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A MODEL FOR TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH TO NON-STANDARD ENGLISH SPEAKERS.

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AFTER TAPE RECORDING AND ANALYZING INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH KINDERGARTEN AND THIRD-GRADE NEGRO CHILDREN IN THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, A PROGRAM OF LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION WAS DRAWN UP TO (1) USE ACTUAL STATEMENTS MADE BY THE CHILD IN HIS DIALECT FOR CONTRAST WITH STANDARD ENGLISH, (2) LIMIT PATTERN PRACTICE TO VERBS AND TO STATEMENTS EASILY COMPARED WITH STANDARD ENGLISH, AND (3) FOCUS ON ONE VERB PATTERN AT A TIME. IN EACH OF EIGHT UNITS THE CHILDREN WERE FIRST ENCOURAGED TO MAKE STATEMENTS USING THE VERB TO BE STUDIED. THESE WERE THEN RECORDED ON THE CHALKBOARD IN STANDARD ENGLISH (CALLED "SCHOOL TALK") AND NONSTANDARD DIALECT (CALLED "EVERYDAY TALK") AND CONTRASTS WERE POINTED OUT AND DRILLED. WRITTEN MATERIALS WERE PREPARED IN BOTH DIALECTS AND THE CHILDREN PRACTICED CHANGING NONSTANDARD TO STANDARD. AT THE END OF ONE SCHOOL YEAR, INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS IN "SCHOOL TALK" WERE RECORDED WITH SMALL GROUPS FROM THE EXPERIMENTAL CLASS AND FROM CONTROL CLASSES. SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES WERE NOTED IN REGARD TO USAGE OF TWO OF THE SIX VERBS TESTED, BUT NO STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DATA WERE FOUND FOR THE OTHER FOUR. THIS PAPER WAS READ AT THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION MEETING, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, FEBRUARY 1968. (JD)

A MODEL FOR TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH TO NON-STANDARD ENGLISH SPEAKERS [1] [2]

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Purpose

For some time, we have been interested in the dialect of the Afro-American child of a low socio-economic status and the part it plays in the difficulty of the children in learning the language arts subjects as taught in our public schools.

For instance, the dialect has been used to suggest, at least in some of the literature, that the children are verbally retarded.

Our experience with the children and the comments we have received from their teachers lead us to conclude that this description is not representative of a large number of the children in low income ghetto schools. However, the non-standard dialect is considered a serious problem by their teachers, who work tirelessly, if unsuccessfully, to change it using such methods as constant correction, providing a model of standard English and following the various speech activities suggested in many language arts manuals and supplements.

Part of our difficulty as educators in effectively coping with this problem of teaching the standard dialect has been a failure to recognize

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that the child's dialect contains a definite structure and organization and is resistant to change. This was clearly demonstrated to us as a result of an investigation we conducted in one of the special summer schools in Chicago in 1965. We tape recorded conversations with entering kindergarten children and with children who had completed the third grade. The third graders were reading at or above grade level and had obviously been exposed to standard speech usage as it appeared in their reading material for at least three years. Their teachers also, no doubt, had provided a model of standard English usage in their communication with the children throughout each school day. In spite of these exposures to standard English, the children's oral speech contained most of the major differences from standard English that we found in the speech of the kindergarten children.

Developments of Materials

While searching for ideas for a language arts program that would be effective for children who used their language fully and well to communicate with the adults and other children in their community and with many of their teachers but who used non-standard patterns, we formulated three conditions upon which to base our model as an approach to this problem.

First, we must start at a point meaningful to the learner. Translated to the area of oral speech, this suggested to us that the learning sequence in teaching standard speech patterns should start with an actual statement made by the child.

Second, in utilizing the different patterns of the non-standard dialect, preference should be given to that speech pattern that permits the transition from the child's dialect to the standard dialect by adding to the child's dialect. For example, "My mama pretty," can be restated in standard English

by adding is - "My mama is pretty." One exception to this is the unique use of the verb be in certain situations such as: "I don't like cake when it be frozen." Here, a complete substitution of verbs is necessary. "I dont like cake when it is frozen."

Third, we felt it essential to focus on one pattern at a time and to proceed systematically in accordance with linguistic principles. This condition we felt was crucial in view of the influence it exerts on the behavior of the classroom teacher. By focusing on one pattern at a time only the verb form relative to the specific pattern is brought to the child's attention as everyday talk and immediately followed by the presentation of the school talk form to the child. The other speech patterns characteristic of the dialect with respect to verb form are permitted in the classroom without comments until the particular verb from is encountered in the sequence of the materials. Needless to say, if the child is "corrected" in an unsystematic fashion each time his speech differs from standard English usage the child will become confused and discouraged. Such systemization is also imperative to avoid the creation of errors which did not originally exist. For example, introduction of the use of is in simple statements must be closely followed by the introduction of am and are so that the child will not begin to use forms such as "I is," "you is," and "they is."

