and Shuy, 1969). Such materials could, of course, be prepared by teachers from stories told by the children with lexical normalization of spelling but not of syntax. We need detailed research with appropriate controls. With content and vocabulary controlled, does a child learn faster if the grammatical structures used come from his own output? What if they are like his most standard forms? His most non-standard forms (as in the Baratz-Stewart materials)? Variable, as verbatim materials would be? It is clear that different content, different grammar but conventionalized orthography, different vocabulary and concept familiarity might all be at issue and should be studied separately.

Case histories of learning to read, with details of teacher-child interaction, might help us locate points of difficulty and develop better theories of the reading process, and more important, better teacher-training methods. It is to be hoped that detailed recordings will be available of children's performance as they learn to read the Baratz-Stewart materials.

It is quite possible that the structural features of the materials in terms of dialect are not important in themselves, given that children understand most standard English structures and that many differences are superficial. Teachers and supervisors who have worked in many schools with dialect speakers complain that the fundamental problem is that many middle-class teachers do not believe that poor children, especially dialect
speakers, can easily learn to read. I could list a variety of types of observed teacher behavior toward lower-class children that could be the kinds of discouraging cues that children emotionally understand, or that more directly reduce the opportunity of the child to learn. There are dramatic examples of teachers who have brought below-average IQ slum children to the third grade level in reading while in first grade. We need to identify and videotape the teaching methods of such teachers and locate by experiment what are the key features of their method, and then teach with these videotapes.

If the Baratz-Stewart materials do result in faster learning, one reason might be their effects on teacher attitudes. If teachers believe the child has a language and a culture of his own that they themselves do not fully understand they are less likely to treat him as "deficient." This may be a key difference in attitudes toward immigrant children and native ethnic minorities. One cannot teach this lesson by exhortation; teachers who begin to realize the children know something they don't know may respect the children more. Therefore research on the effects of teaching materials should include some sensitive indices (perhaps of the Lambert speech guise type) of changes in social attitudes towards dialect speakers on the part of teachers and administrators.

8. We need more research on the development of children's subjective reactions to language. How early, and by what features, do they identify categories of speaker? Are there sex differences, as so many studies have shown, in the direction of greater preference for and use of formal variants by girls? How early can children differentiate the standard English of various ethnic groups? How do they evaluate it?

9. While we know that children as young as 20 months old produce "baby talk intonation" to babies, we do not know how soon they react to misplaced baby talk as anomalous, or judge meanings on the basis of speech variables. We need to know how children develop this kind of norm.

10. We need to explore for practical as well as theoretical reasons ways of training teachers to understand non-standard speech. John Gumperz has made two proposals along these lines. One is that systematic non-standard dialects be taught to teachers as second languages. In this way, teachers would be brought to recognize the systematic character of the dialects and to understand how they convey meaning. I believe also, from
work on second-language teaching, that there might be a very strong attitudinal impact on the teachers. Learning a second language through methods of close imitation of native speakers is a dramatic personal experience. Success in imitation (within the range of adult articulatory rigidity) might be a sensitive measure of intergroup attitudes.

The second method proposed by Gumperz would be similar to some "sensitivity training" techniques. Taped interaction between pupils or teachers and pupils of different dialect backgrounds would be selected to show misunderstanding of the meaning of linguistic features and/or stylistic variation. For instance, suppose an excited child used more dialect features than he would normally use in the classroom and the teacher heard these as hostile. Two groups of listeners again of different dialect backgrounds could separately be asked to make judgments about the social meaning of each utterance. The differences in these judgments would bring to light systems of meaning that are not the same in the two groups, and allow some learning about humor, irony, and insult.

11. We need to know more about the impact on children's attitudes of teachers' use of the vernacular in the classroom. Some programs are already systematically teaching the vernacular (for instance, "Pocho") to teachers. In the case of non-standard black features, Karmen's work suggests that non-standard features out of context may have implications of ridicule, e.g. if non-standard grammar is used without associated phonological and paralinguistic features. Yet Baratz' method of teaching reading implies that the teacher knows how to speak non-standard English appropriately.

12. We need to know how stylistic consistency with co-occurrence constraints can be learned, since children hear speech which is variable at home and among their friends. A good deal needs to be known about whether role-playing can increase consistency, and whether a bi-polar contrast between two relatively consistent "codes" is required or optimal for developing separately stored features lexically, phonologically, and syntactically. The practical implications of more work on the learning of co-occurrence rules are considerable.
Notes

1. The ideas in this paper have been influenced considerably by discussions with John Gumperz, to whom I have not always given due credit. Participants in the conference will recognize that many of the suggestions made during the discussion have been incorporated here in the interests of preserving them. They were so much group products that I am not sure how to attribute them. I have received many insightful suggestions about primary school classroom problems from teachers and former teachers, including particularly Eileen Green, Herbert Kohl, Mary Jamieson, and Mary Suzuki.

