

Understanding the Relationship between Socioeconomic Status, Language
and Educational Achievement: a critical analysis.

by

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B.A, London University, 1964

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the

Degree of Master of Arts

in

Guidance and Psychological Counseling

Department of Educational Sciences

Boğaziçi University

1983

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

I would like to express my very sincere gratitude to Dr Necla Öner and Dr Kathyryn Akural for all the help which they gave me throughout this study. Not only did they guide and stimulate my research, but by generously giving of their time and effort to solving administrative problems they enabled me to complete this work.

I would like to thank Dr Güzver Yıldırım - Stodolsky for her interest and her helpful comments and advice.

I would also like to thank Professor Hikmet Sebüktekin for his advice on the final work.

ABSTRACT

This study draws on literature from English speaking countries to explore the relationship between social class, language and educational achievement. It refers specifically to societies where differences within the common language and between social classes seem to predispose certain children to educational failure.

The study finds a consensus of opinion that membership of a particular social class influences the dialect, or variety of language, acquired by the young child. The different socialising process experienced by children of different socioeconomic status are commonly held to be responsible for this phenomenon.

The research indicates that the child of low socioeconomic status performs less well in school than his higher socioeconomic status counterpart, due to the child using a dialect which does not correspond with the language used in school.

This study explores the possibility that other factors may account for that poor educational performance of the low socio-economic status child. Recent research indicates that this poor academic performance may be attributable to a multitude of factors. It may be that dialect used by the low socioeconomic status child does not reflect the accepted values and thought pattern esteemed by the middle-class oriented academic environments. Likewise, it may not be any intrinsic quality in the child's dialect that disenables him, but rather either people's reactions to it, which may be negative, or the inconsequence between the values reflected by the child's language and his expression style. The low prestige accorded to nonstandard dialects is often extended to those who use such dialects and the low expectations of teachers for such children may become a selffulfilling prophecy.

Society is becoming increasingly aware of the problems of the low socioeconomic status child, and is instituting programmes both general and language specific, to help him. This study makes a critical analysis of some of the latter programmes. It finds that although the aims of programmes still vary from eliminating nonstandard dialects to fostering

only nonstandard dialects, educators are learning from past experiences how best to develop programmes which will fully benefit the young child. Its conclusion is one of hope, for with increased knowledge and commitment, the educational future of the low socio-economic status child must surely improve.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma İngilizce konuşulan ülkelerdeki kaynaklardan toplumsal sınıf, dil ve eğitimde başarı arasındaki ilişkileri araştırma amacıyla yapılmıştır. Ele aldığı alan, özellikle kullanılan ortak dille toplumsal sınıflar arasındaki ayrımların bazı çocuklarda yol açtığı öğrenim başarısızlığıdır.

Bu çalışmaya göre, belli bir toplumsal sınıfın üyesi olma durumunun genç çocuğun benimsediği dili belli lehçeyle ya da dil türüyle konuşması doğrultusunda etkilediği kanısı yaygındır. Değişik sosyo-ekonomik kesimlerden gelen çocukların karşılaştıkları çeşitli toplumsal kaynaşma süreçlerinin bu durumu yarattığı konusunda da ortak bir yargıya varıldığı görülmektedir.

Araştırmanın ortaya çıkardığı sonuçlara bakılırsa, daha aşağı bir sosyo-ekonomik kesimden gelen çocuğun okulda başarısı daha yüksek sosyo-ekonomik kesimden gelen arkadaşından daha düşük olmaktadır. Son araştırmalara göre okuldaki bu başarısızlıkların sayısız etkenlerin sonucu olduğu söylenebilir. Bunlardan biri aşağı sosyo-ekonomik kesimden gelen çocuğun konuştuğu lehçenin orta tabaka değer ve düşünce kalıplarının belirlediği okul çevresinin benimsediği değerleri yansıtmaması olabilir. Ya da böyle bir çocuğun başarısını engelleyen neden onun konuştuğu lehçenin asıl niteliği değil de, başkalarının bu lehçeye gösterebilecekleri olumsuz tepki, ya da çocuğun kullandığı dilin yansıttığı değerlerle anlatım biçimi arasındaki tutarsızlık olabilir. Standart lehçeler dışındaki konuşma biçimlerinin değersiz sayılması çoğu zaman böyle konuşanların da aynı olumsuz ölçülerle değerlendirilmelerine yol açar ve öğretmenlerin böyle öğrencilerden beklentilerinin fazla olmaması o öğrencilerin başarısızlığını hazırlayan etkenleri oluşturur.

Toplum, aşağı sosyo-ekonomik kesimden gelen çocukların sorunlarını giderek daha iyi anlamakta ve onlara yardımcı olmak amacıyla hem genel, hem de özellikle dile dayanan programlar düzenlemektedir. Bu çalışma özellikle dile dayanan bu programlardan bazılarının eleştirel bir çözümlemesini yapmaktadır. Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, bu programların amaçları standart olmıyan lehçelerin kullanım dışı bırakılmasından yalnız standart dışı lehçelerin kullanımını özendirmeye kadar değişmekle birlikte, eğitimciler çocukların

gerçekten yararlanabilecekleri programlar oluşturmak için geçmişteki deneyimlerden ders almaktadırlar. Bu konuda bilgi ve sorumluluğun artmasıyla aşağı sosyo-ekonomik kesimden gelen çocukların gelecekteki öğrenim durumları daha iyiye doğru gideceği için araştırma ümitli bir sonuca varmaktadır.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers commonly observe that many children of seemingly normal intelligence fail to reach the required academic standard in school. Such children are the subject of a great deal of staffroom discussion and may even be referred for professional guidance. It is clear that a problem exists.

Literature shows that language is widely recognised to be a major determinant of educational success or failure. In turn the variety of language acquired by each individual is much inthreenced by socioeconomic status. Yet it is difficult for teacher and those immediately concerned with the education of the young child to fully understand the relationship between these three elements, socioeconomic status, language and educational performance. Why do children develop different dialects and language skills; in what way are these skills related to educational performance; and how children can, whose language skills seem to mitigate against educational achievement, be helped.

This study is an attempt to answer these questions. It has been written for educators and for all those involved in their daily lives with the problem of educational failure. It synthesises the ideas derived from psychology, linguistics, and sociology in an attempt to better understand why many children fail in school and what steps might be taken to avoid such widespread failure.

The approach in this study has been as follows:

1. To examine the relationship between language and socioeconomic status. Does membership in a particular social class mean that a child will acquire certain language skills? And if so, why should this happen?
2. To examine the relationship between language and educational success. Do certain languages or dialects predispose a child to educational success or failure? If so, is this because some languages or dialects are better than others in some way? Or are there other reasons?
3. To examine ways in which the child who is disadvantaged because of his language is being helped, and suggest possible new approaches.

To date, most of the contributions to an understanding of the relationship between socioeconomic status, language and educational performance have come from the United States of America and Britain, and this study refers specifically to the situation in those places. The term Standard English has been used to refer to the British and American English spoken by the more highly educated members of those societies; it is normally used in writing and in mass communication. The term Nonstandard English has been used to refer to any variety of English which is different grammatically or in vocabulary or pronunciation from Standard English. Strictly speaking, the term dialect can be used to refer to any variety of English, Standard or Nonstandard; normally it has been used in this study to refer to the latter only. The findings of this study can be generalised only to societies similar to the USA and Britain, where differences within the common language and between socioeconomic groups are marked. If these conditions do not exist this study is, of course, not relevant.

In this study literature from both Britain and North America has been used; although both use Standard English, they differ. A certain lack of precision in some of the terminology used in this study has resulted. For instance, the terms working class, lower class and low socioeconomic status are used and loosely in published literature interchangeably. All of them refer to the child whose family is either poor, having a manual occupation, ill-educated, immigrant, culturally-deprived, urban, from a ghetto or an ethnic minority - or any combination of these. Similarly the terms upper and middle class and of higher socioeconomic status, refer to the more privileged child whose family does not suffer from such social handicaps. When referring to particular source material, this study uses the terminology of that material, otherwise it uses the terms higher and lower socioeconomic status, or higher and lower or working class.

If such problems arise in the use of two varieties of Standard English, how much greater must be the problems of a child of low socioeconomic status whose dialect may be so different from the Standard English of his teachers as to make it almost incomprehensible. If this study can improve understanding of his problems, or help him in any way, then it will be well worthwhile.

CHAPTER 1

HOW DOES SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS INFLUENCE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT?

Early Research

It has long been recognised that the relationship between socioeconomic status and language is worthy of study. As early as the 1930s a series of studies in linguistic development by McCarthy (1930), Day (1932) and Davies (1937) noted striking social class differences. These researchers found that middle and upper class children used longer and more sophisticated sentence forms at an earlier age than lower class children, and that the differences between the social classes tended to increase rather than to decrease with age. Subsequent studies by Young (1940), Irwin (1948a, 1948b, 1952) and Milner (1951) supported these findings. Milner (1951) and McCarthy (1954) suggested that a restricted verbal environment at home might account for the slow language development of lower class children. Templin (1957) observed that children of higher socioeconomic status scored consistently better than children of lower socioeconomic status over a range of language skills. Significantly she did not suggest that children with low scores were incapable of using certain linguistic structures, but only that their usage was less frequent.

The most influential work in associating socioeconomic status and language was carried out in the 1950s and 1960s by the British linguist, Basil Bernstein. He was the first researcher to bring to general prominence the relationship between membership in a particular social class and the development of certain varieties of language. His work was important not only for the debate which it generated between educators, linguists and psychologists, but also for the effect which it had upon educational practice.

The Work of Basil Bernstein

Bernstein started his work in England in the 1950s at a time when there was considerable concern about the uneven social distribution of educational achievement, and when an explanation was being sought for the high concentration of educational failure and underachievement among children of the unskilled and semiskilled strata of society, the lower social classes. Bernstein himself had an intimate knowledge of the problem as he was personally involved for several years in teaching youngsters whose "level of formal attainment..... was one of the best indictments of the educational system" (Bernstein, 1971: p. 4). In this climate of

concern Bernstein produced a series of papers which seemed to provide not only a plausible explanation for the phenomenon of differential educational achievement, but also a possible solution to the problem.

Bernstein's
initial
research

Bernstein's basic tenet was that language development shows the influence of both culture and social class. Thus differences in socioeconomic status are reflected in the development of different dialects and different usage of language. Such qualitative and functional variations within language Bernstein explained as resulting from the different socialising process employed by families of higher and lower socioeconomic status.

To test the association between socioeconomic status and the development of different varieties of language Bernstein (1958, 1960, 1962a, 1962b) carried out a series of tests on groups of middle and working class children. He found that irrespective of intelligence the working class boys usually had higher scores on nonverbal than on verbal tests, while the scores of the middle class boys showed no such differences.

