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A BI-DIALECTAL TEST FOR DETERMINING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY.

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXPERIMENT WAS TO COMPARE THE LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR OF STANDARD AND NONSTANDARD ENGLISH SPEAKERS WHEN ASKED TO REPEAT STANDARD AND NONSTANDARD SENTENCES. THE SUBJECTS (47 THIRD AND FIFTH GRADERS AT A NEGRO SCHOOL IN WASHINGTON, D.C., AND 30 OF THEIR WHITE COUNTERPARTS AT A SUBURBAN MARYLAND SCHOOL) WERE ASKED TO REPEAT 30 TAPED SENTENCES AS BEST THEY COULD. FIFTEEN OF THESE SENTENCES WERE IN STANDARD ENGLISH AND 15 WERE IN NEGRO NONSTANDARD DIALECT. WHITE SUBJECTS DID SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER THAN NEGRO SUBJECTS IN REPEATING STANDARD ENGLISH SENTENCES. LIKEWISE, NEGRO CHILDREN WERE SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER IN REPEATING NEGRO NONSTANDARD SENTENCES. THE AUTHOR FEELS THAT THE FACT THAT BOTH GROUPS EXHIBITED SIMILAR BEHAVIOR PATTERNS WHEN CONFRONTED WITH SENTENCES OUTSIDE THEIR PRIMARY CODE INDICATES THAT THE LANGUAGE DEFICIENCY THAT HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO THE LOW INCOME NEGRO CHILD IS NOT A LANGUAGE DEFICIT SO MUCH AS A DIFFICULTY IN CODE SWITCHING WHEN THE SECOND CODE (STANDARD ENGLISH) IS NOT AS WELL LEARNED AS THE FIRST (NONSTANDARD ENGLISH). IN A SECOND TASK INVOLVING IDENTIFICATION OF THE RACE OF THE SPEAKER, HIGH PERCENTAGES OF WHITE AND NEGRO CHILDREN IDENTIFIED A STANDARD ENGLISH SENTENCE AS BEING SPOKEN BY A WHITE MAN AND A NONSTANDARD SENTENCE AS BEING SPOKEN BY A NEGRO. (DO)

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There is a major dispute in the literature concerning the nature of the language abilities of economically disadvantaged Negro children.[1] The three main viewpoints concerning the linguistic system of Negro children can be generally categorized as follows:

1. Many such children are verbally destitute, that is they have not developed a functionally adequate or structurally systematic language code.[2]

2. Such children have systematic but underdeveloped language behavior and therefore, their underdeveloped system leads to cognitive deficits,[3] and

3. These children have a fully developed but different system from that of standard English.[4]

The basic point of contention between these three positions is clearly whether or not these children are linguistically deficient or merely linguistically different.

The body of literature that supports the first position is generally composed of studies that placed middle class children and lower class children into typical middle class testing situations, and then counted the different types of utterances; response units were tabulated in terms of middle class standard English norms. Rare has been the study that has controlled for ethnicity and socio-economic status of the children to say nothing of the non existence on the study that controlled not only for race and class of the children but also for the effect of race of the examiner on the behavior of the children.[5]

The second group of studies tended to give credence to the fact that the child could talk, but felt that his speech was characterized by a limited vocabulary, and a restricted sentence structure. The notion here was that only a few of his constructions could be matched with standard English, and it was assumed that the other parts of his language corpus represented random unstructured errors in language behavior. Here too, most of the studies have used middle class settings, and middle class oriented tasks upon which comparisons have been made. The middle class child or standard English (which is the language of the middle class child) have always been used as the controls against which the disadvantaged Negro was measured. The bulk of the cognitive underdevelopment research was given its major support from the early writings of Basil Bernstein[6] on the language and cognitive abilities of lower class English boys. The most unusual facet of a good deal of this research is the assumption that there is a direct relationship between overt language behavior and concept formation. It presumes for example, that the presence or absence of a specific word that has a definite structural relationship in standard English defines whether a particular concept is present. For example, if the child does not use the standard English "if - then" construction it is presumed that such a concept is not within his cognitive repetoire.[7] There are several difficulties here: 1. this construct may well be expressed differently, and therefore be present although the examiner is not aware of it. For example, in standard English one might say "I don't know if I can get the material so that then you can make the dress." Here the if - then

construction is readily recognized, but is this as easily recognized by the standard English speaking experimenter when he analyzes the Negro non-standard utterance "I don' know, can I get the material for you to make the dress." 2. Such a view also disregards the implications of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis concerning the fact that different language systems may give rise to different cognitive strategies.[8]

The last viewpoint, that of language difference, is supported primarily by research of linguists. This research indicates that there is a definite structure to the "errore" of standard English that the Negro non-standard speaker makes. His language does not represent a pathology, a failure to learn the rules of a linguistic system, but rather it represents the fact that he has learned some different, equally highy structured, highly complex rules of language behavior.

