        This fourth book in the Urban Language Series is concerned with the relationship
of language to reading. Literacy must be based on the language the child actually
uses. In the case of ghetto children, materials in their dialect must be prepared so
that their task of associating sounds and words with written symbols is not
complicated by lack of correspondence between these sounds and words and the
students' normal speech. These materials must include forms the child uses and hears,
and exclude forms he does not hear and use. They must avoid complex constructions
and ambiguity and make use of natural redundancy. Further, they must use language
appropriate to the context in the experience of the child. Examples of the kinds of
materials that can be developed are included in two of the articles. Authors of the
various papers (written between 1964 and 1968) are Joan Baratz, Ralph Fasold,
Kenneth Goodman, William Labov, Raven McDavid, Roger Shuy, William Stewart, and
Walter Wolfram. (MK)

TEACHING BLACK CHILDREN

TO READ

EDITED BY

JOAN C. BARATZ & ROGER W. SHUY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

URBAN LANGUAGE SERIES

ROGER W. SHUY, GENERAL EDITOR

[1]

THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF ENGLISH IN NEW YORK CITY
WILLIAM LABOV

[2]

CONVERSATIONS IN A NEGRO AMERICAN DIALECT
TRANSCRIBED & EDITED BY
BENGT LOMAN

[3]

FIELD TECHNIQUES IN AN URBAN LANGUAGE STUDY
ROGER W. SHUY
WALTER A. WOLFRAM
WILLIAM K. RILEY

[4]

TEACHING BLACK CHILDREN TO READ
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CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS : 1969

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The Urban Language Series is intended to make available the
results of recent sociolinguistic research concerned with the
position and role of language in a large metropolitan area.
The series includes descriptions of certain aspects of urban
language, particularly English, as well as theoretical consid-
erations relevant to such descriptions. The series also in-
cludes studies dealing with fieldwork techniques, matters of
pedagogy and relationships of urban language study to other
disciplines. Where appropriate and feasible, accompanying
tape recordings will be made available. Specifically excluded
from consideration are aspects of English as a second language
or second language learning in general.

It is hoped that the Urban Language Series will prove use-
ful to several different kinds of readers. For the linguist,
the series will provide data for the study of language perfor-
mance and for the development of linguistic theory. Histor-
ically, linguists have formulated theory from individual
rather than group performance. They have had to generalize
about what constitutes "standard" or "non-standard" from intu-
itive judgments or from very limited data. This series is
designed to make available large portions of language data as
well as analyses in order to broaden the knowledge from which
linguistic generalizations may come.

For the sociologist the series will provide access to
the nature of social stratification by means of language. It

is the contention of some scholars that a person's use of
language is one of the most important cues to his social
status, age, race or sex.

For the educator, the series will offer among other
things a description of the very things which are most
crucial to the classroom—the linguistic correlates which
separate the accepted from the unaccepted.

Although the value of focussed attention on the special
problems of urban language has been recognized for some time,
relatively few substantial studies have been published. To
a certain degree, this series represents a pioneering venture
on the part of the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Roger W. Shuy
Director, Sociolinguistics Program
Center for Applied Linguistics

TEACHING BLACK CHILDREN TO READ

PREFACE

Reports from city after city with substantial numbers of
economically deprived black children have indicated that
reading achievement for this group is well below the national
norms. In general, the reading failure of these children has
been viewed as one requiring remediation, i.e. a deficit model
has been employed which implies that there is something wrong
with the child that has prevented him from learning to read.
This something is most often presumed to have a neuro-
physiological base (e.g. dyslexia) or to be related to en-
vironmental factors that are presumed to be detrimental to
the acquisition of reading skills (e.g. no books in the home).

The present volume is also concerned with the failure of
black children in our public schools. It is, however, not
concerned with remediation; rather, its focus is on literacy.
The primary concern of the papers in this collection is that
of language and the relationship of language to reading. Not
remediation but how to teach reading is the issue here.

Although each author suggests different ways of handling
certain aspects of the child's speech in teaching reading,
all the papers in this volume recognize and deal with the
role of the child's own language behavior in the process of
learning to read.

These papers were written over approximately a four-year
time span. They were developed in most cases independently,
although some drew on the insights of the earlier papers.

Several of the articles were written specifically for this
volume while others are reprinted from various journals.

McDavid states in his paper the fundamental proposition
that "a reading program in any language, at any stage in a
student's career, is likely to be effective in proportion to
its use of the language habits that the student has acquired
in speaking." His focus is on phoneme-grapheme relationships,
particularly as they conflict across regional dialects.