On the basis of such observed differences in grammatical usage Bernstein suggested that "the different class groups are differentially oriented in their structural and lexical choices" (Bernstein, 1971; P.109). He posited the existence of two linguistic codes, the restricted and the elaborated, which he defined as the basic organising concepts underlying language. The restricted code is characterised by the use of such linguistic features as short uncomplicated sentences, simple and repetitive use of conjunctions, frequent use of commands and questions, limited use of adjectives and adverbs, and frequent use of personal pronouns as subjects and low order symbolism. Most important, much meaning is implicit. Characteristic features of the elaborated code include grammatical and syntactic accuracy, complex sentences, frequent use of prepositions and impersonal pronouns, a wide range of adjectives and adverbs, and the use of expressive symbolism. In this code much meaning is explicit. While all social classes utilise the restricted code, only the higher classes have frequent access to the elaborated code. This differential access to the two codes manifests itself in the contrast between the language of the different social classes.

Criticisms
Of Bernstein's
Early Work

This early work of Bernstein has been subjected to a barrage of criticism. Certainly the empirical basis of his research seems crude and unsatisfactory by today's standards. He did not attempt, for instance, to explain how the social class of his subjects was determined, and he was vague in his definition of social class; he utilised existing tests without questioning whether they actually measured what he was trying to assess; he ignored the effect of the test situation. Nor are the two codes as discrete as he implies. To identify as dichotomies what are in fact only different dimensions of language is to be arbitrary in the extreme. Bernstein himself later emphasised that the differences between the two codes are relative rather than absolute.

Confirmation
Of Bernstein's
Ideas

Despite its inadequacies this early work of Bernstein's was important in that it acted as a catalyst in the field of linguistics. His ideas stimulated a vast amount of new research throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The main body of this work used improved methodology to investigate many different aspects of language. To select but a few examples, Robinson (1965) and Lawton (1963) looked at written work; Hess and Shipman (1965) and Brandis and Henderson (1970) studied maternal language; Greenberg and Formanek (1971) and Van der Geest et al (1973) tried to avoid the effects of the test situation; Deutsch status; Loban (1963) and Robinson and Rackstraw (1972) introduced new and more sophisticated methods of linguistic analysis. All of these researchers substantiated Bernstein's proposed relationship between socioeconomic status and language. There have been very few dissenting voices.

Bernstein's
Later
Research

For Bernstein, however, establishing this relationship was only part of a wider problem, that of the educational underachievement of the lower class child. He was not interested solely in describing social class differences in language, but wanted also to explain why such differences should arise and to investigate their educational implications.

In his later papers Bernstein (1965, 1971) suggested that it is different types of familial organisation and different social relationships within the family which led to the qualitative differences in language which he had observed. He distinguished two types of family organisation, the personal and the positional, differentiated by their use of contrasting control systems

to produce behaviour held to be appropriate. This in turn predisposed the two types familial organisation to a different orientation to meaning. In very simple terms the working class child is part of a positional family and his social identity is very much a result of his age, sex and status within the family. Language is used to instruct. Its meaning is dependant upon the context within which it is being used, which is mutually available to all family members. Meaning does not therefore have to be made explicit, and the restricted code is the appropriate organising force behind language. The higher class child, on the other hand, is part of a personal family, in which the unique attributes of each member are emphasised and where social identities are created by individuals. Language is used more to mediate and explain and to transmit social skills. In such a family meaning is less mutually available and less dependant on context, and thus the elaborated code is more appropriate. Bernstein stressed again that no social class is limited to the use of just one of the codes, but that the lower social classes would tend to use the restricted code and the higher social classes would tend to use the elaborated code. Bernstein has suggested that it is the function for which language is used which determines its form. The main difference between higher and lower social classes is in the extent to which their control and socialising patterns require meaning to be made explicit, and it is this factor which determines their respective usage of the two codes.

Criticisms
of Bernstein's
later Work

Bernstein's work is not easy to understand for a variety of reasons. His ideas have evolved over a number of years, and are represented by a series of developing rather than absolute concepts. As Bernstein himself admits, his work has been to "explore an intuition" (Bernstein 1971; P.2) Only after 12 years did Bernstein himself consider that what he termed his theory (but what was in fact only a hypothesis) was "sufficiently explicit to stand detailed explanation at both conceptual and empirical levels" (Bernstein, 1971; P.17). Unfortunately he has never provided a single, comprehensive statement of his so called theories. Even in his collected papers (1971-1973) there is no cogent and coherent abstract of his work.

A further obstacle to the satisfactory understanding of Bernstein's work lies in Bernstein's own writing style. He himself observed disarmingly that his papers were "obscure, lack precision, and probably abound with

ambiguities" (Bernstein, 1971; P.19). He has also employed frequent changes of terminology, which he has not always explained, and on certain occasions when he has modified his theoretical position, he has failed to acknowledge the substitution of one idea for another.

The above limitations, however frustrating, are chiefly of detail and presentation. A more fundamental problem is that Bernstein has put forward as proved and accepted facts, ideas and beliefs which derived largely from his own intuition. His observations may indeed be valid, but until they are scientifically proved to be so, they should be regarded as hypotheses rather than facts substantiating theories. It is unfortunate that the many possible areas of inquiry which Bernstein has indicated have not yet been adequately explored, for his work has raised questions which are vitally important to our understanding of the problem of educational failure.

Summary

In conclusion it is fair to say that while the work of Bernstein is open to criticism, his research, and that of many others inspired by him, clearly shows that socioeconomic status influences the variety of language acquired by the child, and supports the argument that there is a relationship between the two. But this is not the whole picture. Trudgill suggested that "in situations more artificial and alien to them than to middle class children, working class children use a higher proportion of pronouns. Is this what it has all been about?" (Trudgill, 1975; P.47). The answer to his question is "No", and for two vital reasons. Firstly, Bernstein's work has suggested reasons why differences between children of higher and lower socioeconomic status arise in the linguistic, psychological and sociological dimensions of life. Their characteristic use of the two codes reflects alternative ways of looking at, and reacting to, the world, which in turn may seem to affect educational success or failure. This aspect of Bernstein's work will be discussed in greater depth later in this study. Secondly, Bernstein's work was the catalyst which put the question of the relationship between language, social class and education into the open debating forum, and in doing so focused upon it the attention of linguists, psychologists and sociologists. The implications and importance for education of their ensuing discussions were and still are vital.

CHAPTER 2

ARE ALL LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS EQUALLY EFFICIENT AS VEHICLES OF COMMUNICATION?

he Quality
f Language

Any evaluation of the evidence concerning the relationship between varieties of language and socioeconomic status will confirm what most teachers know from their own experience, namely that in most classrooms there is a vast range of language skills. Most teachers too have their own opinions about the language skills of their pupils; "Johnny is monosyllabic, he won't say a word", "Sue's pronunciation is terrible, I can hardly understand what she says", "Henry told a lovely story today, it was really vivid", are typical of the many comments on children's language made by all teachers.

Underlying such comments, however there lies a fundamental issue. How valid are qualitative judgements about language? Can any language or dialect be proven to be in some way superior or inferior to another? Do speakers of different languages or dialects have different potentialities open to them, and are there things which can be said in one language or dialect but not in another?

If an individual wishes to express thought, he can only do so by utilising the language which is available to him. This language is a creation of the society in which he lives, fashioned forthat society's purposes by the common experiences which that society has shared. It is not necessarily appropriate to the special needs of each of its members: it will be quite adequate for everyday communications, but occasions will always arise when it is not able to express a thought or idea with the required exactitude. A simple illustration of this lies in the ability of the human eye to distinguish thousands of different shades of colour, and the corresponding inability of the human tongue to produce any definitive description of them. At a philosophical level the frustration of writers and thinkers with the constratints and limitations imposed upon them by language is universal. But do some languages or dialects present more restraints than others? Are some languages or dialects better vehicles of communication?

The question of the quality of language has been at the heart of one of the most significant educational controversies of the last 20 years. In the 1950s and 1960s in Britain and North America society as a whole was increasingly conscious of the inadequate educational performance of many children of low socioeconomic status. An easy explanation of this failure seemed to be that the dialect of those children was not adequate to the demands of formal education. Debate focussed on whether the Standard English of the higher social classes was in any way better than the Nonstandard English of the lower social classes. On the one hand the verbal deficit hypothesis argued that Nonstandard English was linguistically less adequate than, and inferior to Standard English. On the other hand the verbal difference hypothesis claimed that Nonstandard English was not deficient but merely different from Standard English. The debate was particularly emotive in that the supposedly inadequate Non standard English of children of low socioeconomic status was held to be responsible at least in part for the inadequacy of their performance at school.

The Verbal Deficit Hypothesis

The promulgation of the verbal deficit hypothesis was the immediate result of Bernstein's work, or rather of Bernstein's work misinterpreted, since he himself strongly denies the veracity of the hypothesis, and regrets his association with it. Nevertheless his early writings were ambiguous, and the source of some confusion. For instance in an early paper he stated quite clearly that "the depressed scores on the verbal test for those working class boys who have very high nonverbal scores could be expected in terms of the linguistic deprivation experienced in their social background" (Bernstein, 1959: p.322). Yet in the same paper he paid tribute to the qualities of working class speech; "A public language contains its own aesthetic, a simplicity and directness of expression, emotionally virile, pithy and powerful, and a metaphoric range of considerable force and appropriateness" (Bernstein, 1959; p-323)

In the face of such contradictions it is easy to understand why Bernstein was commonly thought to support the language deficit hypothesis. Nevertheless in his later papers he clearly did not wish to be associated with any deficit view of working class dialect, and regretted that his earlier work might have been misleading.

The confusion over Bernstein's supposed support of the verbal deficit hypothesis is particularly unfortunate. As this hypothesis has been largely discredited, the main body of Bernstein's research, so closely but so falsely associated with it, has suffered the same approbrium. This should not be so, for criticisms levelled at the verbal deficit hypothesis do not in any way invalidate the basic tenets of Bernstein's id

Jensen summarized the argument in favour of verbal deficit thus:

"..... language in the lower class is not as flexible as a means of communication as in the middle class. It is not as readily adapted to the subtleties of a particular situation, but consists more of a relatively small repertoire of stereotyped phrases and expressions which are used rather loosely without much effort to achieve a subtle correspondance between perception and verbal expression. Much of the lower class language consists of a kind of 'emotional' accompaniment to action here and now. In contrast, middle class language, rather than being a mere accompaniment to ongoing activity, serves more to represent things and events not immediately present" (Jensen, 1968; p.118).

Influential deficit theorists included Reissman(1962), Bereiter and Engelmann (1966), Deutsch et al(1968), Gahagan and Gahagan (1970), Tough (1976), Hess and Shipman (1965), Robinson (1965), Brandis and Henderson (1970), Greenberg and Formanek (1971), Robinson and Rackstraw (1972), Cook-Gumperz (1973) and Van der Geest et al (1973). Bereiter and Engelmann even went so far as to claim that "language is apparently dispensible enough in the life of the lower class child for an occasional child to get along without it altogether" (Bereiter and Engelmann), 1966; p.31).