This latter position being the case, the question is raised as to how much the research in the other two positions is contaminated by the fact that the experimenter thought that he was giving both groups the same task. In actual fact the control group was being asked "how well have you learned the language in your environment?" whereas the experimental group was being asked "how well have you learned standard English?"- a language which is not the subject's "native tongue." If contamination is present in the experiment due to the fact that the two groups were not being given the same task even though one was the control for the other, it is logical to assume that if we reverse the tables and ask the standard speaker "how well have you developed your language?" and use non-standard Negro speech as the criterion, he will reflect the

same behaviors that the non-standard speaker manifests when having to speak standard English.

The purpose of the present experiment was to compare the language behavior of standard and non-standard speakers when they are asked to repeat standard and non-standard sentences. The assumption is that Negro lower class children are learning a well ordered but different system from their white counterparts and that if this system is used as the criterion of "correctness," the white child will have to be able to use the Negro child's system as well as the Negro child or else he will have to be classified as "deficient in language development."

Subjects:

The subjects in this experiment were third and fifth graders at Logan School, a Washington, D.C. inner city, impact aid school. All the children in this school are Negro. Third and fifth graders from Rockville Elementary School in Montgomery Country, Maryland, were also used in this experiment. This school is located in an integrated low middle income community. All the subjects from that school were white.

	LOGAN	ROCKVILLE	TOTAL
Third Grade	24	15	39
Fifth Grade	23	15	38
TOTAL	47	30	77

Procedure:

A sentence repetition test was constructed that contained 30 sentences. Fifteen of these sentences were in standard English and 15 of them were in Negro non-standard.[9] The sentences were presented on tape to the subject who was asked to repeat the sentence after hearing it once. Two random orders of the sentences were constructed to control for an order effect. The sentences were as follows:[10]

1. That girl, she ain' go ta school 'cause she ain' got no clothes to wear.
2. John give me two books for me to take back the liberry 'cause dey overdue.
3. I's some toys out chere and the chil'run they don' wanna play wid dem no more.
4. Does Deborah like to play with the girl that sits next to her in school.
5. The teacher give him a note 'bout de school meetin' an he 'posed to give it ta his mother to read.
6. John he always be late for school 'cause he don't like ta go music class.
7. My aunt who lives in Baltimore used to come to visit us on Sunday afternoons.
8. Do Deborah like to play wid da girl that sit next to her at school.
9. I asked Tom if he wanted to go to the picture that was playing at the Howard.
10. John gave me two books to take to the library because they were overdue.
11. Can Michael make the boat by hisself or do we gotta he'p him do it.
12. Henry lives near the ball park but can't go to the games because he has no money.
13. Where Mary brovah goin' wif a raggedy umbrella and a old blue raincoat.
14. There are some toys out here that the children don't want to play with anymore.
15. If I give you three dollars will you buy me the things that I need to make the wagon?
16. When the teacher asked if he had done his homework, Henry said "I didn't do it."
17. I aks Tom do he wanna go to the picture that be playin' at the Howard.

18. Henry live beside the ball park but he can't go to the games'cause he ain' got no money.
19. The teacher gave him a note about the school meeting to give to his mother.
20. She was the girl who didn't go to school because she had no clothes to wear.
21. John is always late to school because he doesn't like to go to music class.
22. Patricia sits in the front row so that she can hear everything the teacher says.
23. If I give you three dollar you gonna but what I need to make the wagon?
24. When the teachah aks Henry did he do his homework, Henry say I ain't did it.
25. My aunt, she live in Baltimore, and she useda come visit us Sunday afternoon.
26. Gloria's friend is working as a waitress in the Hot Shoppes on Connecticutt Avenue.
27. Can Michael build the boat all by himself or should we help him with some of the work.
28. Where is Mary's brother going with a raggedy umbrella and an old blue raincoat.
29. Patricia all the time be sittin' in the front row so she can hear everything the teacher say.
30. Gloria frien', she a waitress, she be working the Hot Shoppes on Connecticutt Avenue.