Goodman also takes as basic to any reading program the
premise that "literacy is built on the base of the child's
existing language." He focuses on dialect differences that
can impede learning to read, and suggests possible solutions
which might avoid these barriers.

Labov discusses the difficulties in teaching black
children to read arising from the "ignorance of standard
English rules on the part of speakers of non-standard Eng-
lish" and from the "ignorance of non-standard English rules
on the part of teachers and text writers." His discussion
of sources of reading problems for non-standard speakers
deals mainly with differences in phonology between standard
and Negro non-standard English.

Baratz takes as a basic premise that the reading problem
in the United States in regard to the black population is no
different from literacy problems of emergent nations around
the world. She feels that the child's different syntactic
structures must be incorporated into the teaching procedures.
A difference model, rather than a deficit model, is proposed
for teaching black children to read.

Shuy also focuses on differences in the child's language
system as a basis for suggested developments of beginning
reading materials. He provides a possible linguistic rationale
for consideration in the construction of such materials.

Fasold's paper deals with some of the problems of ortho-
graphic presentation of dialect materials to children. A
systematic framework for the use of standard orthography in
dialect texts is presented.

The Wolfram and Fasold paper is an attempt to illustrate
some practical applications of the theoretical considerations
of several of the preceding articles.

In the final paper, Stewart, who for some time now has
been a staunch advocate of dialect-based texts, also focuses
sharply on the child's different language system. He dis-
cusses the nature of the child's reading problem with par-
ticular emphasis on language interference as a prime source
for the child's failure in school. While he calls for the
use of dialect materials, Stewart elaborates on some of the
difficulties inherent in constructing and programming such
materials.

During the four-year time span of these papers there
have been changes in the rhetoric concerning the American
Negro. In McDavid's paper (1964), and even more so in
Goodman's paper (1965), although some of the dialect speak-
ers that are being described are clearly Negroes, no reference
to race is made--the black man was still "the invisible man".
Finally, however, the overt identification is made: Labov
(1966-67) addresses himself to describing reading problems
of Negro children, while in 1968, Baratz, Fasold, Shuy, and
Wolfram use such terms as black, Negro inner-city, ghetto
dwellers, and Afro-American synonymously.

J.C.B.
R.W.S.

Washington, D.C.
January 1969

CONTENTS

DIALECTOLOGY AND THE TEACHING OF READING

by Raven I. McDavid, Jr.

Dialect associations of phonemes and graphemes may vary
strikingly from one part of the culture to another. English
patterns of phonemic-graphemic correspondences involve sev-
eral layers of cultural convention, and some of the practices
of some subcultural subdialects may be sharply at variance
with the normal practices of a speaker. These complexities
of association make it difficult for someone not only to
spell a word he normally confines to the spoken informal
style, but to pronounce a word which he is accustomed to
meeting only in print. And if words of the last group are
frequently mispronounced in oral reading, there is a reason-
able supposition that they will be as frequently misappre-
hended in silent reading. This supposition, like many others,
needs to be tested, but pending disproof, I shall continue to
assert it.

More important than this, and amusing examples that may
be drawn from anyone's recollections,[1] is the basic problem:
to what extent do dialect differences in American English
complicate the task of teaching in American schools the read-
ing of matter written or printed in English? I shall here
use reading in its widest sense, to include not only simple

. . . .

literacy but the skill—the art, in fact—of understanding
materials of increasing complication, whether scientific or
aesthetic in their essential bent.

Here we have to ask ourselves a few questions, some of
which, like desperate Pilates, we cannot expect to have ade-
quately answered in this life: (1) What is the process of
learning to read, in linguistic and sociolinguistic terms?
(2) What is the general dialectal situation in American Eng-
list?   (4) How does this situation affect the problem of the
classroom teacher, as a teacher of reading?   (5) How much do
we know about various kinds of dialect differences in American
English?   How much more can we hope to know?   (6) How do these
differences, as we know them, affect the problem of the class-
room teacher of reading in the American dialectal situation?

What is the process of learning to read, in linguistic
and sociolinguistic terms?   On this question I gladly yield
to the greater expertise of the professionals.   There are
many forces converging to a point when a teacher guides a
student into the ability to understand the graphic representa-
tion of the language the student can already manipulate orally
and understand aurally.   But even here a few propositions can
be restated:

A reading program, in any language, at any stage in a
student's career, is likely to be effective in proportion to
its use of the language habits that the student has acquired
in speaking.

All children by the age of six use extremely complicated
syntactic patterns; furthermore, children's vocabularies are
frequently underestimated, rarely overestimated.