The Verbal Difference Hypothesis

Reaction to the verbal deficit hypothesis came swiftly in the USA, brought about especially by the insinuation that linguistic inferiority could be equated with racial inferiority. The opposition was voiced by supporters of the verbal difference hypothesis.

As long ago as the 1920s structural linguists such as Sapir (Manvelba 1949), and Bloomfield (1935) observed that, within any language, different dialects commonly, for social, historical or political reasons, develop;

equally commonly, one or more of these dialects assumes the status of being the standard dialect, in that it is the dialect of masscommunication and the printed word. This point of view is widely accepted by contemporary linguists such as Trudgill (1974, 1974b).

What distinguishes supporters of the verbal difference hypothesis from verbal deficit theorists, however is that the standard dialect is in any way inherently superior to any other dialect, or that nonstandard dialects are "poor", "deficient", "inferior", or "illogical". Trudgill stated that:

"Just as there is no linguistic reason for arguing that Gaelic is superior to Chinese, so no English dialect can be claimed to be linguistically superior or inferior to another.....there is no linguistic evidence whatsoever for suggesting that one dialect is more 'expressive' or 'logical' than any other, or for postulating that there are 'primitive', 'inadequate' or 'debased' English dialects" (Trudgill, 1975; p. 26)

The Work
of Lobov

The attack on the verbal deficit theory was spearheaded by William Labov (1966, 1972, 1976). Labov defined his theoretical stance thus:

"There is no reason to believe that any nonstandard vernacular is in itself an obstacle to learning. The chief problem is ignorance of language on the part of all concerned. Our job as linguists is to remedy this ignorance..... teachers are now being told to ignore the language of Negro children as unworthy of attention and useless for learning. They are being taught to hear every natural utterance of the child as evidence of this mental inferiority. As linguists we are unanimous in condemning these views as bad observation bad theory and bad practice" (Labov, 1972;).

Adherents of the verbal difference hypothesis in America, such as Gordon (1982) have concentrated on demonstrating that Black American dialects are as regular as the standard and differ from it in a systematic manner, that those who speak these dialects are as capable as others of abstract and sophisticated thinking, and that these dialects do not contain any mysterious blight that might impair cognitive development or educability.

Labov's attack on the verbal deficit theory was threefold. He first questioned the validity of previous research. Contrary to previous assertions that Negro children from the ghetto area receive little verbal stimulation, Labov claimed that those same children were "bathed in verbal stimulation from morning to night" (Labov, 1973; p.33). He explained this seeming contradiction as being due to inadequate research methods. He accepted that Bernstein and Bereiter and Engelmann had observed children who were apparently nonverbal, but demanded to know how else a small child would appear when faced with a situation which he could only interpret as being threatening or hostile. He contrasted the speech elicited in a rather formal interview of an eight year old Negro boy with that from a less formal interview of the same subject by the same interviewer. At the second interview, the interviewer a) sat on the floor b) produced a bag of crisps, c) included another child and d) introduced taboo words. According to Labov the transformation was remarkable.

"The monosyllabic speaker who had nothing to say about anything and cannot remember what he did yesterday has disappeared. Instead we have two boys who have so much to say they keep interrupting each other, who seem to have no difficulty in using the English language to express themselves" (Labov, 1972; p. 209)

Labov illustrated with devastating clarity the distortion of performance which resulted from the normal interview situation. Labov then went on to argue that the dialect of the middle classes was not, in fact, "better" than that of the lower classes. Rather, the reverse was true. He claimed that:

"In many ways working class speakers are more effective narrators, reasoners, and debators than many middle class speakers who temporize, qualify and lose their arguments in a mass of irrelevant detail" (Labov, 1972; p.214)

Labov admitted that he could provide no systematic quantitative evidence to support this argument. Instead he compared and contrasted the speech of a 15 year old Black member of a street gang with that of an upper middle class college educated Black adult. Not only did he criticise the latter

for its sheer verbosity, but he also failed to find any evidence that the speaker himself was "more rational, more logical, or more intelligent" or dealt "more easily with abstractions", than the teenager (Labov, 1972; p.213) Labov also claimed to be unable to understand what the adult was saying!

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Labov (1973) investigated the grammar of Black English Vernacular in an attempt to prove that it was, like any other language, systematic and governed by rules. He pointed out, for instance, that the omission of "is" or "are" in Black English Vernacular corresponds to the contraction of the same words in Standard English, and is equally rule governed. Likewise positive and negative meanings are conveyed in Black English Vernacular by the use of a double negative plus a particular stress pattern in a regular and systematic way. His overall conclusion was that although Black English Vernacular differs somewhat from Standard English in its grammar, its stress patterns, and its use of context, it does conform to a system of rules, and in the vast majority of cases these are identical to those of Standard English.

criticism
Labov's
work

Labov's work has been highly acclaimed, but in some ways it is open to the very criticisms which are levelled at that of Bernstein, namely that many of his judgements are subjective. For instance, he provides no more empiric evidence to support his claim that children of lower socioeconomic status are "bathed in verbal stimulation" (Labov, 1973; p.33) than does Bernstein to support his claim that those same children suffer from the linguistic deprivation experienced in their social background. Labov's suggestion that the speech of his middle class adult subject is less comprehensible than that of his teenage subject is equally subjective, and yet he has not hesitated to base his assertion of "the logic of Nonstandard English" upon these very interviews. Labov has no more proved his case than have the verbal deficit theorists, other than in his demonstration that Black English Vernacular is regular grammatically.

support
for
Labov's
views

Other studies to establish the linguistic equality of Black English Vernacular and other nonstandard dialects followed that of Labov. Baratz (1969) and Gay and Tweney (1976) for instance found a consistency and regularity in Black English Vernacular to support what Edwards (1979a) called its "linguistic validity". Edwards (1976a, 1976b) studied the

language of West Indian immigrant children in Britain and found it to be a distinct dialect with rules of its own. However, as both he and Trudgill (1975) pointed out, West Indian English is in fact a very wide ranging dialect, including speech little divergent from Standard English to broadest Creole.

The work of Francis (1974) and Edwards (1977) cast further doubts on the verbal deficit hypothesis. In studying the dialects of disadvantaged children in Britain and Eire respectively, researchers both observed that the differences in speech between the social classes were actually less marked than the differences within the social classes. Cumulatively their conclusions further undermined the verbal deficit hypothesis, in that they indicated that interclass differences were so small as to be negligible.

Houston (1970) provided a useful overview of the language deficit/ language difference controversy. She considered, and refuted, evidence on the following points:

1. That the language of the disadvantaged/ lower class/ working class child is linguistically deficient.
2. That that child cannot use words properly.
3. That that child prefers to communicate nonverbally, and that to him, language is dispensable.

Summary

The current climate of opinion among educators and linguists is to support the verbal difference hypothesis, and to argue that no language or dialect is "poor", "illogical", "deficient" or "primitive". Certainly the evidence which linguists have produced to show that nonstandard dialects are distinctive and systematic grammatically is overwhelming. For those concerned with the problem of educational failure, however, this evidence is not sufficient. There remains the very vital question of whether all dialects or languages are equally effective as vehicles of communication. Nonstandard dialects may indeed be quite appropriate to serve the immediate communication needs of those who use them, but are they also appropriate

for the wider demands of education and in society at large? Are all dialects equally able to express all ideas in all situations? No firm conclusions can yet be drawn on these issues. Until more evidence is available, those concerned with education should avoid making subjective judgements about the quality of the language of the children in their care.

CHAPTER 3

HOW IS LANGUAGE LEARNED?

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT?

Language and psychology Although the way in which an individual acquires language is an issue which has long engaged the interest of psychology, no definitive and unchallenged theory has yet emerged to explain the phenomenon. Nor is there a consensus of opinion on such related questions as whether thought is a necessary predeterminant of language or vice versa. Nevertheless an examination of such issues is of great importance to those concerned with the problem of poor academic achievement. Such an examination may not only provide some explanation of why the problem has arisen, but also how it may be solved.

Every normal human being learns a language. Lenneberg (1967) suggests that this ability is a species specific and inherited phenomenon. Lenneberg claims that non humans will never be able to use language because they have neither the anatomical nor physiological features necessary for the production of speech; he also argues that human languages differ in kind from animal communication systems. Lenneberg also suggested that a child's ability to learn language is a function of maturation. He discovered universal milestones of language development, which occur in fixed sequence, and are common to all children in all types of society. Nevertheless he also pointed out the present ambiguity in understanding the relationship between language and thought in demonstrating that language is not necessary for some thought processes such as the assimilation and categorisation of information. (Clark, 1977)

In the most general terms psychology provides two conceptual frameworks which explain how language is acquired, that of behaviourist psychology and that of developmental psychology. The former sees language as a behaviour, to be learned, whereas the latter sees language as part of cognitive development.

Contribution of Behaviourist psychology The prime concern of behaviourist psychology is to explain overt and observable behaviour. Using a basis of meticulous scientific research, behaviourist psychology claims that all behaviour is learned as a result of associating a stimulus with a response. Moreover a given response can be manipulated or reinforced.

The simplest form of stimulus/response behaviour was demonstrated in Russia in the late 19th Century by Pavlov (1927, English translation). It is commonly known nowadays as classical conditioning. Pavlov, a physiologist concerned with animal behaviour, presented a pair of stimuli, a buzzer and meat powder, to dogs over a long series of trials. The dogs' response was to salivate. Eventually the buzzer alone (a conditioned stimulus) stimulated salivation (a conditioned response) which had not previously been evident, from the dogs. Almost simultaneously, Thorndike (1898) in the USA showed that a stimulus/ response connection could be strengthened by providing satisfaction in the form of some sort of reward, and thus first formally emphasised the importance of motivation in learning.

the work
B.F
Skinner

Today behaviourist psychology is dominated by the work of the American psychologist, Skinner, who has developed the theory of operant conditioning, a much more complex, yet equally scientific and objective variant of the original stimulus/response ideas. Skinner insists that the same principles apply to both human and animal behaviour, and that learning inevitably happens when stimuli and responses become associated through training or accident. Skinner accepts that classical conditioning as demonstrated by Pavlov does occur, but attributes far less importance to it, for whereas classical conditioning applies only to reflex activity, his explanation, operant conditioning, applies to all behaviour.

Skinner says that in daily life the stimulus which produces a given response is not usually known, and reinforcement of the response cannot be made until the stimulant, or operant, has occurred spontaneously. But when a spontaneous and random operant response is made to an unknown stimulus and is in turn followed by a reinforcing stimulus, then the rate of responding for that particular operant will increase.

When Skinner applies his ideas to language acquisition the initial operant is the spontaneous babbling of a baby. The reinforcing stimulus then becomes the parents' immediate repetition of the sounds which most nearly approximate those found in adult language. The process of reinforcement becomes progressively more precise, as first sounds, then simple words, and eventually whole sentences are acquired by the child. Language is thus learned, according to Skinner, by the child's successive approximations towards the desired pronunciation and speech

patterns being reinforced by rewards and repetitions from the parents. (Skinner, 1957).