In addition to the tape recorded conversations mentioned previously, we had also taped conversations with kindergarten, first, second and third grade Afro-American students in a school in a different low income ghetto

area in June of 1965. All of the conversations were analyzed and four striking differences in verb usage were identified as the focal point of our proposed program of instruction.

They are:

a) The verbs <u>is</u> and <u>are</u> are omitted:

(1) In simple sentences. e.g.

He my friend.

(2) In sentences using the present participle form. e.g.

They playing house.

(3) In sentences expressing the future using the verb go. i.e.

She gon be a nurse when she grow up.

b) One verb form is used for all subjects in the present tense. i.e.

Chocolate milk look good.

The baby look like he do.

That boy have a piece of bread.

c) One verb form is used for all subjects in the past tense. i.e.

We was hungry.

Somebody knock that down.

Yesterday I write my name.

d) Be is used in place of <u>is</u>, <u>am</u> and <u>are</u> and in sentences describing a recurring event. i.e.

When my mama be gone, I take care of the babies.

Sometimes he be riding in the alley.

I be scared when it be thundering.

The instructional sequence of our program begins with the teaching of Rhymed Pattern Practices developed by Mr. Melvin Hoffman, consulting linguist to the project. These rhymed verses are intended to provide a model of standard English usage (possibly at a preconscious level).

These practices are then followed by activities developed by the authors and Mrs. John Patterson, a project staff teacher, and designed to help the child make the transition at a conscious level from his established dialect form to the corresponding standard dialect form.

The teacher tells a story or asks a question which will elicit from the children their speech patterns in the verb area being studied. The children's statement in non-standard and standard forms are recorded on chalkboard or paper. For example, some of the sentences given by the children in a conversation about their friends or classmates during a lesson on the use of <u>is</u> in simple sentence were:

Terry he bad in school.
Deborah my friend.
Michael is strong.
Gregory brown just like me.

The teacher then describes each sentence as EVERYDAY TALK or SCHOOL TALK pointing out to the children that the sentences that omit <u>is</u> are EVERYDAY TALK and the sentences that include <u>is</u> may be EVERYDAY TALK and definitely are SCHOOL TALK. The teacher discusses SCHOOL TALK and EVERYDAY TALK as different ways of expressing ideas, neither one "wrong" or "right" but used in different situations, that is, in school, out of school.

After the activities stemming from the children's own statements are concluded, pre-written sentences and stories in EVERYDAY TALK and dialogues

in SCHOOL TALK which include the verbs being studied are given to the children for practice in changing the non-standard dialect to the standard dialect in orally spoken sentences.

The sequence of the verb pattern introduced is as follows:

Unit 1 - am, is, are

Unit 2 - was, were

Unit 3 - "s", "es"

Unit 4 - do, does

Unit 5 - say, says

Unit 6 - have, has

Unit 7 - "ed"

Unit 8 - be

Collection of Data

At the initial stage of the development of the program, considering the ingrained nature of the children's dialect, we did not expect that they would adopt the standard dialect in even the minority of instances in their informal talk after just a year's time. However, we hoped that the children would be able to respond in the standard dialect or SCHOOL TALK if asked to do so at the beginning of an informal conversation.

Therefore, it was determined that the appropriate evaluation at the end of the school year would consist of comparing the SCHOOL TALK conversation of the experimental group with the oral speech of similar children, with respect to age, grade, I.Q., and socio-economic status who had been given the traditional speech lessons.

Two classes were selected from neighboring schools to serve as the control groups. Samples of spontaneous speech were obtained in June, 1966 from both the experimental and control groups in a series of small group sessions consisting of approximately 5 to 6 students. Each session was tape recorded. The sessions were initiated by asking the children how they planned to spend their time during the summer vacation. Two other questions served as stimuli.

1. What would you like to be when you grow up?
2. If you had $100 to spend all by yourself, what would you buy?

The tape recordings were then analyzed with respect to the extent of correspondence to standard English or to non-standard English when any one of the verb forms comprising the experimental treatment occurred in their speech. For example, the statement, "When it be hot, we go to the beach everyday," was counted as corresponding to the non-standard dialect; whereas the statement, "When it is hot, we go to the beach everyday," was counted as corresponding to standard English. A count was made for each child as how many times his speech corresponded to the non-standard dialect or standard dialect with respect to each verb form included in the experimental material.