Our culture demands a high degree of reading skill of
anyone who hopes to participate adequately in its benefits;
but conversely, more than any other culture ever known, it
provides frequent opportunities for children to develop at

an early age associations between the language and its graphic
representation. It is an ironic fact that the culturally
most deprived groups actually make the greatest use of the
entertainment medium that provides the greatest opportunities
for developing these associations—television.

All instructional programs which are concerned with
developing skills might learn from the intensive language
programs of World War II and develop drill materials based
on functional situations and substitutions in patterns.
Admittedly limited in my knowledge of the subculture of pro-
fessional teaching of reading, I find none of the so-called
basal readers that has yet done this.

What is dialectology? Dialectology is the study of
language differences within a speech community, with a dialect
simply defined as a variety of a language, generally mutually
intelligible with other varieties of that language, but set
off from them by a unique complex of features of pronunci-
ation, grammar, and vocabulary. Dialect, thus used, is not
a derogatory term but a descriptive one; it is equally appli-
cable to the Gullah of Edisto Island (locally /'edisto
'ɔilənt/) and to the quaint and curious subspecies of culti-
vated Eastern New England speech employed by the Senators
from Massachusetts. These differences are often apprehended
intuitively or informally, but they can always be classified
objectively provided comparable data have been elicited.
The methods of eliciting such data and the techniques of
classification have been described on many occasions: the
handbooks of the linguistic atlases of Italy and of New Eng-
land present rather detailed accounts of methods and pro-
cedures.

What is the general dialectal situation in American
English? Dialects in American English are less sharply set
off from each other than those in British English or in any

of the better known languages of Western Europe. With few
exceptions, an American from one region can understand one
from another region without difficulty. The more recently a
part of the country has been settled, the less sharp are the
dialect differences; in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast
states there are no differences as great as those between
Boston, New York, and Albany.

Second, there is no single regional variety of speech
that has established itself as prestigious, and therefore to
be imitated more than all others. In Italy the educated
speech of Florence has been preferred since the fourteenth
century; in France, the Francian of Paris; in England, the
upper-class speech of London, now half embalmed in the guise
of Received Pronunciation (RP). But in the United States
the educated speech of Boston, New York, Atlanta, Chicago,
San Francisco or Seattle stands on a par with that of Rich-
mond or Charleston or St. Louis or any other cultural center.
The time is largely past when a teacher attempts to impose
on his students a dialect from another region.

Third, there is extreme mobility, both regional and
social, epitomized by the fact that the great-grandson of an
Irish common laborer was our last president, and was succeeded
by the son of a southern marginal farmer. The son of an Ital-
ian immigrant has been secretary of Health, Education and
Welfare, and the rolls of Congress are studded with those
whose ancestors were the humblest of people, who rose by
their own merits. And the records of internal migration are
at least as complex, as any linguistic geographer can tell
us. The movements of Daniel Boone from Virginia to North
Carolina to Kentucky and finally to Missouri typify the
search of Americans for new frontiers, physical or economic.
The migrations of children of servicemen or Methodist minis-
ters have always been proverbial; today the children of

corporation executives and junior executives are also likely
to change schools every few years. And teachers themselves,
from all over the nation, are drawn westward by California
gold, or to the large metropolitan areas by higher salaries
and pensions and better working conditions. The typical kin-
dergarten or first grade classroom today is likely to show a
wide range of regional or social dialects, or both.

How does the dialectal situation affect the teacher of
reading? This dialectal situation means that the teacher
must accept a multi-valued conception of standard English,
with a consequent variety of phonemic-graphemic associations.
He must also be ready to face the problem of introducing to
reading materials in the standard language children for whom
standard English is an alien idiom and the dominant culture
an unknown culture.

How much do we know about various kinds of dialect dif-
ferences? Fortunately, we have at our disposal a large body
of evidence on regional and social differences within Ameri-
can English. Such broad-gauge studies as the Linguistic Atlas
project are largely unpublished as yet, but several signifi-
cant derivative books and monographs and a spate of articles
have appeared. Other more specialized studies, such as
C.K. Thomas's investigations of the low-back vowels before
/-r-/, have given valuable information on particular problems.
Several specific communities have been investigated, with
emphasis on social differences in dialect; especially notable
is the study of New York's Lower East Side by William Labov,
and that of Metropolitan Chicago by Lee Pederson. Viewed in
terms of linguistic phenomena, we have the following kinds
of information:

1. A delineation of most of the significant dialect
areas east of the Mississippi, and of those in several states
farther westward.