To Skinner, all behaviour is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning. Language acquisition is only one aspect of behaviour; so are such skills as problem solving and concept attainment, so vital in education. Behaviourist psychology sees the development of language and cognition as being parallel but independent. According to Sprinthall and Sprinthall, Skinner claims furthermore that: " Understanding a subject, such as history, is simply the result of having learned the verbal repertoire. Skinner insists that when students can answer questions in a given area, and speak and write fluently about that area, then, by definition, they understand that area" (Sprinthall and Sprinthall, 1976; P 305).

Skinner's theories have aroused opposition. Chomsky (1959, 1975) argues that behaviourist psychology fails to explain adequately the highly complex process of language acquisition. He states that Skinner's analysis of language is a surface analysis, and fails to recognise the deeper structure of language which determines meaning expressed through the surface structure. Chomsky claims that every individual has an innate Language Acquisition Device; an integral conceptual capacity which provides him with a pre-knowledge of language universals (the rules and constituents which underline all languages) and which enables him to learn and understand the rules of his own language. Thus the individual can use his language competence (his underlying knowledge of the structure and rules of language) to process verbal input, which is often disorganised and unstructured, and produce meaningful sentences of his own. Chomsky calls the rules by which an individual understands language spoken by others and formulates his own ideas into spoken language "transformational grammar". Chomsky's claims that the human being has an innate and unique predisposition to learn language parallel those of Lenneberg.

practical application of behaviourist psychology Skinner (1965, 1968) has applied his ideas in practical and specific ways to teaching. His confidence that reinforcement of desired responses can be used to promote learning has led him to suggest techniques of behaviour modification which can be used in the classroom to elicit certain responses from which knowledge is inferred. Skinner suggests that reinforcers such as good grades, approval, prizes, etc be used to promote meaningful behavioural changes. Skinner was one of the first advocates of the use of

teaching machines, which in his view have the great advantage of providing immediate reinforcement.

The fundamental principles of behaviourist psychology have been used in programmes designed specifically to stimulate language development. The best known of these is probably that of Bereiter and Engelmann (1966). This programme was designed for disadvantaged children in the USA, whose major weaknesses, in the view of the authors, lay in their ability to use language: when such children had learned appropriate language, namely Standard English, then, it was thought, they could learn other things too. Such views, of course, clearly reflect the language deficit hypothesis.

The Bereiter and Engelmann programme is very highly structured and employs direct teaching methods. It aims to elicit specific responses from children by using five basic "moves". These are:

1. Repeating sentences verbatim.
2. Answering simple yes/no questions.
3. Producing simple statements.
4. Making location statements.
5. Deducing the answers to problems.

The children are taught in small groups, with a teacher clearly in control. The children respond loudly and usually in unison to "moves" initiated by the teacher. When the children have produced the desired responses, such acceptable behaviour is reinforced by a reward of some sort, such as praise or candy.

Contribution Behaviourist psychology has little in common with developmental psychology. While behaviourist psychology emphasises that all behaviour is learnt from the stimulus/response associations already described, developmental psychology holds that each individual's unique mode of functioning is due primarily to his innate cognitive mechanisms. The former emphasises the influence of the environment on the individual in a deterministic fashion: the latter believes that the individual can himself select those aspects of the environment with which he will interact.

Work
ean
et

The most influential development psychologist is Jean Piaget(1970, 1969). He maintains that every human must pass through a series of developmental stages which are universal and unvarying, and that in each stage there are major qualitative transformations of mental organisation followed by periods of assimilation and integration. At any one time an individual has command of certain schemes or behaviour patterns which enable him to act upon external stimuli in order to deal with his environment. As the individual reacts to new features in his environment, the schemes, or patterns, change, enabling him to adapt to new situations. These schemes become increasingly complex with maturity. Thus development proceeds from infancy, when responses are reflexive, through various stages which are characterised by the assimilation of different and increasingly complex cognitive processes. Eventually the individual may reach the highest level of cognitive development formal thought, characterised by the attainment of logical, rational, abstract thinking strategies.

Although Piaget has not focused specifically on language acquisition he has provided powerful new insights which can be applied to the development of language. Essentially he contends that as with any new information a child will interpret and apply new linguistic information only in terms of what he already knows. Piaget maintains that language is an aspect of thought, and like thought develops through the interaction of the individual and the environment. Language does not precede or determine thought, but is its symbolic representation and external expression. The young child is limited to concrete experiences and objects and cannot manipulate words as abstract symbols. Only as he grows older and is no longer tied to the actual can he use language to develop thinking.

Work
Jerome
ner

The American psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1962,1966,1971) accepts many of Piaget's developmental theories and suggests that "ability to use language is ahead of their capacity to be aware of and to utilise its potential for representing or organising the world, and of their ability to use it as an instrument of thought" (Patterson 1977, p.145). Bruner however claims that a child uses language as a tool of thought at a rather younger age (6 to 7 years) than does Piaget (7 + years).

Bruner sees cognitive growth as an individual's gradual development of an understanding of his world. This he achieves gradually, in stages, by experiencing and mastering three means of representing: inactive, iconic, and symbolic. In his early years the child understands only actual concrete objects and actions, the enactive means of representation. He learns best by doing, and verbal communication alone is inefficient.

To a slightly older child, an image can replace an action or an object: in this stage of iconic representation, however an image always represents a concrete object or a particular action. Language becomes much more important to the child. Finally, by symbolic representation an individual can portray thoughts and objects symbolically. The importance of language in each of these stages differs: it is most important when the individual orders his world through symbols. The most common form of symbolism is language, and so language becomes crucial in promoting thought.

Bruner suggests furthermore that every individual has a basic, innate "linguistic competence" which allows him to learn language, and a basic, innate "communicative competence" which enables him to choose appropriate linguistic forms for particular circumstances. According to Bruner, the child should have full command of these skills by the age of seven. There is a third competence, however, which Bruner calls "analytic competence". This involves the ability to reason and analyse using the raw data of representation in the form of verbal description. Analytical competence is the ability to use language for thinking: it is not innate, but is acquired through the intellectual activities which are part of formal education. Only when a child has this competence will he be able to develop his intellectual potential to the full.

ork
gotski Piaget has been responsible for providing the underlying theoretical concepts of developmental psychology, but within this school of thought there is in fact a lack of unanimity of the role and importance of language. Other developmental psychologists have attributed far more importance to the role of language in developing thought than has Piaget or Bruner. The Russian school of psycholinguistics has provided a very illuminating analysis of the relationship between language and thought. Vygotski (1962, English translation) studied the cognitive development experienced by the individual, and argued that thought and language develop separately, but that eventually the two processes merge; they happen

simultaneously but are different. Thus there is a "pre-intellectual" stage in language and a "pre-linguistic" stage in thought, but when, at the age of about two years, the two converge, "thought becomes verbal and speech rational" (Vygotski, 1962; p. 44). For the following five years language has both the internal function of organising thought, and the external function of communicating this thought to others: moreover, both functions are verbalised, so that the child talks aloud to himself as well as in social communication. Not until the age of seven does the child make the distinction between speech for himself and speech for others: at that point he ceases to verbalise his thoughts, and internalises them. It is then that the development of higher forms of intellectual activity becomes possible. To the Russians, language is therefore an essential factor in mental growth.

Developmental Psychology emphasises the concept that it is practical experience which facilitates cognitive development, a concept whose influence has been far reaching. Much effort has been expended in defying the higher order mental skills, and in devising classroom strategies to promote their development. In school the learning environment, curriculum materials and teaching strategies aim to provide an optimal situation with which the child can interact and develop. "Learning by discovery", "play with a purpose", "learning through experiencing", are tag phrases which every teacher knows and uses to describe the educational practice which are commonplace in primary schools today.

The principles of developmental psychology can also be seen working in practice in some language programmes. The programme Development Unit of the Compensatory Education Project in the United Kingdom has developed a "language throughout the curriculum" programme. It is designed specifically for disadvantaged children aged from four to six years, and aims to foster the development of Standard English. In particular it focuses upon vocabulary and language structures as factors in determining logical thinking and reasoning: again the influence of the verbal deficit hypothesis can be seen. The programme is not a highly structured, detailed and presequenced package of language activities, and does not employ direct teaching methods. Instead it provides a set of guidelines and suggested activities which the teacher can select and adapt as and when appropriate.

The handbook for the programme (Downes, 1978) contains practical suggestions for language stimulation throughout the curriculum. It identifies particular language skills (listening, naming, categorising, describing, denoting position, reasoning):, explains their relevance to other aspects of child development; and suggests ways in which these skills can be promoted. The handbook also looks at the classroom itself and suggests how the teacher can explore the language teaching opportunities which arise from the work areas and the activities commonly found in a classroom, eg. , sand play, music corner, etc. Language games are described which are intended to complement and reinforce the language learning that takes place informally as part of the normal range of classroom activities which themselves are designed to promote cognitive development.

Summary

Psychology cannot yet tell us exactly how a child learns language, nor explain the precise relationship between language and thought. It has not usually been concerned with how different dialects develop and indeed this is not its real task. However, an understanding of the basic principles of behaviourist and developmental psychology is undeniably important to all concerned in education. If only in focusing attention on the complexity of all aspects of child development. Such an understanding also provides useful insight into the theoretical foundations of language development programmes, an insight often not furnished by the programmes themselves.

Nevertheless psychology can confuse as well as enlighten. For instance, the work of both Piaget and Bruner seems to suggest that language is not in fact as important in promoting cognitive development in the early years as it is usually held to be. On the other hand, the work of Vygotski suggests that language is in fact critically important at that time, because before the age of seven the child verbalises his thoughts. In the face of such conflicting opinion it is hard for the teacher to know whether there is too much emphasis on providing language in the classroom, to the detriment of providing concrete, physical experiences, or whether language should actually be given even more emphasis in school than it receives now.

One approach to dealing with these complex issues might be to look at those areas of common ground shared by the various schools of thought.

For instance, psychologists are in universal agreement that language and thought are in some way related; likewise there is a general consensus of opinion on the importance of motivation in stimulating both linguistic and cognitive development. It might be profitable to investigate further ways in which existing motivation could be harnessed or fresh motivation provided to promote language development. Psychology must continue to add to our understanding of how children can be helped to succeed in school.

CHAPTER 4
ARE ALL LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS
EQUALLY EFFICIENT AS TOOLS OF THOUGHT?

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ught
There is no conclusive evidence that any one language or dialect is better or worse than another for thinking. Lenneberg makes this point emphatically:

"Could it be that some languages require less mature cognition' than others, perhaps because they are still more primitive? In recent years this notion has been thoroughly discredited by virtually all students of language" (Lenneberg, 1967; p. 364).

