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Discussed briefly by the author are some of the "most immediately relevant" implications for TESOL which arise from research studies in dialectology. One phenomenon, which until recently has received little attention, is that of "receptive bi-dialectalism" or "bilingualism." One of the earliest observations of this phenomenon is a passage taken from the writing of Daniel Defoe in 1724. An individual, presented with a stimulus in one dialect and asked to repeat it, will respond by producing the form that is native to his own dialect rather than the form which he has heard (or read). The author feels that such evidence should give us pause in attempts to judge a child's linguistic competence solely or even largely on the basis of his production; rather we should begin by attempting to assess the child's receptive competence as the basis from which to proceed in determining appropriate instructional procedures. If the child has an already well-developed receptive knowledge of a more formal or "mainstream" dialect of the language, much of the instructional task can be seen as guiding him toward an automatic productive control of the "mainstream" dialect. Implicit in this approach is the idea that only positive stimuli and motivations will be supplied to lead him to develop and practice this control, and that no negative values or stigmas will be applied to his use of his native linguistic forms. (AMM)

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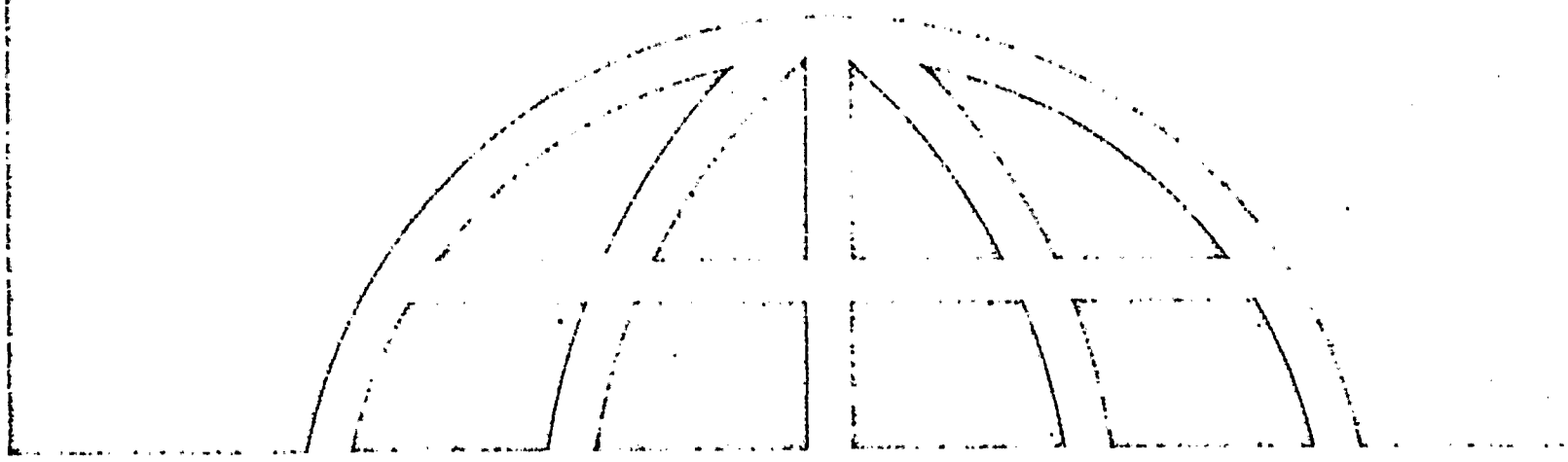

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*Social Dialects and Language Learning: Implications for TESOL**

Rudolph C. Troike

In this paper I shall discuss some of the implications for TESOL which arise from research studies in dialectology that can be related meaningfully to the development of action programs in the schools, and from a general understanding of the nature of language, language learning, and language variation. Although it would be possible to expatiate on this subject at great length, I shall focus my remarks on those major points which seem most immediately relevant.