2. As far as segmental phonemes are concerned, rather
detailed information on differences in the phonemic systems
of these dialects, on the incidence of the phonemes in par-
ticular words, and on the phonetic qualities of the phonemes.

3. Rather good sampling of variations in verb forms;
less adequate sampling of other matters of inflection and of
most matters of syntax.

4. Rather detailed information on representative selec-
tions of the folk vocabulary of older America, particularly
of the folk vocabulary of rural areas; less adequate infor-
mation about regional and social differences in the lexicon
of more recent aspects of culture, especially of the charac-
teristic vocabulary of urban areas. Enough information, in
any case, to permit tentative generalizations about the
regional differences in culture, somewhat more accurate than
the impressionistic feelings we all have. Certainly enough
to realize the complexity of urban culture, where chitter-
lings and bagels may be sold in the same store, and the
daughter of two white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (wasps, famil-
iarly) may come home from kindergarten talking of dreidels.

5. Very little about regional or social variation in
the suprasegmentals: stress, intonation, transitions, and
terminals. Almost all the evidence on such variations is to
be found in nontechnical observations, such as Mencken's
summary of the intonation patterns of English in the Pennsyl-
vania German areas. Exceptions to this generality are a few
pages in Pike's Intonation of American English (1942) and
such incidental comments that in such words as nonsense
Sledd and I, like many Middle Westerners, have the sequence
$/´ + ^/$, but the phonetic qualities of our stress phonemes
are such that to Middle Westerners like Joos we seem to be
saying $/´ \mid ´/$. The whole range of regional and social
variation in these complex phenomena needs detailed investi-
gation.

The same observation can be made about the dialectology
of paralanguage and kinesics; again, as with the dialectology
of the suprasegmentals, there has been no systematic research,
but a number of shrewd intuitive guesses. For these fields,
as with the suprasegmentals, we can all concede that the
phenomena have only recently been considered systematically
structured as a part of human communication, so that the
techniques of dialectal investigation would take some time
to develop. However, our objective appreciation of the delay
in no way mitigates the urgency of the investigation, nor
lessens our appreciation of such pioneering work as has been
conducted by Basil Bernstein at the University of London or
by Rufus Baehr at the University of Chicago, limited as their
conclusions may be.

6. Again, there is little systematic evidence available
about regional and social differences in children's speech,
or differences in the speech of equivalent social groups in
the same region but residing in cities, suburbs, small towns,
and rural communities. This in no way detracts from the value
of Miss Strickland's magnificent study, or of the Loban study
at California, or of the work just beginning on the Chicago
South Side. It simply recognizes the need to learn far more
than we have yet learned.

How do these differences affect the teacher of reading?
The implications of this current state of our knowledge of
American dialects for the practical work of teaching reading
will demand the cooperation of several kinds of scholars and
the devotion of skilled teachers. What follows represents
the thinking of one person who feels that it is important to
put the resources of dialectology, regional and social, at
the service of society, and who is willing both to offer his
mite and to listen to suggestions as to how that mite can be
most profitably invested. Some observations follow.

Whatever the disadvantages of our current system of
writing down English, we are not likely to find a better one
generally adopted. We must assume that students in our
schools are going to have to use the conventional English
alphabet when they read. While we should not discourage the
experimental use of such devices as the Pitman Augmented
Alphabet, we must remember that they are strictly interim
devices, and their use must allow for a systematic phasing
out, and the mastering of the conventional system. Further-
more, any such interim device must be tested in terms of its
adequacy in representing the units of the sound system that
contrast in the various standard dialects of American English.

The regional differences in children's speech are prob-
ably diminishing, though undoubtedly there are differences in
experience that might be considered in any program. On the
other side of the coin, however, television now brings a wide
assortment of vicarious experiences to most children in most
areas; one might think in terms of a reading program that
would enable the children to investigate more widely on their
own the worlds of Robin Hood, the cowboys, the spacemen—or
the wide range of materials offered by Garfield Goose—when
the television is being repaired or repossessed.