There is likewise a consensus of opinion among psychologists and linguists that language is the external and symbolic expression of thought. But language may do more than convey ideas. It is also a means of categorising experience, and the qualities of a particular language may influence the thoughts of its users in some unique way. A language evolves over time to meet the needs of a society, and reflects the particular perceptions of that society: at the same time language may influence the thoughts and attitudes of the members of that society.

e Work of
jamin
orf
Central to any discussion of such ideas is the work of the American amateur linguist Benjamin Whorf. According to Whorf's linguistic relativity hypothesis which proposes that language influences man's perception of his environment, and leads him to conceive the world in different ways (Carroll, 1956). Whorf's hypothesis is expressed as follows:

"..... the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself a shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions for his sythe of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly, between different grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages" (Carroll, 1956; p. 212-214).

Whorf illustrated his ideas by interpreting the thought and culture of the Hopi Indians of North America. According to Whorf, the Hopi have

their own unique perception of the universe. Whorf claimed that they categorised the world in two ways, which he labelled manifesting and manifested, and which are roughly equivalent to subjective and objective. The subjective domain is that of the unrealised future in which man and nature are subject to change and alteration; the objective domain is the unchanging past and present of man and his world.

Whorf's hypothesis is not usually accepted without reservations, for it is very difficult to make reliable comparisons between different cultures. Nevertheless his ideas may be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the relationship between language and differential educational attainment.

In the 1960s and 1970s attention was focused on differences within languages, rather than on the differences between languages. As a corollary to the language deficit hypothesis it was held that the language used by the child of low socioeconomic status was less effective as a tool of thought than the standard dialect used by his higher socioeconomic status counterpart. In turn it was assumed that this 'language deficiency' was one of the major factors in the inadequate educational performance among children of low social class. The Newsom Report (1963) voiced the concern in this way:

"There is a gulf between those who have, and the many who have not, sufficient command of words to be able to listen and discuss rationally; to express ideas and feelings clearly; and even to have any ideas at all. We simply do not know how many people are frustrated in their daily lives by inability to express themselves adequately; or how many never develop intellectually because they lack the words to think and reason..... The evidence of research increasingly suggests that linguistic inadequacy, disadvantages of social and physical background, and poor attainments in school are closely associated. Because the forms of speech which are all that they ever require for daily use in their homes and the neighbourhoods in which they live are restricted, some boys and girls may never acquire the basic means of learning and their intellectual potential is therefore masked" (Newsom, 1963; p.23).

There is, as has been previously stated, no conclusive evidence to indicate that any one language or dialect is better than another as a tool of thought. However, an examination of Whorf's hypothesis may give the question a different perspective. If a language transmits a particular way of perceiving and categorising reality, might some of these ways of perception be more appropriate to the cognitive strategies demanded by formal education than others? If this discussion is applied to the relationship between particular dialects and educational performance, the theme is as follows. Does the nonstandard dialect of English used by the child of low socioeconomic status lead him to perceive, and categorise, and think in a particular way; and is this way of thinking less closely related to the particular cognitive strategies demanded by formal education than that the child of higher socioeconomic status.

Bernstein's
Contribution

A consideration of such issues has been reflected by some of Bernstein's work. Indeed Bernstein freely acknowledged his debt to Whorf. As Chapter 1 showed, that part of Bernstein's work which dealt with the superficial differences between his two codes, the restricted and the elaborated, was the one which attracted most attention. In fact, it is his explanation of the underlying reasons for the development of the codes which probably has greater significance, and which is relevant to the present topic of discussion.

Bernstein (1965, 1971, 1972a) claimed that it is the way in which an individual is socialised which determines the language which he habitually uses. He suggested that it is the kind of relationship within families which determines the extent to which meaning needs to be made explicit, and it is this which really differentiates the two codes. Position oriented families rely upon authority for socialisation, relatively little discussion takes place within the family, and meanings do not have to be made explicit. Such families are usually found among the lower social classes, and the code most frequently used by them is the restricted code. Person oriented families on the other hand place more emphasis on the individual qualities of their members; socialisation depends more upon negotiation through language, and meanings do need to be made explicit. Such a family would commonly have higher socioeconomic status, and use both the restricted and the elaborated codes.

The differing modes of socialisation which children experience therefore influences both the degree to which they're accustomed to making meaning explicit, and their perception of such a need, according to Bernstein (1970). The child of low socioeconomic status does not habitually make meaning explicit in his immediate environment, and perceives no necessity for doing so. Yet it is this very ability to make meaning explicit which is one of the main demands of formal education: It determines the successful realisation of many of the intellectual tasks expected of the child in school.

The child of low socioeconomic status is therefore at a very great disadvantage in educational terms, for there is a discontinuity between his personal perceptions and skills and those required by school, at least where the need to make meaning explicit is concerned. The child of higher socioeconomic status is at no such disadvantage. He will have both the practical experience and the awareness of this need which his lower socioeconomic status counterpart lacks. He is therefore more attuned to the requirements of formal education, and this will predispose him to scholastic success. The low socioeconomic status child, having no such predisposition, may encounter difficulties in school for which he is completely unprepared.

the Work of
Halliday

Like Bernstein, Halliday (1973,1975) stresses the importance of the relationship between language and the social situation in which language is learned and used. He has also made a further contribution to our understanding of why the language of the low socioeconomic status child may handicap him in school by suggesting that a child who, in Bernstein's terms, uses the restricted code, is a child who has failed to fully master the operation of certain language functions. To Halliday restriction in language is not one of outward form, but of the variety of uses available.

Halliday suggested that any utterance is linguistically determined by the situation in which it is made: in other words, meaning and function are the decisive factors in shaping the form of language. According to Halliday (1975) there are two general functional categories of language. The mathemic and the progmatic; he suggested that " the mathemic/progmatic

distinction corresponds to one of 'response required' (pragmatic) versus 'response not required' (mathematic)" (Halliday, 1975; p. 54). The two functional categories develop from seven initial models of language common to all children. Halliday suggests that the mathematic category, crucial to learning and education, develops from two of seven initial 'models'. The "heuristic" which enables the child to use language as a means of finding out and the "personal" which enable him to use language to express his own individuality. The development of both functional categories of language is inevitable and universal, but because language is learned in society, and society and socialisation processes differ, the usage and command of both functional categories will vary with each individual. Lower class children are less often encouraged to ask questions than their higher class counterparts and their role in society is less dependant upon their individual qualities. This is reflected in the way in which the initial heuristic and personal models develop into the mathematic functional category of language; this category essential in education may be less well developed in the lower class child. Halliday suggested that all children should be given planned experience and training in using the heuristic and personal models, and that the child of low socioeconomic status in particular needs such help, for his lack of familiarity with these models may limit his ability to succeed in school.

In the UK the Schools Council Communication Skills Project: 7/13 (Tough, 1979) has drawn upon Halliday's ideas in formulating a language improvement programme for all schoolchildren. The project has defined seven uses of spoken language, similar to Halliday's "models" which it recognises as being important in stimulating learning and intellectual development. It has outlined ways in which the teacher can assess an individual child's language to establish whether or not it is lacking in any of these areas, and suggests strategies to promote children's language development. The teachers are helped to improve their own professional communication skills, in order that their interaction with the children may be more appropriate. The project designers contend that by improving the quality and suitability of communication in different situations, cognitive development and ensuing success in school will be facilitated.

Summary

It must be stressed that the educational implications of the work of Whorf, Bernstein and Halliday described above have not yet been fully explored. They are certainly controversial. While drawing upon the ideas of developmental psychology, they show the particular influence of Vygotski, who sees language as facilitating thought, rather than of Piaget, who sees language as representing thought. The ideas share some common ground with those of Bruner, who also insists that there are linguistic skills which are especially appropriate in facilitating cognitive development. This factor may in fact be the most encouraging for the teacher. If the language skills needed by formal education can be defined and taught, children who do not have these skills, and because of this lack may face serious educational problems, can be helped. Behaviourist psychologists, of course, would also subscribe to this point of view, although their prescriptions for remediation would predictably be more circumscribed and clearcut than remedial plans developed by cognitive psychologists.

Teachers know that the children in their charge come to school with of their varying experiences which differentiate them linguistically, psychologically and socially. If linguists and psychology can contribute a deeper understanding of the problems faced by some of these children, then ways may be found of helping those who are ill equipped to meet the demands of formal education. The ideas of Whorf, Halliday and Bernstein are worthy of further examination, in the hope that they may do this.

CHAPTER 5

HOW DOES DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL AFFECT THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF THE LANGUAGE DISADVANTAGED CHILD?

language
and
education

As the preceeding chapters have shown, over the last 25 years the most common explanation of relationship between language on educational achievement has been simply that some languages and dialects are better, or at least more appropriate for school life, than others. Nowadays this stance is less often held and realisation is growing that educational achievement is affected by a complex web of linguistic, social and environmental factors so closely associated as to be inseparable. It is now widely recognised that it is not so much any innate inferiority in the dialect of the lower socioeconomic status child, but rather the disparity between the language of his home and his school, and the negative evaluations of his dialect by educators, which may predispose him to educational failure.

linguistic
disparity
between
home and
school

For the speaker of Standard English the language of the home and the school is essentially the same. For the speaker of Nonstandard English, the Standard English which is the norm in school today, may be strange and unfamiliar; his chief acquaintance with it may well be only at secondhand, through television. He will certainly lack practice in using it.

There are several aspects of this disparity which may be of particular significance. First as Perera (1981) explained, most children regardless of their socioeconomic status will encounter problems in adapting to the linguistic demands of the school. Mercer (1981) pointed out, for instance, that no matter how good the language skills of a young child, these skills will certainly be predominantly of a narrative and descriptive nature. In contrast, the learning of academic subjects often requires different kinds of language skills, such as the ability to analyse or discuss a particular topic. Perera (1981) warned that for children who have had

limited access to Standard English, the problems will be compounded. She suggested that all children may have difficulty in understanding the teacher's language, in understanding the language of workcards and textbooks, and in writing about school subjects. Understanding the teacher's spoken language may be problematical because of unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence patterns or ambiguous references. Understanding workcards and textbooks may be more difficult because the language used here is more formal, and the child is unable to make use of contextual clues such as gestures, intonation and facial expressions. Familiar words may have special meanings (eg. caravan, battery, or relief); unfamiliar sentence patterns may appear, and a rather technical vocabulary be introduced. Finally, when writing themselves, children need to adopt a formal impersonal style, alien to the immediacy of their normal spoken language. Perara predicted that all children will meet these difficulties, but since the discrepancy between the language of the home and the school is far greater for speakers of Nonstandard English, their problems will be especially severe.