Subjects were asked to repeat exactly what they heard as best they could. After the subject had responded to all the stimuli on the tape, he was asked to listen to two stimuli, one in standard English and the other in non-standard English. After each of these stimuli, the subject was asked to identify who was speaking from among a group of pictures containing Negro and white men, women, boys and girls and an Oriental girl.

Results:

The data were analyzed to ascertain what happened to the following standard structures, and what happened to the following non-standard constructions:

Standard Constructions	Non-standard Constructions
Third person singular	Non addition of third person -s
Presence of Copula	Zero copula
Treatment of Negation	Double Negation, ain't
If - did	Did - he "flip"
Past markers	Zero past morpheme
Possessive marker	Zero possessive morpheme
Plural	Use of "be"

1. Analysis of variance on repetition of standard constructions.

The data concerning repetition of the seven standard constructions were subjected to a Winer multifactor repeated measures analysis of variance.[11] (Table 1) The factors under study were A. race - Negro versus white performance; B. age - third graders versus fifth graders; and C. grammatical category - the seven standard forms listed above. The analysis of variance indicated that race, grammatical feature and the interaction of race and grammatical feature were significant beyond the .001 level. The interaction of age and grammatical feature was significant at the .05 level.

White subjects were significantly better than Negro subjects in repeating standardEnglish sentences. A Scheffee test for multiple comparisons of factor C, grammatical features, indicated that most of the significant variance could be ascribed to the differential performance of subjects on the "if - did" construction. In addition the plural feature was significantly more accurate than the third person singular and the possessive. The significant A x C interaction, race and grammatical feature, was most readily explained by the significant difference between Negro and white performance on the following grammatical categories - third person singular, copula, if-did and negation. The

Table 1

Analysis of Variance of Standard English Sentences

	ss	df	ms	F
Between subjects				
A	128.48	1	128.48	285.51*
B	.09	1	.09	.20
AxB	1.00	1	1.00	2.22
Subjects within groups	25.22	56	.45	
Within subjects				
C	69.98	6	11.66	31.61*
AxC	39.49	6	6.58	21.23*
BxC	4.46	6	.74	2.39@
AxBxC	2.51	6	.41	1.32
C x subjects within groups	103.74	336	.31	
TOTAL	374.97	419		

*significant beyond .001 level
@significant at the .05 level

B x C interaction, age and grammatical feature, was mostly accountable by the significant difference in performance at grade three and grade five of the if-did construction and the plural marker. (Table 2)

2. Analysis of variance on repetition of non-standard constructions.

The data concerning repetition of the seven non-standard constructions were subjected to a Winer multifactor repeated measures analysis of variance. (Table 3) The factors under study were the same as those in the previous analysis of variance - A. race, B. age, and C. grammatical feature. The analysis of variance indicated that race, grammatical feature, and the interaction of race and grammatical feature were all significant beyond the .001 level.

Negro subjects were significantly better than white subjects in repeating Negro non-standard sentences. A Scheffee test for multiple comparisons[12] of factor C, grammatical features, indicated that most of the significant variance could be ascribed to the differential performance of subjects on the do - he flip. The significant A x C interaction, race and grammatical feature, was most readily explained by the differential performance of Negro and white subjects on the do - he flip and the double negative constructions. (Table 4)

3. Identification of race of the speaker.

Seventy three point three percent of the third graders identified standard stimuli as being spoken by a white man, and 73.3% of the third graders identified non-standard as being spoken by a Negro. Eighty three point three percent of the fifth graders judged the standard sentence as being spoken by a white man, while 93.3% of the fifth graders

Table 2

Schefée Results of Standard English Sentences Analysis

Factor C

Third person	"To be"	"If-did"	Past Marker	Possessive	Plural	Negation
143.40	155.67	7ᴗ.65	152.67	140.07	167.96	152.67

Third person is significantly different from the plural and the possessive at the .05 level. The "if-did" construction is significantly different from all other constructions at the .05 level.

Factor AC

	Third person	"To be"	"If-did"	Past Marker	Possessive	Plural	Negation
Negro	51.00	65.88	6.33	69.21	66.30	77.14	54.90
White	92.40	89.79	80.32	89.79	48.44	90.82	85.17

Performance of Negro and white students was significantly different on the third person, "to be," "if-did," and negation constructions at the .05 level.