Social differences present a more complicated problem.
Under the older demographic pattern, most phonological and
lexical details were shared throughout a community, and the
social differences were largely matters of grammar—differences
in particular morphological or syntactic features (e.g., _seed_
vs. _saw_, _all to once_ vs. _all at once_). It was assumed that
newer immigrant groups would have peculiarities of speech,
but that assimilation to the normal patterns of their com-
munities would gradually take place; and by and large this
expectation has been fulfilled, as one may observe from
listening to any presidential news conference. However, in

recent years the prevailing pattern in American cities has
been altered to something once restricted to the rural areas
of the Southeast, and what had been the ideal of a human-
istically oriented plantation culture modeling itself on its
interpretations of the classical societies is now fulfilled
as the nightmare of a technologically determined urban and
suburban civilization, where a high degree of literacy is
essential for any true participation in the benefits of
society. The mudsill of happy slaves on which Southern apolo-
gists erected their myth of an Aristotelian-ordered society
has now become a frustrated and properly resentful, low
skilled and often unemployable proletariat, potentially
threatening the stability of urban society. Set off by skin
color, by ignorance of the values of the dominant culture,
and by a dialectal cleavage which contrasts the pronunciation,
grammar, and vocabulary of southeastern folk-speech and North
Central common and cultivated speech, they find integrated
schools, fair employment, and open occupancy a cruel mockery,
as working-class whites, themselves anthropologically un-
sophisticated, join the sauve qui peut in search of a subur-
ban haven.

The usual teacher, compulsively in pursuit of middle-
class norms, has no conception of the environment of depri-
vation, exploitation, frustration, and violence in which the
lower-class urban Negroes live. The normal curiosity of
children about the world is inhibited by properly fearful
parents; absence of mothers means the lack of anyone for the
children to talk to; books are nonexistent; and in a caco-
phonous world the television—potentially a powerful instru-
ment for acculturation—becomes just another source of back-
ground noise.

The educational advancement of this new urban group—
which means basically the improvement of their ability to

read—constitutes the greatest challenge to American educa-
tion. It is likely that teaching some form of standard Eng-
lish as a second language will be necessary; and it might be
easier to start this second language in the kindergartens or
earlier, and use this as the vehicle of reading, and hence
of introduction to the values of the dominant culture.

Paralanguage and kinesics are largely cued into reading
materials by lexical devices, e.g., such verbs as <u>sauntered</u>,
<u>gesticulated</u>, <u>simpered</u>, and <u>whined</u>. Some of this comes into
oral reading in the early grades; relating to it is important
for silent reading in the advanced grades and in college, to
say nothing of later life. Whether these cues can be grasped
informally—as is the usual procedure today—or should be
formally indicated is something that needs exploration.
Where regional and social differences occur, some accounting
may be necessary, but we need to discover those differences
first.

Suprasegmentals, like segmentals, are not adequately
represented by the conventional writing system, but have been
conventionalized over some four centuries by generations of
editors and printers. Where regional and social differences
occur—especially in the same classroom—so that the same
gross phonetics may signal different meanings or different
gross phonetics signal the same meaning, one may hope that
the future teachers will be sophisticated enough to recognize
what is going on and to explain the differences to the student
(and one is unrealistic if he thinks that children in the
early grades cannot detect such differences and wonder about
them). In most cases, it is unlikely that there will be
serious differences in the positions of the terminals (Trager
and Smith's single-bar, double-bar, double-cross), and there
seems to be no reason for failing to order line-breaks in
elementary reading materials according to the positions of

the terminals. (This, I am told by some experienced teachers
of reading, is frowned upon, as interfering with the develop-
ment of a wide eye-span; but what profiteth a man to span
whole lines at a glance and miss the structural cues to mean-
ing? It would seem that there is really no basic conflict,
but only a question of ordering materials.)

The problems of general differences in the regional and
social vocabularies have been approached in the analysis of
the potential regional and social differences in children's
speech. But there will always be a problem of relating
visual signal and speech signal in words that are associated
primarily with either the spoken or the written side of the
language. A legendary episode in my childhood concerns a
time in 1914 when I brought in the evening paper and remarked
from the headline "/jépən/ (Japan) enters the war" (less
heinous in my community perhaps than elsewhere, since a local
tobacconist was named Gapen /gépən/). And I still recall my
first attempts to render negotiations and cooperate (respec-
tively /nígətèšənz/ and /kúpərèt/, or a rather good second-
grader's /vɛləkəsi/ and /mæŋgi/ for velocity and mangy. Con-
versely, familiar childhood words like fice or rinktums or
larrows (to pull a few out of my own recollection) may lack
an established orthographic form altogether. Because a dia-
lect is associated with some kind of subculture, there may
be differences in the most feasible words to introduce in a
given set of reading materials.

In the early grades, it would seem that the grammatical
problems, generally social rather than regional, can be
handled as matters of selection, careful allocation to con-
text, and pattern drill. The forms saw and seen are both a
part of the language experience of every American child; the
problem is to make sure that he regularly selects the forms
I saw and I have seen. This of course may be related to the

problem of teaching the standard usage as a second language,
and of associating all reading materials with this usage.
Problems like associating the /-s, -z, -əz/ allomorphs with
the third singular present indicative, where the home dialect
has /∅/, must certainly be handled in this fashion.