Bernstein and Henderson (1969) emphasised another aspect of linguistic disparity between home and school for the child of low socioeconomic status. They described how the ways of acquiring skills vary between his home and school. At home, the emphasis in learning is upon using language to regulate, to give instructions, orders and commands. At school the emphasis in learning is upon active participation, and language is used to explain, to predict, to reason and so forth. The child of higher socioeconomic status will be far more familiar with the latter uses of language, and with learning through experience, than his lower social class counterpart.

socioenvironmental disparity between home and school The linguistic disparity between home and school experienced by the child of low socioeconomic status is paralleled by socioenvironmental and psychological disparities. Just as the Standard English of the higher classes is the norm in school, so are the accepted behaviour patterns, control systems and values those of the higher social classes. Thus for many children school is almost a continuation and extension of home life. The lower class child, however, is thrown into an alien world when

he goes to school. Aspects of his new environment will be unfamiliar, and the discontinuity which he experiences may be akin to culture shock. Brandis and Bernstein (1974) have gone so far as to suggest that such children's earliest experiences at school should include a process of socialisation into the ways of the school, for only then will their behaviour be seen as appropriate by their teachers, who themselves often have different values and perceptions.

It is easy to see how, in an environment which a child does not understand and which he sees as threatening, he may feel isolated and insecure. His attitude towards school may well develop into one of indifference or antagonism. Labov (1976) pointed out the dangers inherent in such a situation. He illustrated how the negative connotations of school and Standard English for speakers of Black English Vernacular persist into adolescence. Many Young Blacks dislike and reject school and everything which they associate with it. One expression of their alienation is to give to Black English Vernacular the status of a prestige dialect, and regard Standard English as a language spoken only by outsiders.

Labov's work relates primarily to urban Blacks in the USA, but there seem to be some parallels elsewhere. Edwards (1976) noted that West Indian dialects are being consciously cultivated in parts of London by young people of immigrant origin. This conscious cultivation suggests similar alienation from mainstream society and prestige within the group as the Black English Vernacular of the USA.

Negative
Attitudes
to
Nonstandard
English.

A further explanation of why the language of the lower class child may determine his performance at school arises not so much from the nature of his language, as from attitudes and prejudices towards it held by other people, particularly teachers. The significance of the reaction of teachers and others to Nonstandard English has been recognised only in the last 20 years but it is an issue which is receiving an increasing amount of attention. There are two related areas of possible significance. Differing varieties of language may be perceived as having different status; they may also be associated with differing expectations.

Trudgill (1975) demonstrates that Standard English is considered the most prestigious variety of English, and while lesser status is accorded to other dialects. The issue is, however, rather more complicated than a simple assumption that Standard English is of high status and prestige while other varieties of English are not. Studies by Wilkinson (1975) and Giles (1970) in the UK both show that there is in fact a hierarchy of prestige, at the head of which stands Standard English, followed in turn by regional accents, such as Cockney, from London, and Scouse, from Liverpool. There are many indications that the English of minority ethnic groups (Blacks and Hispanics in the USA) is accorded least prestige of all (Irwin, 1977; Carranza and Ryan, 1975).

Such studies do not, of course, show directly that teachers accord low prestige to the dialect of the lower class child. Nevertheless there is no reason to believe that teachers do not conform to the general opinions regarding the prestige of different dialects and that they will not hold in low esteem the Nonstandard English of the lower socioeconomic groups. Furthermore it is certainly fair to say that many lower class children are aware of the negative that their dialect promotes among their teachers. Halliday described the dangers inherent in such a situation:

" A speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being; to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him ashamed of the colour of his skin" (Halliday, 1968; p. 165)

Yet how many children are put into just this position, albeit it unwittingly, by their teachers? With confidence undermined and unhappiness ensuing, it is small wonder that such children fail to develop their full potential.

low
expectations
by
teachers

Just as teachers may be prejudiced in their evaluation of a child's dialect, so dialect causes prejudice in attitudes to the child himself. In turn, this prejudice affects teachers' expectations of such children. Various studies provide evidence of the negative evaluations which the speech

of the lower class child elicits. Giles (1973) and Edwards (1977, 1979) both asked teachers to evaluate recorded speech samples. On a range of characteristic and attributes such as intelligence, integrity, enthusiasm and likely school achievement, the speakers of Standard English were rated consistently higher than the Nonstandard speakers. That language alone can initiate such subjective and stereotyped judgements seems a critical issue in itself. Perhaps even more significant for the educational performance of the lower class child is the growing body of evidence which shows that teachers' expectations may in fact serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy in education. As Merton (1968) demonstrated the less a teacher expects from a child, the less that child is likely to achieve.

The issue of the effect of a teacher's expectations upon a child's school performance was first brought into prominence in a study by Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1965). Teachers were told that certain children in their classes were "late bloomers" and would make considerable intellectual gains within the coming year. Although these children had in fact been selected at random, nevertheless the prediction was fulfilled. Rist (1970) in his study of Kindergarten children, found that teachers behaved in different ways towards children of whom they had different expectations. Children from a very poor urban area, who Rist had arbitrarily labelled "fast" learners, but who were in fact of the same ability level as the rest of the class, were seated nearer to their teachers and given more frequent and positive contact than the other children. Moreover, this differential treatment continued into first and second grades, because the teachers there accepted the Kindergarten teachers' assessments, regardless of performance.

In speculating upon the question of how low teacher expectations lead to failure in the child, Rist suggested that the teacher communicates in different ways with children whose abilities, in her perception, differ. The children become aware of this and responding to what is expected of them, perform according to these expectations. Rist noted that a child's potential is categorised very early in his school career, and that it is very difficult to change the image then created. He specifically stated that a child's ability to use Standard American English is one of the most important elements in a teacher's categorisation of that child.

In short, because of his language, a child of low socioeconomic status is seen by his teacher as being somehow inadequate. The teacher expects that he will perform poorly; the child, sensitive to his teacher's opinion, and possibly treated in a way which is not particularly conducive to learning, comes in time to fulfill this expectation.

The solution to some of the problems of the language disadvantaged child is glaringly obvious: eliminate prejudice. This, unfortunately, is a goal which society is hardly likely to achieve in the near future. Nevertheless teachers must play a part: it is their social, ethnical and moral responsibility to eliminate prejudice in the classroom. Alone, they can at least examine their own consciences, and together, they can attend some of the relevant inservice training which is already available. The teacher can, as suggested here:

"... approach the disadvantaged class with the knowledge that he or she will be dealing with a heterogeneous assortment of abilities, attitudes and motivations. In every case, the aim must be to assist the child in developing his fullest potential. Anything which proves an obstacle in this process should be carefully examined to ascertain whether it is a substantive difficulty, or whether, it is a product of social attitude...."

CHAPTER 6

HOW CAN LANGUAGE DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN BE HELPED IN SCHOOL?

Differential Education Performance

It is an undisputed fact that children from the lower social classes tend to perform less well in school than middle and upper class children. Teachers observe this in their own experience, and research evidence supports their view.

An interesting illustration of this differential achievement in school is provided by the National Child Development Study, a comprehensive and longitudinal survey of all children born in England, Scotland and Wales between 3-9 March 1958. This study has published, and continues to publish, data on all aspects of the development of its subjects. The study finds social class to be the variant most closely associated with educational attainment (Davie, Butler and Goldstein, 1972).

The study used the British Registrar Generals classification of social class, and showed that when its subjects reached the age of seven, only 7 percent of the children from the highest social class (Class I) had "poor" reading skills, compared with 50 percent from the lowest social class (Class V). Children from social classes I, II and III non manual were 0.9 years ahead of children from social class III manual and social class IV, who in turn were a further 0.7 years ahead of children from social class V. At the age of 11, when the children were retested, the difference between the same social groups was 1.9 and 1.1 years respectively a widening of the gap.

Similar results were obtained from mathematical tests. At the age of seven, 28 percent of children from social class I had "good arithmetical ability" compared to 14 percent of children from social class V. By the age of 11, the children from social classes I, II and II non manual were 1.1 years ahead of those from social classes II manual and IV, who in turn were a further 0.6 years ahead of those from social class V (Davie, Butler and Goldstein, 1972; Fogelman, 1976). The gap was even wider when the children were retested at the age of 16 (Fogelman et al. 1978).

Finally, in 1976, when those children would normally enter university on the results of public examinations, over 76 percent of the places for UK based candidates were given to children from social classes, I,II and III non manual, while children from social classes III non manual and IV gained less than 22 percent of the places, and children from social class V only just over 1 percent of the places (U.C.C.A 1977/1978). Such numbers were, of course, quite out of proportion to the actual membership of the various social classes.

An additional and particularly disturbing factor is that data available on ethnic minorities indicate that their achievement falls below that of the social classes to which they belong. For instance, when a series of Bristol Achievement Tests were administered to children from social classes III manual, IV and V, attending the same schools, the scores for English, Study Skills, and Mathematics respectively were 91.5, 93.2 and 96.9 for non immigrants, but only 86.6, 86.5 and 91.0 for children of immigrant extraction (Rushton and Turner, 1975). The researchers in this study found the differences in scores to be significant and suggested that the problems of children of ethnic minority were even greater than those of the lower social classes to which they normally belonged.

Such research findings have been sufficiently common to instigate a great deal of research to determine the factors which contribute to the poor academic performance of children from the lower social classes. The schools Council Research and Development Project in Compensatory Education identified 13 major predictors of educational handicap from an original list of 144 (Chazan and Williams, 1978). Two of the 13 were language related. This reflects a general consensus of opinion that language does have a significant effect upon educational performance. The preceding chapters of this study have indicated some of the contributions of psychology, linguistics and social psychology to our understanding of the relationship between language and educational achievement.

Given the fact that many lower class children fail in school, and that their language plays some part in contributing to this failure,

the question arises as to how such children can be helped to overcome their problems and to develop their full academic potential. This issue has attracted a great deal of attention over the past 25 years. It has been part of a general concern with the problems of the lower social classes, and a particular concern that the educational experience of the poor contravene the ideals of society.

One of the most cherished principles of the Western world is that of equality of educational opportunity, irrespective of colour, creed, race or financial status. Yet in the 1960s the evidence indicated firstly that not all children were participating equally in education, and secondly that educational achievement was related less to ability than to socioeconomic status. At a personal level, the educational system was obviously failing many children; at a national level a great deal of potential talent was being wasted; moreover this was happening at a time when the USSR was forging ahead in the space race and newly developed countries were starting to compete with the West in industry and commerce. In the USA the growing realisation of these problems was promoted by the rise of the Civil Rights movement, which pressed for better housing, jobs, education and opportunities for the ethnic minorities and the poor. The concern with the problems of the lower socioeconomic classes in the USA promoted a response in Europe which reflected a growing awareness of similar problems there.

Compensatory Education

It was in this climate of concern that the concept of Compensatory Education developed. Compensatory Education aimed to make up for any deficits in the child's home environment which might limit his educational progress, and it received widespread public and governmental support. Included in the ensuing projects were a comprehensive range of measures such as the provision of extra medical facilities, the building of new schools and the development of novel teaching methods and techniques. Almost without exception Compensatory Education projects also included a language component. Indeed, Woodhead claims that "the main emphasis of British compensatory work has been on language" (Woodhead, 1976; p. 36). However, the basic consensus of opinion that children should not suffer educationally because of their language did not indicate what programmes should be tried to remedy the situation.