Factor BC

	Third Person	"To be"	"If-did"	Past Marker	Possessive	Plural	Negation
Grade 3	72.46	76.73	39.55	74.60	82.39	86.11	65.63
Grade 5	70.94	78.94	47.10	78.07	72.35	81.85	74.44

Performance of third ard fifth graders on the "if-did" was significantly different from their performance on the plural and the possessive.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance of Negro Non-Standard Sentences

Between Subjects				
A	73.20	1	73.20	66.55*
B	.53	1	.53	.48
AxB	.01	1	.01	.009
Subjects within groups	61.63	56	1.10	
Within subjects				
C	44.34	6	7.39	13.19*
AxC	39.49	6	6.58	11.75*
BxC	.82	6	.14	.25
AxBxC	3.42	6	.57	1.02
C subjects within groups	188.83	336	.56	
TOTAL	412.27	419		

*significant beyond the .001 level

Table 4

Schefee Results of Negro Non Standard English Sentences Analysis

Factor C

Third person	Be	Zero Copula	If-did	Past Marker	Double Neg.	Possesive
86.79	54.48	106.61	109.30	80.93	109.57	73.06

The use of "Be" was significantly different from performance in regard to the zero copula, the third person singular, the if-did flip and the double negative.

Factor AC

	Third person	Be	Zero Copula	If-did	Past Marker	Double Neg.	Possessive
Negro	52.88	35.27	57.16	87.87	53.39	67.90	42.57
White	33.91	19.21	49.45	21.43	26.54	31.67	30.49

Most of the significance was due to the difference in performance between Negro and white students on the double negative and on the if-did flip constructions.

judged the non-standard sentence as being spoken by a Negro. Eighty percent of the white children identified standard sentences as being spoken by a white man while 76.6% of the Negro children identified standard sentences as being spoken by a white man. Non-standard sentences were judged to be spoken by a Negro 83.3% of the time by both Negro and white children.

Discussion:

The fact that the standard and non-standard speakers exhibited similar behaviors when confronted with sentences that were outside of their primary code indicates quite clearly that the "language deficiency" that has been attributed to the low income Negro child is not a language deficit so much as a difficulty in code switching when the second code (standard English) is not as well learned as the first (non-standard English).

The kinds of "errors" of the two groups (i.e. white subjects adding the third person -s to non-standard stimuli and Negroes deleting the third person -s on standard stimuli) represent a language intrusion of one code (the dominant system) upon the structure of the second code (the newly acquired system). If, indeed, non-standard were not a structured system with well ordered rules one would not expect 1. Negro children to be able to repeat the structures any better than white children, and 2. non-standard patterns to emerge systematically when lower class Negroes responded to standard sentences. However, expectations were not upheld. The Negro children were in fact able to repeat non-standard structures better than were the white children, and

they did produce systematic non-standard patterns when responding to standard sentences. The converse was true for the whites who responded significantly better to standard structures and who exhibited systematic standard patterns when responding to non-standard stimuli. The assumption that Negro lower class children are learning a well ordered but different system from their white counterparts and that if this system rather than standard English is used as a criterion of "correctness" that the white child will do more poorly than the Negro (i.e. appear deficient) was supported.

But one might ask whether the sentences were really Negro non-standard stimuli. The fact that the speaker was a white man reading both the standard and non-standard sentences did not seem to interfere with the fact that those sentences which contained syntactic and phonological features of non-standard English were overwhelmingly chosen as being spoken by a Negro both by white and Negro third and fifth graders.

The implications of this research to students of language development are very clear. If the criterion for language development is the use of a well ordered systematic code, then the continued use of measures of language development that have standard English as the criterion of a developed form will only continue to produce the results that the Negro lower class child is delayed in language development because he has not acquired the rules that the middle class child has been able to acquire - i.e. his language is underdeveloped. Using standard English criterion for tests that ask "how well has standard English been developed in this child?" is excellent, however, using standard English

as criterion for tests that ask "how well has this child developed language?" is absurd if the primary language that the child is developing is not that of standard English. The question to be asked in assessing language development in these children is "are the linguistic structures that the child uses highly ordered rules or random utterances, and how well do these utterances approximate the ordered rules of the adults in his environment?"

FOOTNOTES

1. In current usage, the term "disadvantaged" usually refers to low economic status, often combined with underprivileged minority group status, and the host of detrimental effects which these have on an individual's ability to participate in mainstream American society. As used here, the term may also refer to members of a different culture together with the detrimental effects which differences between it and mainstream culture may have on such individuals.

2. For a review of this position regarding the language of the disadvantaged child see Raph, Jane B., "Language and speech deficits in culturally disadvantaged children: implications for the speech clinician," Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders, 1967, 32, 203 - 215.