Perhaps the most important—and certainly the most
clearly systematized—impact of dialectology on the teaching
of reading will come in the area of phonemic-graphemic asso-
ciations in the segmentals. (Several scholars, notably
Charles F. Hockett of Cornell, are investigating the relative
frequency of certain kinds of phonemic-graphic associations.)

There are two problems to be considered: (1) structural
differences, presence or absence of such contrasts as do/dew,
cot/caught, morning/mourning, have/halve; (2) differences in
the incidence of phonemes, as found in the variant pronunci-
ations of coop, on, fog. These must be related to the neces-
sity of introducing at the earliest possible moment such forms
as a, the, and the like, the desirability of proceeding from
grosser to finer graphic distinctions, and the distribution
of the learning load so that too many sound-symbol associations
are not thrust upon the student at once. (Leonard Bloomfield,
C.C. Fries, and other linguists have recognized the importance
of getting into the program, as early as possible, the high-
frequency function words.) And somehow, not too late, the
student must be conditioned to the morphographic side of the
English orthographical system, so that he can associate history
and historical and so on.

A complex dialectal problem develops when there is another
language in use at home, whether Acadian French, Milwaukee
German, Yiddish, or Puerto Rican Spanish. This is often fur-
ther complicated when the students or the parents first en-
counter English as a nonstandard type. However, these are
best treated here as differences in degree and not in kind.

A student of dialectology is not, _per se_, an authority
on all problems of reading, or necessarily on any of them.
His role is, rather, that of a consultant, to collaborate
with the others involved in this most important problem in
American education—to be a devil's advocate if necessary—
by attempting to anticipate some of the problems teachers
and students may have in using materials in a different cul-
tural situation from that for which they were originally
designed.

NOTES

1. Humorous anecdotes can be documented from such sources
    as, for example, Mayor Collins of Boston who, on meeting
    the aristocratic Senator Hoare at a social gathering,
    asked, "And how is Mrs. W.?"

DIALECT BARRIERS TO READING COMPREHENSION

by Kenneth S. Goodman

The task of learning to read is not an easy one. But it's a
lot easier to learn to read one's mother tongue than to learn
to read a foreign language, one which the learner does not
speak. Actually each of us speaks a particular dialect of a
language. Each dialect is distinguished from all other dia-
lects by certain features as: some of its sounds, some of its
grammar, some of its vocabulary. The dialect which the child
learns in the intimacy of his own home is his mother tongue.
All physically normal children learn to speak a dialect.
Whatever happens to his language during his life, however
fluent and multilingual he may become, this native dialect
is his most deeply and permanently rooted means of communi-
cation.

Since it is true that learning to read a foreign lan-
guage is a more difficult task than learning to read a native
language, it must follow that it is harder for a child to
learn to read a dialect which is not his own than to learn
to read his own dialect.

This leads to an important hypothesis: <u>The more diver-</u>
<u>gence there is between the dialect of the learner and the</u>

. . . .

<u>dialect of learning, the more difficult will be the task of
learning to read</u>.

     This is a general hypothesis. It applies to all learners.
If the language of the reading materials or the language of
the teacher differs to any degree from the native speech of
the learners some reading difficulty will result. To some
extent also there is divergence between the immature speech
of the young learner and adult language norms in the speech
community. Children have mastered most but not all of the
sounds and syntax of adult speech. A further divergence re-
flects the fact that older members of any language community
are less influenced by language change than are the youth.
Thus the teacher may cling to language which is obsolescent
in form or meaning. Books particularly lag behind language
change since they freeze language at the date of composition.
Though this paper is mainly concerned with gross dialect dif-
ferences it must be remembered, then, that the reading pro-
blems discussed apply to some extent to all learners because
minor dialect differences are features of even homogeneous
speech communities.

The Divergent Speaker

     For purposes of discussion we'll call the child who
speaks a dialect different from that which the school, text,
or teacher treats as standard, <u>the divergent speaker</u>. Diver-
gence, of course, is relative and there is by no means agree-
ment on what standard American English is. Divergent is a
good term however, because it is neutral as a value term and
it is important, perhaps critical, in considering the problems
of the divergent speaker to avoid labeling his language as
bad, sloppy, or sub-standard. We need to keep clear that,
though some dialects may carry more social prestige than
others, they are not necessarily more effective in communi-
cation. Gleason has said, "It is a safe generalization to

say that all languages are approximately equally adequate
for the needs of the culture of which they are a part."
Dialects represent subcultures. Therefore it can similarly
be said that all dialects are equally adequate for the needs
of the subculture of which they are a part.