As a point of departure, I begin with a quotation from Daniel Defoe (best known today as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*), taken from the chapter "A Tour Thro' Somerset" in his book *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, published in 1724:

> It cannot pass my Observation here, that, when we are come this Length from London, the Dialect of the English Tongue, or the Country-way of expressing themselves, is not easily understood. . . . It is not possible to explain this fully by Writing, because the Difference is not so much in the Orthography, as in the Tone and Accent; their abridging the Speech, *Cham*, for *I am; Chil*, for *I will*; *Don*, for *do on*, or *put on*; and *Doff*, for *do off*, or *put off*; and the like.
>
> I cannot omit a short Story here on this Subject: Coming to a Relation's House, who was a Schoolmaster at Martock in Somersetshire, I went into his School to beg the Boys, or rather the Master, a Play-day, as is usual in such Cases. I observed one of the lowest Scholars was reading his Lesson to the Usher in a Chapter in the Bible. I sat down by the Master, till the Boy had read it out, and observed the Boy read a little oddly in the Tone of the Country, which made me the more attentive; because, on Inquiry, I found that the Words were the same, and the Orthography the same, as in all our Bibles. I observed also the Boy read it out with his Eyes still on the Book, and his Head, like a mere Boy, moving from Side to Side, as the Lines reached cross the Columns of the Book: His Lesson was in the *Canticles of Solomon*; the Words these; 'I have put off my Coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my Feet; how shall I defile them?' The Boy read thus, with his Eyes, as I say, full on the Text: 'Chav a doffed my Coot; how shall I don't? Chav a washed my Feet; how shall I moil 'em?'
>
> How the dexterous Dunce could form his Mouth to express so readily the Words (which stood right printed in the Book) in his Country Jargon, I could not but admire.

This is one of the earliest observations I have been able to discover concerning a phenomenon which is of the greatest importance to teachers of language, but which until recently has received only scant attention. The

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* This paper was presented at the TESOL Convention, March 1968.

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phenomenon I refer to is that of *receptive bi-dialectalism* or *bilingualism.* The Defoe example is typical of many we have observed in which an individual, who is presented with a stimulus in one dialect and asked to repeat it, will respond by producing the form that is native to his own dialect rather than the form which he has heard or seen. This substitution of native forms for stimulus forms includes not only features of phonology, but extends to vocabulary and syntax as well, as may be seen in Defoe's example.

Such responses seem to give unequivocal evidence that the person has an adequate receptive knowledge of the stimulus dialect, and that he performs—and has learned to perform—instantaneous *translation* from that dialect into his native dialect. Such evidence should further give us pause at attempts to judge a child's linguistic competence solely or even largely on the basis of his *production,* as we are prone to do, and as our tests are now largely designed to do.

Instead, we should begin by attempting to assess the child's *receptive* competence, as the basis from which to proceed in determining appropriate instructional procedures. Thus, if the child has an already well-developed receptive knowledge of a more formal or "mainstream" dialect of the language, much of the instructional task can be seen as guiding him toward an automatic *productive control* of the "mainstream" dialect, rther than of having to teach it to him from scratch. Implicit in this approach is the idea that only positive stimuli and motivations will be supplied to lead him to develop and practice this control, and that no negative values or stigmas will be applied to his use of his native linguistic forms. The goal is to make clear to the child that the choice of dialect is a matter of social appropriateness and expediency rather than one of right versus wrong, or good versus bad.

To the oft-repeated objection that the first-grade child is too innocent of the social world around him to appreciate the significance of dialect differences, I can only reply, "*Nonsense!*" Five- and six-year-olds are far more perceptive than adults usually give them credit for, and it is only a cultural myth which prevents us from seeing this fact. With his indulgence, I should like to illustrate my point with an account of an actual event reported to me by a colleague of mine. As is well known, there are two ways in American English of pronouncing the word *creek*: in large parts of the North, even by educated speakers, it is pronounced to rhyme with *pick,* while elsewhere it rhymes with *peek.* My colleague happens to be a "crick" speaker, while his wife is a "creek" speaker. Several years ago his son, then five, said something to his father about the "creek" behind their home, and was promptly reproved by his four-year-old sister, who happened to be standing nearby, with "Don't you know that you're supposed to say 'crick' to Daddy and 'creek' to Mommie?" Many more examples could be cited to show that even pre-first-graders are far from linguistically naive and have already learned a great deal about the adaptive significance of linguistic behavior within their own very real social world.