2. For theoretical discussions of communicative competence, see Hymes (n.d.). For some research suggestions regarding developmental sociolinguistics, see Slobin (1967). The term "sociolinguistic" rather than "communicative" is used here to exclude the many forms of skill in non-linguistic communication which also undergo development, and show up at an earlier age than conventional linguistic communication.

3. With biological abnormalities we include birth damage, damage arising from malnutrition in gestation or infancy, damage from malnutrition of the maternal grandmother during pregnancy, damage from chronic illnesses, as well as genetically based brain deficiencies. From a social engineering standpoint it is important of course to differentiate these sources, since something can be done about malnutrition, illness, and the higher incidence of birth damage among the poor.

4. Stewart (1970) in particular has argued strongly that the number and importance of grammatical differences between non-standard black English and any form of standard English is greater, for historical reasons, than other social dialect differences.

5. For further discussion of these points see Hymes (1964) and Ervin-Tripp (1964). The further development of the importance of repertoire in social meaning has been in the work of John Gumperz (Blom and Gumperz, in press; Gumperz, 1967, 1964).

6. A striking finding of this study was that speakers valued the local vernacular highly and could not believe that they employed standard Norwegian words and features for certain kinds of speech. The relation between the vernacular and a standard has been an educational issue in many parts of the world; studies in other places might often be relevant to developmental issues in the United States.

7. A vivid example of completely unconscious marking which was not a direct imitation appeared in Labov's study of lower-east-side New York speech (1964, p. 97). A Negro without ethnically distinctive speech told a story about a dangerous experience. In the dialogue he included, he represented his own speech in his typical unmarked casual style, but he also represented the speech of the person he feared, since he was supposed to have threatened someone with a gun. This voice was rasping and rapid, with rough southern Negro features. He later reported that the other person was --- Hungarian!
8. The discrepancy between the children's report about neighborhood lan-
guage, which they rated as predominantly Spanish, and their work
fluency scores, which were significantly greater in English for the
task of naming objects in the neighborhood, illustrates the problems
of using tests rather than recordings of natural conversation. It
is possible that most "doorstep conversations" common in the Puerto
Rican neighborhoods were in Spanish, but that vocabulary for nameable
shops and objects was English primarily, and likewise that consider-
able English was in fact used in conversations which speakers believed
were normally, expectedly in Spanish. John Gumperz (1967) has par-
ticularly emphasized the difference between questionnaire answers and
actual behavior.

9. We distinguish immigrant children here from children in those bi-
lingual communities where the same conditions of admixture of English
and other forms may obtain in some cases. Many instances have been
observed in which bilinguals cannot identify the language of provenance
of a form because it is used in both their codes.

10. This statement may sound over-optimistic. There are many registers
outside of the everyday experience of most people. With more open
enrollment in universities, some students may encounter, for the first
time, with discouraging results, lecturers who use complex nominal-
izations, and unusual types of sentence embeddings, in addition to new
vocabulary and subject matter. The assumption that syntactic learning
ends in childhood is not socially realistic, but there has been little
systematic study of complex registers.

11. In studies which disconnect syntax from phonology, there is a serious
confounding because of the likelihood of some co-occurrence rules be-
tween the two levels. Non-standard syntax with "standard" phonology
is bizarre and quite different in meaning from non-standard syntax
and congruent phonology. In the same way, the standard syntax and
stereotyped stage non-standard phonology employed by Stern and Kieslar
(1968) was so bizarre a combination black children could not under-
stand it very well. In the Weener study the syntax had no clear
identity, and the black speaker's phonology was a natural formal
reading style.

12. In some features there is a slight increase during adolescence. We
can expect the peer culture will alter norms and that the progress
from childhood to adult status will be affected not only by increasing
knowledge in which children become more like adults, but by the ef-
fects of strongly age-graded attitudes and also by generational changes
in norms that remain with the teen-agers when they are adults.

13. Some primers have simply painted the faces of children for minority
readers. A deeper change might entail using the kinds of names and
nicknames actually in use, culture content of interest to the child-
ren, but, more important still, thematic cores that engage the
children. At this conference, it was pointed out that black children
like the Five Chinese Brothers because they are rewarded for clever-
ness, which is highly valued in black culture. It was mentioned that
Ping, about a duck lost from his flock on a Chinese junk, appealed to
Navahos. The metaphor of the flock of ducks is parallel to the flock of sheep which is the core of traditional Navaho material values. At least, one should not assume that such superficial features as geographical location is primary in a child's interest or his sense of "relevance".

14. For instance, a current program for Chicano teachers at Sacramento State College.

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