Every child brings to school, when he comes, five or six
years of language and of experience. His language is closely
intertwined with the culture of his community; it embodies
the cultural values and structures the way in which he may
perceive his world and communicate his reactions to others.

His language is so well learned and so deeply embossed
on his subconscious that little conscious effort is involved
for him in its use. It is as much a part of him as his skin.
Ironically, well-meaning adults, including teachers who would
never intentionally reject a child or any important character-
istic of a child, such as the clothes he wears or the color
of his skin, will immediately and emphatically reject his
language. This hurts him far more than other kinds of re-
jection because it endangers the means which he depends on
for communication and self-expression.

Things that other people say sound right or funny to a
child depending on whether they fit within the language norms
of his dialect. He has become exceedingly proficient in de-
tecting slight, subtle differences in speech sounds which are
significant in his dialect and he's learned to ignore other
differences in speech sounds that are not significant. He
uses rhythm and pitch patterns of his language with great
subtlety. He enjoys puns on language which employ very slight
variations in relative pitch and stress. By the time diver-
gent speakers are in the middle grades they have learned to
get pleasure from the fact that an in-group pun based on their
common divergent dialect is unfunny to an outsider like their
teacher who doesn't share the dialect.

All children develop vocabulary which falls generally
within the vocabulary pool of their speech community. Through
repeated experience common for their culture they have begun
to develop complex concepts and express them in their mother
tongue.

In every respect the process of language development of
the divergent speaker is exactly the same as that of the
standard speaker. His language when he enters school is just
as systematic, just as grammatical within the norms of his
dialect, just as much a part of him as any other child's is.
Most important, it is a vital link with those important to
him and to the world of men.

There are some differences between the problems of the
divergent speaker in an isolated rural community where a
single dialect is the common speech and has been for several
generations and the problems of the divergent speaker in the
center of one of our great cities. This latter child may
live in a virtual ghetto, but his friends and neighbors repre-
sent a variety of language backgrounds. Transplanted regional
dialects become social class dialects. As the city-dweller
grows older he comes into increasing contact with the general
culture and its language. In the home community the idio-
lects, the personal languages of individuals, will cluster
closely around a dialect prototype. But the dialects of urban
divergent speakers are much more varied and shade off from
distinct divergent dialects to standard speech. Variables
such as family origin, recency of migration, degree of iso-
lation from influences outside the subculture, attitudes
toward self, personal and parental goals are some of the fac-
tors which may determine idiolect.

Divergent Languages or Dialects

Language diversity among divergent speakers complicates
the task of understanding the literacy problems which they

have. The basic problems will be the same but the specific
form and degree will vary among individuals.

Teachers need to give careful consideration to the sep-
arate characteristics of several kinds of language divergence.
They need to first differentiate immature language from dia-
lect-based divergence. Language which is immature is always
in transition toward adult norms. Teachers need not worry
too much about immaturity in language since desired change
is virtually inevitable. On the other hand, whatever the
teacher does to speed this change is in the direction the
child is moving. He can confirm the teacher's advice in the
speech of his parents. But if the teacher "corrects" the
dialect-based divergent language, this is at cross purposes
with the direction of growth of the child. All his past and
present language experience contradicts what the teacher tells
him. School becomes a place where people talk funny and
teachers tell you things about your language that aren't true.

Another point that needs to be clarified is the differ-
ence between standard regional speech and some imaginary
national standard which is correct everywhere and always.
No dialect of American English ever has achieved this status;
instead we have a series of standard regional dialects, the
speech of the cultured people in each area.

It's obvious that a teacher in Atlanta, Georgia, is
foolish to try to get her children to speak like cultured
people in Detroit or Chicago, just as it's foolish for any
teacher to impose universal standard pronunciations which
are not even present in the teacher's own speech. I'm re-
ferring to such hypocrisies as insisting that u before e
must always say its own name and therefore Tuesday is
/tyuzdey/. Cultured speech, socially preferred, is not the
same in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Miami, Baltimore,
Atlanta, or Chicago. The problem, if any, comes when the

Bostonian moves to Chicago, the New Yorker to Los Angeles,
the Atlantan to Detroit. Americans are ethnocentric in re-
gard to most cultural traits but they are doubly so with
regard to language. Anybody who doesn't speak the way I do
is wrong. A green onion is not a scallion. I live in Detróit
not Détroit. I can carry my books to work but not my friends.
Fear ends with an r and Cuba does not. Such ethnocentrisms
are unfortunate among the general public. They may be tragic
among educators. Too often we send children off to speech
correction classes not because their speech needs correction
but because it isn't like ours. Pity the poor child who finds
himself transplanted to a new and strange environment and then
must handle the additional complication of learning to talk
all over again. And, of course, if the child is a migrant
from the rural South to the urban North, his speech marks him
not only as different but socially inferior. He is told not
just that he is wrong but sloppy, careless, vulgar, crude.
His best defense is to be silent.