Against this background, then, let me sketch briefly what seem to me to be some of the major implications of current research on non-standard dialects, and of dialectology in general, for teaching English to non-English speakers.

First of all, the teacher must realize that she is a teacher of *language*, and that all languages spoken by more than one person have dialects. Dialects arise by natural processes beyond the reach of coercive methods to control, and are specific to particular social groups and particular areas. There is no such thing as a "standard language" as contrasted with "dialects"; there are only more or less culturally valued or socially prestigious dialects, and more or less formal dialects, of a language. Any other view simply reflects the ignorance of the one who holds it.

Any instructional program, whether in a more widely prestigious dialect of the native language, or in a second language, must begin with as full an *objective* knowledge as possible on the part of the teacher and of the materials preparer of the specific features of the native dialect of the learner. Only in this way can an accurate prediction of the linguistic interference between the native language (or dialect) and the target language (or dialect) be made, and an understanding of its sources achieved. With specific respect to Spanish, there are, as anyone who knows the history of Spanish settlement in the New World might expect, different dialects of Spanish spoken today in Puerto Rico, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. (At this point I should like to dispose once and for all of the prevalent idea that there is in Texas a supposedly corrupt form of Spanish known as "Tex-Mex"; this is a dangerous myth and, like most dangerous myths, has no basis in fact.) There are in fact several native dialects of Spanish spoken in Texas alone—even in a single city such as San Antonio or El Paso—and most of these are simply local varieties of the much larger regional dialect of North Mexican Spanish. But these dialects are enough different that we cannot afford to ignore their differences, whether we are teaching a more formal or mainstream dialect of Spanish or whether we are teaching English.

To illustrate the relevance of these differences with a single example, the phoneme represented in Spanish orthography by *ch* may in some areas have as its phonetic norm [š], the initial sound of *ship*, while in other areas the phonetic norm may be [č], the initial sound of *chip*. In still other areas, [č] may occur after pause or a preceding consonant and [š] everywhere else. In teaching Spanish, if the pattern used locally should have less prestige than one of the other patterns, the teacher should attempt to guide the student toward a habitual use of the more prestigious pattern. In teaching English, the teacher needs to know which of the patterns is in use among her students (even individuals in the same class may differ) in order to arrange and sequence the examples used to contrast the two sounds. Obviously if [š] is the norm of pronunciation, it is [č] which must be introduced and contrasted. If the dialect uses [č] and [š] in different positions, then the program for teaching the /č/:/š/ contrast in English must be modified accordingly.

Those who are teaching the Navajo in New Mexico and Arizona must know also that there are different dialects of Navajo, and that these likewise need to be taken into account in teaching.

Another point which deserves mention because it is so often ignored is that in teaching either a second language or a second dialect, we need to know what syntactic patterns are or *are not* in the repertory of the speaker at different age levels. Thus, for example, we have found that some first-grade Spanish speakers—whether as a development or dialectal feature we are not sure—do not have the inflected verb form for expressing futurity (Infinitive + Suffix, e.g., *cantar-é*, "I will sing"), but instead use only the construction *ir a* + *Infinitive*, comparable to the English "be going to" future: *voy a cantar*, "I am going to sing." Materials designed either for teaching a more "standard" dialect of Spanish or for teaching English to Spanish-speaking children at this level should certainly take such matters into account. A prime need today is for more detailed studies of the structures present or lacking in the grammar of first graders of various dialect and language backgrounds. It is patently absurd as well as frustrating to the learner to base reading lessons or classroom questions on structures which the child does not yet understand or which are absent from the dialect.