By far the best known and most wide reading Compensatory Education project introduced to date is the American Headstart programme. Thousands of children have taken part in the programme since its inception in 1965. The project has been concerned with all aspects of child development, medical, dental, nutritional and so on, but its educational objective was to give poor children pre school experiences which would enable them to enter school on equal terms with their more privileged counterparts. There was, however, no one typical Headstart project. Headstart had aims, but in the interest of maintaining flexibility, its leaders deliberately avoided recommending any specific means of achieving them. Hence a plethora of different programmes sprung up. Despite their many diversities, an element common to nearly every one of Headstart programmes was language intervention.

Headstart

Attempts at evaluation were built into Headstart from the beginning in 1965, and a major empirical investigation of the project was carried out in 1969 by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University. (Ciricellia and Granger, 1969). Several thousand children who had participated in Headstart were assessed and compared to a control group matched on all relevant criteria (age, ethnic group, sex, etc.) on a range of measures designed to assess educational and social progress (verbal ability, attainment, attitude to school, etc.). The study found that the number of measures on which there were significant differences was extremely small, and in the few tests where the Headstart children had performed better than the control group this advantage had "washed out" by the second year. The Westinghouse Report itself has been criticised on such grounds as inadequacy of sampling methods and narrowness of scope, but nevertheless its basic finding that most Headstart projects have relatively little measured impact is in agreement with later evaluations (Kellaghan, 1977; Smith, 1975; Woodhead, 1976).

On the credit side of Headstart it must be said that lessons have been learnt from mistakes made in its early days, Zigler (1979) indicates the extent to which an improvement in the programme has taken place. Significant educational progress is now being made by participants, as is evidenced, for instance, by the fact that Headstart children are now more likely to deserve, and hold down, places in regular

classes, and less likely to be in special education than comparison children.

Approaches to
Language
Disadvantage
in School

In a paper which attempts to understand the relationship between social class, language and educational achievement it is essential to discuss language programmes which are currently in use. Such programmes are the main focus of efforts to help the child whose language predisposes him to poor educational performance. Trudgill (1975) provided a useful framework of approaches which are now being used to alleviate the problems of the language disadvantaged child in school. Based on their objectives, approaches fall into three categories:

1. Elimination of the child's Nonstandard English and the substitution in its place of Standard English.
2. Addition of Standard English, concurrent with the retention of the child's own Nonstandard English.
3. Retention, and increased appreciation of, the child's Nonstandard English only.

Substitution
Approach

The general philosophy behind the first approach, that of substituting Standard English for Nonstandard English, is closely related to the language deficit theory. Since the Nonstandard English of the lower social classes is viewed as inadequate, both linguistically and as a tool of thought, it is held responsible for the poor educational achievement of those children who commonly use it. If, for these children, Standard English can replace Nonstandard English, they will then have at their command a "better" language in which to think and express themselves, and their educational achievement will improve. In the long term these children will benefit further by gaining monetary and status advancement in a predominantly Standard English speaking society.

In practical terms, programmes designed to substitute Standard English for Nonstandard English have varied considerably. Many of them were developed as part of Project Headstart, whose emphasis on flexibility virtually ensured that a whole range of different programmes would emerge. In the long term this may well prove advantageous, for nowadays it is possible to compare different programmes in an attempt to define the qualities which make them most effective.

Karnes (1973) carried out a project at the University of Illinois to try to discover what sort of language programmes were the most effective. He investigated five kinds of language programmes which he categorised according to their degree of structure. They ranged from the "traditional", wherein the children pursued their own interests and language was stimulated only informally by the teacher, to the very structured programme of Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) in which the children worked in small groups to practise intensive oral drills in verbal and logical patterns. The findings of Karnes' study were quite clearcut: the most highly structured programmes produced the greatest improvements in scores on both verbal and cognitive measures. Karnes' findings were supported by Weikart (1972) whose investigation of language programmes showed that those using direct teaching stimulated gains in both language and social and emotional behaviour, while those using informal methods stimulated gains only in social and emotional behaviour. Programmes such as that of Bereiter and Engelmann are clearly based on the theories of learning proposed by behaviourist psychology.

If language disadvantaged children are to be taught Standard English as a substitute for their own dialect, what advice can be given to teachers on how to choose a programme? Empirical studies (Kellaghan, 1972) suggest that the following features clearly distinguish the more successful language programmes:

1. Careful planning and a clear statement of academic objectives
2. Instruction and material designed to be relevant to these objectives
3. High intensity treatment involving the use of small groups and a low teacher/pupil ratio.
4. Teacher training in the method and content of the programme

Other factors less directly related to the immediate programme may also be significant. Woodhead (1976) identifies the degree of teacher commitment, and Lazar (1981) the degree of parental involvement, as being related to the positive outcome of a language programme.

Certainly the perfect language programme has not yet been, and may never be, developed. Nevertheless as programme designers learn from past mistakes, and understanding of how language and learning are related increases, programmes and results continue to improve. The oft-repeated often levelled against them that they are ineffective no longer holds true.

Criticisms
of
Substitution
Approach

There are, however, other grounds for criticising language programmes which aim to substitute Standard English for Nonstandard English. One very serious charge is that this approach may damage the child who habitually uses Nonstandard English. If Nonstandard English is deemed not suitable for use in school, and is therefore to be eradicated, it must in some way be inferior and inadequate. By implication, the child who uses Nonstandard English is likewise inferior and inadequate. The damage that such a denigration may do to a child is potentially enormous.

There is no doubt that in the past attempts to eradicate Nonstandard English have been carried out with a great lack of sensitivity. Teachers have not been sufficiently aware of the danger to the child's self concept and self esteem inherent in such a policy. Recently Trudgill (1975) has indicated how the child's value of himself as a human being may be destroyed, and Labov (1976) shows how such a child may become progressively alienated from school and from mainstream society by what is, in effect, an attack on the individual as well as upon his language. Chazan (1973) details the problems which may arise if a teacher imposes a strange language and alien values upon a child. He may become a stranger, both in the new world of school, where he is insecure and bewildered, and in the familiar world of home and family whose value and significance is being undermined.

A further criticism of the concept of substituting Standard English for Nonstandard English remains. This is that Nonstandard English speaking children are in fact exposed to and understand a great deal of Standard English throughout infancy and childhood via the mass media, especially television. Broadcasting Yearbook in the USA regularly reports that in a typical home television is switched on for over six hours a day.

Precise figures are not known, but as Tizard (1975) points out, the amount of time spent by the child watching television compares very favourably with the amount spent in school.

Medrich(1979) found that there is a marked correlation between the amount of television watched and the income and educational levels of the family. The lower the level of income and maternal education (themselves significant indicators of low socioeconomic status), the higher the probability that the family will be "constant television watchers".

The merits of television viewing have been much discussed in the literature. Medrich (1979) claimed that television has a negative effect, as is evidenced by the fact that children from his "constant television" households had lower reading scores than children from his "non constant television " households. Singer (1979) on the other hand claims that there is a paucity of empirical evidence to support the assertion that television interferes with the child's acquisition of language skills and reading. Whatever the case, the fact remains that most children watch television, that much of what they hear is Standard English, and that they do understand it.

What then are language programmes adding to this situation? Children of all social classes watch, and presumably understand, television. Since Standard English is the normal language of television, it must be assumed that all viewing children understand Standard English. Language programmes which aim to teach Standard English to dialect speakers are not therefore teaching something which is new and unfamiliar. They are simply providing an opportunity to practise a dialect which is already understood. The success of the formal, structured programmes such as that of Bereiter and Engelmann may be due to the fact that they concentrate less on developing understanding, which the language disadvantaged child already has, and more on responding, talking and actually using language, which are the skills which he needs to practice.

The second approach to the problem of language disadvantaged children is that of fostering their own Nonstandard dialect, while at the same time developing competence in Standard English. In particular, the

emphasis is upon mastering Standard English for specific functions and situations where it is thought to be more appropriate and acceptable than Nonstandard English. Such an approach is known as Bidialectalism. It aims to develop fluent Standard English and language skills which will enable the child to conform to the requirements of education in particular, and society in general, while at the same time fostering and valuing a range of other language skills and resources.

Bidialectalism has not yet developed the plethora of language programmes associated with the substitution approach. As yet it is rather unstructured, and much has been left to the initiative and enterprise of the individual teacher. Typical classroom practice is for the teacher to encourage and teach Standard English in activities such as formal letter writing, while cultivating Nonstandard English for creative and expressive writing such as stories and poetry. However some material has been designed directly to promote Bidialectalism. The Language In Use materials produced by the Schools Council in the UK aim to develop "an awareness of what language is and how it is used, and at the same time, to extend competence in handling materials" (Doughty, 1976; p.8). The materials try to build on the child's out of school experience to develop his language skills, and to emphasise that language lives as part of behaviour, and in a social context, not in some vacuum. There is a heavy dependence on oral work in the form of improvisation and role playing to promote such aims.

Criticisms
of
Bidialectal
Approach

Bidialectalism, being more recent and less common than the substitution approach, has as yet attracted less critical attention, but Trudgill (1975) has provided a critique. Trudgill sees the advantages of Bidialectalism as consisting merely of placating the prejudiced attitudes towards Nonstandard English found, for instance, among examiners and employers, who, in Trudgill's view, could and should be able to accept and understand Nonstandard English. Trudgill also claims that it may actually be harder to learn two varieties of the same language than to learn two different languages, although, this has not yet been adequately investigated. Trudgill questions the degree of motivation behind the learning of a new dialect, and he feels that the communication advantages which will arise, and which are perceptible to the child, are negligible. He neglects, however,

to say anything about the social, educational or economic advantages which the child might gain from having command of Standard English.

Dialect For
Approach

The third and most radical approach to the problem of the language disadvantaged child is for the school to foster only his own dialect in school, in the belief that literacy can be developed in any language or dialect. This approach is known as dialect fair instruction. The aim of dialect fair instruction is for the child to successfully acquire basic skills no matter what language or dialect he speaks, and to use them throughout formal education. In support of the contention that literacy is independent of dialect or variety of language, Trudgill (1975) goes so far as to argue that Keats' poetry can be discussed just as adequately in Nonstandard English as in Standard English, and Sutcliffe (1982) demonstrates how an academic thesis presented for a Masters degree at a British university can be written in Jamaican patois.

In practical terms the implementation of dialect fair instruction involves both the provision of all written material in Nonstandard English and a knowledge of Nonstandard English on the part of the teacher. Attempts to meet these criteria have been made, but without marked success. In the USA there have been serious attempts to reflect the language of some disadvantaged children by introducing reading material in Black English Vernacular. Several reading schemes have used syntax, spellings and vocabulary appropriate to Black English Vernacular, with stories set in a social context with which disadvantaged children are familiar. However, the emphasis until now has been upon on learning to read in dialect only as a preliminary step to learning to read in Standard English, and not for its own sake (Baratz, 1979, 1972). This is not completely in accord with the aims of dialect fair instruction. An alternative approach now being tried uses Standard English materials, but employs a set of phonic rules and teaching strategies appropriate to the dialect spoken by the children. This approach enables children to read ordinary Standard English texts in their own dialect throughout education and in the outside world by "translating" the Standard English into their own dialect both syntactically and phonologically. Berdan (1981) claims an approach using this method has had some success.