Analysis of Data

These data contained some characteristics that should be discussed before presenting the findings. In the first place, some children used a particular verb far more frequently than did others. For example, the verb form "I be" occurred as many as fifteen times with some children and

as few as two times with other children. However, if the latter children used the non-standard form "I be" only two times and did not use the corresponding standard form at all, one could not conclude that they utilized the dialect form less than the children who used the form "I be" fifteen times. Conversely, if other children used the standard English form "I am" ten times and the form "I be" did not occur in their speech at all, one could not conclude they had mastered standard English usage more than the children who used "I am" two times, but also did not "I be" at all.

In view of these considerations a non-parametric technique seemed most appropriate to test the significance of the differences between the experimental and control groups. Each child was therefore rated as a plus or minus with respect to standard English usage for each of six verb forms. The X^2 test was then used to determine the significance of the differences between the groups.

Results

Although each teacher utilized the Language Arts Curriculum Guide prepared by the Department of Curriculum Development and Teaching of the Chicago Board of Education, it is highly probable, we felt, that the language arts activities relative to oral language of the two control groups may have varied because of the teacher variable. Hence, it was anticipated that the two control groups might show some differences in their speech because of this variable. Therefore, the experimental group was compared separately with each control group. The findings of these comparisons are given in tables I and II.

It is interesting to note that the significant differences between the experimental group and both control groups were with respect to the same two verb forms i.e.,the Conditional with Be form and the Regular Present (inclusion of "s" to verb). The findings with respect to the other verb forms showed positive trends favoring the experimental group but were not statistically significant. However, when the two control groups are combined and compared with the experimental groups as shown in table III, the trends are more apparent.

Extensive investigations are needed to determine why the experimental treatment appeared more effective with some verb forms than with the others.

In the meanwhile, the authors feel that the most significant implication of the model is with respect to the concept of EVERYDAY TALK and SCHOOL TALK and its influence on the attitude and behavior of the teacher toward the children's oral speech. In utilizing this model the teacher is at no time required to criticize the oral speech of the children. On the contrary, the model encourages the teacher to respect and accept the children's established dialect and at the same time provides a framework to help the children recognize, learn, and hopefully begin to use standard English.

PSYCHOLINGUISTICS EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT

TABLE I

Number of Children in Experimental Group Compared With Children in Control Group I Whose Informal Speech Corresponds to Standard English Usage With Respect to Six Verb Forms

Variable	Experimental Group		Control Group I		X^2	P
	Standard English	Non Standard Dialect	Standard English	Non Standard Dialect		
Be Present (omission of am, is, are)	33	1	32	7	3.27	<.10
Irregular Present (have-has do-does say-says)	5	3	5	12	1.29	<.30
Regular Present (work-works)	6	5	3	20	4.62	<.05
Irregular Past (write-wrote)	16	0	18	4	1.60	<.30
Regular Past (work-worked)	5	0	10	5	.80	—
Conditional With Be (if I be)	19	1	6	28	27.27	<.001

PSYCHOLINGUISTICS EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT

TABLE II

Number of Children in Experimental Group Compared With Children in Control Group II Whose Informal Speech Corresponds to Standard English Usage With Respect to Six Verb Forms

Variable	Experimental Group		Control Group II		X^2	P
	Standard English	Non Standard Dialect	Standard English	Non Standard Dialect		
Be Present (omission of am, is, are)	33	1	20	3	1.23	<.30
Irregular Present (have-has do-does say-says	5	3	2	7	1.41	<.30
Regular Present (work-works)	6	5	2	11	4.56	<.05
Irregular Past (write-wrote)	16	0	2	1	—	—
Regular Past (work-worked)	5	0	4	1	—	—
Conditional With Be (if I be)	19	1	5	24	25.61	<.001

PSYCHOLINGUISTICS EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT

TABLE III

Number of Children in Experimental Group Compared With Children in Control Groups I and II Whose Informal Speech Corresponds to Standard English Usage With Respect to Six Verb Forms

Variable	Experimental Group		Combined Control Groups I and II			
	Standard English	Non Standard Dialect	Standard English	Non Standard Dialect	X^2	P
Be Present (omission of am, is, are)	33	1	52	10	2.58	<.20
Irregular Present (have-has do-does say-says)	5	3	7	19	2.01	<.20
Regular Present (work-works)	6	5	5	31	5.63	<.02
Irregular Past (write-wrote)	16	0	20	5	2.03	<.20
Regular Past (work-worked)	5	0	14	6	—	—
Conditional With Be (if I be)	19	1	11	52	36.14	<.001