3. Bereiter, C., "Academic instruction and preschool children, Language Programs for the Disadvantaged, NCTE Task Force Report, Corbin and Crosby (Eds.), NCTE, Champaign, Ill., 1965. Bernstein, B., "Language and social class," British Journal of Soc., 11, 1960, 27 - 76. Deutsch, M., "The role of social class in language development and cognition," Amer. Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 35, 1965, 24 - 35. Hess, R., Shipman, V. and Jackson, D., "Some new dimensions in providing equal educational opportunity, Journal of Negro Education, 34, 1965, 220 - 231. John, Vera, "The intellectual development of slum children; some preliminary findings," Amer. Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 33, 1963, 13 - 22.

4. Bailey, B., "Toward a new perspective in Negro English dialectology," American Speech, 1967, 171 - 177. Baratz, J. and Povich, E., "Grammatical constructions in the language of the Negro preschool child," submitted for publication to Child Development, 1968. Dillard, J.L., "Negro children's dialect in the inner city," The Florida FL Reporter, 1967. Labov, W., Stages in the acquisition of standard English," Social Dialects and Language Learning, Shuy (Ed.), NCTE, Ill., 1965. Stewart, W.A.,"Sociolinguistic factors in the history of American Negro dialects," The Florida FL Reporter, vol. 5, 1967; "Urban Negro speech: sociolinguistic factors affecting English teaching," Social Dialects and Language Learning, Shuy, R. (Ed.), NCTE, Ill., 1965; "Continuity and change in American Negro dialects," The Florida FL Reporter, Spring 1968.

5. For the importance of this variable see Baratz, S., "The effect of race of the experimenter, instructions and comparison populations upon the level of reported anxiety in Negro subjects," Jounal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1967, vol. 7, 194 - 198. Clark, K., Dark Ghetto, Harper Row, New York, 1965. Katz, I. and Greenbaum, C., "Effects of anxiety, threat and racial environment on task performance of Negro college students," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, vol 66, 1963, 562 - 567. Pettigrew, T., A Profile of the Negro American, Van Nostrand, Princeton, New Jersey, 1964.

6. Basil Bernstein is an English social psychologist who has done some research on language patterns of lower class English boys. Most

of his discussions deal with the "restricted codes" of these boys as compared with the "elaborated codes" of middle class boys. The middle class children are capable of switching from restricted to formal code but the lower class chilren only have the restricted code at their command. Bernstein has done no work with American Negro children, although many researchers have attempted to use his model with disadvantaged Negro children.

7. For example, Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann in their book, Teaching Disadvantaged School Children, Prentice Hall, Inc., New Jersey, 1967, presume that since the "if-then" construction is not present in the disadvantaged child's linguistic repetoire, it is therefore, one of the five-element concepts that must be taught directly to these children. (pp. 172 - 185)

8. John, Vera, "The Basil Bernstein Fad," unpublished paper, Yeshiva University, 1967. Stodolsky, S. and Lesser, G., "Learning patterns in the disadvantaged," Harvard Educational Review, Fall, 1967, 546 - 593. Zintz, M., Education Across Cultures, Brown Book Co., Dubuque, Iowa, 1963.

9. The standard English sentences were constructed by Joan Baratz with the possibility of echoic repetition being largely diminished by means of minimum sentence lengths of twenty syllables and by relatively complex syntactic structures. (Menyuk, P. in her unpublished ASHA paper (1967), on sentence repetition and linguistic competence reviews the literature on the relationship of knowledge of syntactic

structure to recall of sentences.) The non-standard equivalents of the standard stimuli were constructed by William A. Stewart, a specialist in Negro dialects. Mr. Stewart also read both sets of sentences on the tape.

10. The spellings of these sentences that are presented here, are a gross approximation of the sound on the tape.

11. Stewart is white, and a native speaker of a variety of standard American English which is quite close, in phonology and grammatical structure, to that spoken by educated, younger generation Californians. It is also close to the kind of English which Kenyon and others have labeled "General American." Some linguists at the Center for Applied Linguistics who listened to Stewart's rendition of non-standard Negro dialect, felt that there were occaisional lapses in some of the vowel and consonants. Although Stewart points out that most of these involve standardizing alternatives within the Negro speech community itself, he does feel that some of his uses of stress were not truly non-standard. This, however, appears to have had little effect on the subjects' ethnic identification of the stimuli as being spoken by a Negro.