Criticisims
of Dialect
Fair Approach

Dialect fair instruction programmes have sometimes provoked such violent reactions that schools have been forced to drop them. Such reactions have come partly from those social classes which the programmes are specifically designed to help, and partly from traditional educators. Even the most ardent supporters of dialect fair instruction concede that the vast majority of parents from the lower social classes wish their children to learn Standard English as a means of breaking out of the poverty/language/education trap and ensuring upward social mobility. In the USA Labov himself writes that "both Black and White sections of the community strongly endorse the proposition that schools should teach Standard English to all children" (Labov, 1972; p.241). In the UK there is a very strong and influential school of thought led by Honey (1983) which claims that "to deny children the opportunity to learn to handle Standard English because of pseudoscientific judgments about all varieties of language being "equal" is to set limits IN ADVANCE to their ability to express themselves effectively outside their immediate subculture, and to slam the door on any real opportunity for social progress" (Honey, 1983; p.24). Honey argues further that it is a cruel deceit to persuade children "that society will accord their nonstandard language patterns that equality of treatment which certain theorists say they 'deserve'" (Honey, 1983; p.31). Honey advocates such methods as a return to the formal teaching of grammar, and a promotion of Standard English at the expense of Nonstandard English, and even at the expense of the self-esteem of its speaker, if necessary, as the way of helping the disadvantaged to success in the educational system.

Opposition to dialect fair instruction is also voiced on the grounds of sheer impracticality. Ideally such instruction should provide not for one but for as many dialects to be fostered as are present in a given classroom, some used by relatively few children. The financial costs of providing dialect specific materials would, of course, be enormous. Perhaps more unsurmountable would be the problem of training teachers, for not only would they have to "learn" new dialects, but also new attitudes. Society's attitudes too would have to change, and certainly dialect fair instruction should never be introduced in school without the support of the children and parents involved.

In practice it is difficult to find any one of these three approaches to the problems of a language disadvantaged child in a pure form. Standard English and Nonstandard English continue to coexist in school. If the oral language of the classroom is commonly Nonstandard English, Standard English will still be found in text or supplementary books. If the teacher speaks Standard English in school, the children will chatter in Nonstandard English in the playground. If the teacher knows and uses Nonstandard English, the children will still hear Standard English on television. In the classroom the differences between the three approaches are not absolute but rather of degree and emphasis.

Summary

Society acknowledges that language disadvantaged children must be helped, and a great deal of theoretical and practical work has already advanced the solution of their problems. For teachers, the situation is improving, in that research and experience are providing them with better understanding and better means of implementing teaching programmes. While it is hard to believe that the attitudes of society towards dialects can be changed, it may be hoped that teachers can lead the way towards eradicating prejudice against nonstandard dialects.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall conclusion to be drawn from the evidence presented in this study is that socioeconomic status does influence language acquisition and that language is, in turn, a major factor in determining academic achievement.

Chapter 1 demonstrated the general consensus of opinion that membership in a particular social class does influence the characteristic dialect which an individual acquires. The higher socioeconomic groups are said to use, for instance, longer sentences, a wider ranging vocabulary and more adjectives and adverbs than the lower socioeconomic groups. Bernstein believed that the most significant contrast between the language of the higher and lower socioeconomic groups was the degree to which meaning was made explicit. He suggested that the diversities of dialect which he observed resulted from the different socialising patterns of the various social classes. Because the higher socioeconomic groups used language to negotiate and mediate, and thus the underlying organising concept, or code, required that language make meaning explicit. The lower socioeconomic groups in contrast used language less for purposes such as explanation and discussion, and more for regulation. Thus their underlying code did not need to make meaning explicit. Bernstein emphasised that the differences between the language of the socioeconomic groups lay in the frequency with which various linguistic features were used, not in their presence or absence.

The recognition that interclass differences of language exist has important implications educationally. It used to be thought that these differences might account directly for the poor educational achievement of many lower class children: inadequate language skills might account for inadequate performance in school.

In the 1960s and 1970s debate raged over whether any language or dialect was better or worse than another. This debate was analysed in Chapter 2. In the linguistic dimension the language deficit hypothesis proposed that the nonstandard dialects used by the lower socioeconomic groups were inferior to the Standard English of the higher socioeconomic

groups: this was held to contribute to the poor academic achievement of so many children of low socioeconomic status. Proponents of language difference hypothesis disagreed, and claimed that Nonstandard English was not inferior to, but merely different from, Standard English. The demonstration by linguists such as Labov that nonstandard dialects such as Black English Vernacular are systematic and regular accounts for the support usually given to the latter hypothesis by linguists today. Nevertheless there is still a body of opinion which does not accept that this is adequate proof of the equality of all languages and dialects as vehicles of communication.

Chapters 3 and 4 considered the psychological dimension. While there is agreement that language and thought are related, behaviourist psychology and developmental psychology explain this relationship in different ways. For educators this is problematical, in that the conflicting psychological evidence has given no clear indication of how and when the development of language and thought can best be stimulated. Both behaviourist and developmental psychology agree that motivation is essential and this may be a profitable field for further investigation. Psychology also presents a consensus of opinion that no language or dialect is better than another cognitively, as a tool of thought. The work of Bernstein and Halliday has suggested, however, that school may provide a more familiar environment for children of higher socioeconomic status, and that these children may possibly be better oriented to the demands of formal education than their lower status counterparts.

The latter ideas are consonant with current thinking in the social-psychological dimension discussed in Chapter 5. Nowadays it is thought that a more plausible explanation of the poor academic achievement of the lower class child may lie not so much in any intrinsic qualities which his language may possess, but in the disparity between his nonstandard dialect and the Standard English which is the norm in school: The child's values and perceptions may not be congruent with those of the school. Since nonstandard dialects usually have little prestige: children will be made aware of the negative feelings which their dialect elicits, and may feel devalued themselves, or alienated

from school and all that it stands for. An equally serious problem is that teachers have low expectations of children who use nonstandard dialects: such low expectation are often fulfilled, even when the initial judgement has no real foundation.

Chapter 6 discussed the relationship between low socioeconomic status, the use of a nonstandard dialect and poor academic achievement, a relationship long recognised, even though not properly understood. Very considerable attempts have been made over the last 20 years to help the children who suffer because of this relationship. In language programmes the traditional emphasis has been to substitute Standard English for Nonstandard English. A more recent trend has been to give every child's dialect equal status, and to promote Nonstandard English, either alongside or instead of Standard English. The latter approach in particular is controversial. Language programmes have met with varying success, but the factors which contribute to a successful language programme are being learned from past experience.

Recommendations

This study has been written in the hope that some of those teachers who have felt frustrated because of a lack of understanding of the problems of the low socioeconomic status child may gain a better insight into the difficulties which those children face.

As well as providing this general background into why children who use nonstandard dialects commonly have low academic achievement, this study also raises several specific issues which every educator should consider:

1. The choice of teaching programmes in school is usually decided by factors such as cost, easy availability, or recommendation of other professionals. In choosing a language programme the individual teacher must ask herself two additional questions. Firstly, to what psychological theory of language acquisition does she subscribe: secondly, how important is it, in her view for the dialect speaker to gain command of Standard English. The answers to these questions will vary with every individual,

but they will help the teacher to choose a language programme in which she believes, with which she will be confident, and by which the language disadvantaged child can best be helped. The answers to these questions cannot be given lightly. The teacher must give them serious attention, for if she does not she may well choose a programme to which she is not truly committed. If this happens the magnitude of the already difficult task of helping the language disadvantaged child will be increased, and the teacher's programme may well be doomed to failure.

As a very general guide, if a teacher's sympathies lie with developmental psychology she should arrange the classroom and organise the work so as to facilitate learning through experiencing and doing. As a very general guide, if the teacher's sympathies lie with developmental psychology she will see intellectual development as resulting from the child's interaction with the environment, and she will organise her teaching programme so as to facilitate learning through experiencing and doing. She will provide tasks and activities appropriate to the developmental stage which the child has reached, giving each child the opportunities to assimilate what he has learned before proceeding to a higher developmental stage and new activities. If on the other hand the teacher favours the principles of behaviourist psychology she should concentrate upon using appropriate reinforcement strategies to modify behaviour. She will define specific objectives and construct "a graded sequence of steps towards the objective, each of which is reinforced until it is established, at which time the next step is presented" (Patterson, 1977; p.271)

The teacher must also assess her own attitudes to language. If she feels that a command of Standard English is essential, not just to facilitate success in the educational world, but in the social and economic world outside, the teacher will choose a language substitution programme. To some extent this decision will inevitably reflect her personal attitude toward language: it should also reflect whether or not she considers that society's prejudices to nonstandard dialects are so ingrained as to spoil the life chances of the child who knows only Nonstandard English. The teacher may feel, on the other hand, that all dialects are equally good and should be cherished: she may

feel that the risk of damage to the self esteem and self concept of the child are too high a price to pay for his acquiring a dialect which is acceptable to society at large. If this is the case, she should choose a bidialectal or dialect fair programme of instruction.

2. All teachers hold their own values and standards: it is right and proper that this should be so. What teachers must not hold are prejudices. They must not simply assume that any dialect is better or worse than another: more important still, they must not assume that any child in their care is better or worse in any way than another. Every child must be accepted for what he is, an individual, who will bring to school certain abilities which have been influenced largely by his environment. Teachers must never assume that the child who conforms to their expectations and values is better than the child who does not. Every child should be helped in equal respect by his teacher. Every child will need to have different treatment and help. The teacher must utilise the existing experience of the child to develop his full potential. The teacher must not make any distinction between children on the spurious supposition that some are better than others because they speak a more prestigious dialect.

3. Teachers qualify and start their careers when they're in their 20s: 40 years later they may still be in charge of a class of children. Although they no doubt will have learnt a great deal from their experience, but nevertheless teachers must nevertheless guard against becoming set in their ways and out of touch. The pressures of a teaching career are heavy, and it is difficult to find time and energy to follow the latest ideas. Even so teachers should constantly examine both their own work and current thinking on education.

This study for instance has indicated several new areas worthy of further exploration, including motivation, and the implications for language learning of television. Teachers do not have to accept everything which the so called experts say, but they should remember that they must always be aware of new knowledge and ideas in order to evaluate them.

The overall message of this study is one of hope. Understanding of the problems of the language disadvantaged child is increasing; the realisation that they need special help is there; programmes to help them are improving. Educators can view their task as a worthwhile challenge, in which, with commitment, they can help all children to experience greater success in school.

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