Speaking as an anthropologist, I should also like to emphasize the cultural and social dimensions of language learning as they affect the disadvantaged child. I think it is important that at all times we show respect for the language the child brings to school, whether it be a language which differs altogether from that of the school or a dialect which differs in only a few points of phonology and morphology from that which serves as the medium of instruction. Whatever the child's language, he has worked it out for himself—and it is a marvelous intellectual achievement—as an adaptive mechanism for communication within a specific social and cultural environment. When he enters school, he comes in contact for the first time with a new subculture, or a totally new culture in many instances, and has to undergo rapid and sometimes traumatic acculturation, often with little guidance. But while some of the features of the child's native culture may be accepted or at least tolerated in the school, he often finds his language, that adaptive instrument that has served him so well in his own environment, suddenly and inexplicably brought under direct attack. Even where he escapes this fate, he may discover that his linguistic skills do not serve him adequately in meeting the demands of the new environment, and so, baffled and frustrated, he may withdraw or rechannel his energies, and cease to try.

Learning the language of a society which is outside the immediate ken of the disadvantaged child cannot be left to chance. We must structure the child's experience with the new language or dialect in such a way as to optimize his chances for internalizing it, and then make sure that sufficient opportunity is provided for intensive practice in the new patterns so that they can become fixed and automatic. Since his language is one of the most important tools the child has for adapting to the demands of the new cul-

tural environment, it is imperative that he be provided with this tool as rapidly as possible. "Nothing succeeds like success" is a two-sided coin, and the child's whole attitude toward academic achievement will often be fixed before he leaves the first grade.

To return to the point made at the beginning of this paper, *receptive* knowledge of another language or another dialect can be imparted much more speedily and more efficiently than can productive control of that language or dialect. Once receptive knowledge has been developed, it can be used as the basis for a more efficient and effective program for developing productive control. I am strongly persuaded that the only way we can hope to develop this receptive capacity with the speed and efficiency that is needed is through the use of appropriate motivational materials—in which I would particularly include tape-recorded materials—and organized structural drill, within a carefully worked out program which combines instruction in the native and target languages in an integral whole rather than in separate-but-parallel sequences. Further, we should not wait until the child is six to begin that training, for by then he will have lost the four most crucial years in the language-learning process, but rather we should start working with children at the ages of two and three, in order to help them achieve the fullest development of their linguistic capabilities. When we realize that most academic casualties are made before the first grade, we can't afford to wait. There is no time to lose.

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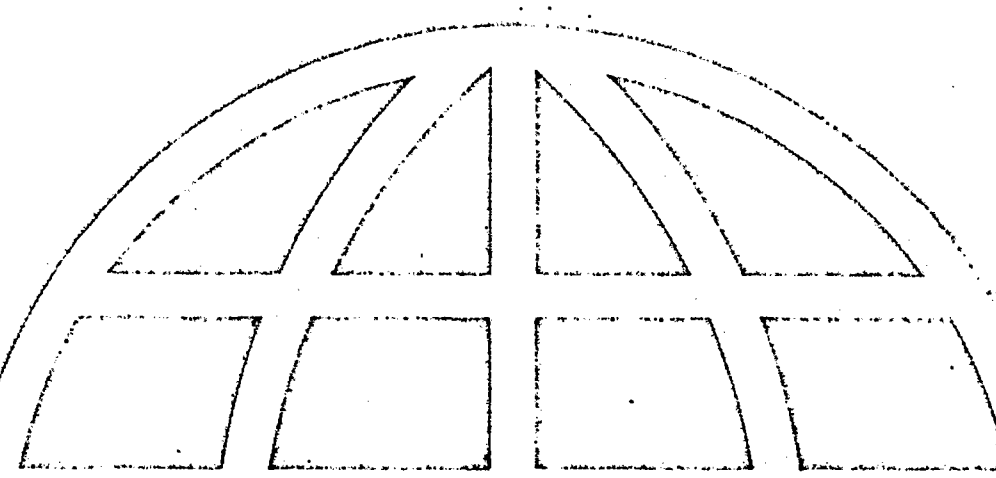

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