In his classroom the divergent speaker finds several
kinds of language being used. First is the language or bundle
of idiolects within dialects which he and his classmates bring
with them as individuals. Represented in their language or
dialect is the language or dialect of their parents and their
speech community. Next there is the language of the teacher
which will exist in at least two forms. There will be the
teacher's informal, unguarded idiolect and his version of cor-
rect standard speech; the way he says things off guard; the
way he strives to speak as a cultivated person. Another ver-
sion of the standard language will be the literary form or
forms the child encounters in books. To this we must add the
artificial language of the basal reader. Artificial language
is not used by anyone in any communicative situation. Some
primerese is artificial to the point of being non-language,
not even a divergent one.

The Consensus of Language and the Uniformity of Print

Two things are in the divergent child's favor. First,
all speakers have a range of comprehension which extends
beyond the limits of their own dialect. All of us can under-
stand speech which differs from our own, particularly if we
are in frequent contact with such speech. As they grow older,
urban children are in increasing contact with a number of
dialects other than their own. Secondly, the English ortho-
graphy has one great virtue in its uniformity across dialects.
No matter how words are pronounced, printers across the coun-
try usually spell them the same. Though we get some mavericks
like guilty and judgment, we spell pumpkin the same whether
we say pəŋkin or pəmpkən and something the same whether we
say səmpthin or səmpm. This standardization of print for a
multidialectal speech suggests that part of the problem of
learning to read for divergent speakers could be eliminated
if teachers let children read in their own dialects and if
teachers got rid of the misconception that spelling determines
pronunciation. One child asked his teacher how to spell
/ræt/. "R-a-t," she said. "No, ma'am," he responded, "I
don't mean rat mouse, I mean right now."

Points of Divergence Among Dialects

Now if we examine the areas in which dialects differ we
can perhaps shed some light on the barriers divergent readers
face. Let us start with sound.

SOUND DIVERGENCE

Intonation

Dialects differ in intonation. Perhaps what makes an
unfamiliar dialect most difficult to understand is its un-
expected pitch, stress, and rhythm. Teachers often complain
when they first begin to work with divergent speakers that
they can't understand a word. But after a short time they
seem to tune in on the right frequency. They catch on to the

melody of the dialect. Since intonation is essential in
understanding oral language, it is logical to assume that it
must be supplied mentally by readers as they read in order
for comprehension to take place. How much comprehension is
interfered with if the teacher insists on intonation patterns
in oral reading which are unnatural to the divergent reader
can only be conjectured at this time. But there is no doubt
that this is a source of difficulty to some extent.

Phonemes

Phonemes are the significant units of speech sounds
which are the symbols of oral language. All American dialects
share more or less a common pool of phonemes. But not all
dialects use all these phonemes in all the wame ways. They
pattern differently in different dialects. Since phonemes
are really bundles of related sounds rather than single
sounds, it is likely that the range of sounds that compose a
particular phoneme will vary among dialects. Vowel phonemes
are particularly likely to vary. Even within dialects there
are some variations. Good examples are words ending in -og,
such as /dog/, /fog/, /frog/, /log/; or are they /dɔg/, /fɔg/,
/frɔg/, /lɔg/? In my own idiolect I find I say /frɔg/, /fɔg/,
/dɔg/, /lɔg/, but I also say /cag/, /bag/, /smag/.

Obviously, phonics programs which attempt to teach a
relationship between letters and sounds cannot be universally
applicable to all dialects. The basic premise of phonics
instruction is that by teaching a child to associate the
sounds which he hears in oral language with the letters in
written language he will be able to sound out words. But a
divergent speaker can't hear the sounds of standard speech
in his nonstandard dialect because he does not have them or
because they occur in different places in his dialect than
other dialects. The instruction may be not only inappro-
priate but confusing. When he reads the lesson he may then

be forced to sound out words which are not words in his dia-
lect. To illustrate: Take a child who normally says /də/
rather than /ðə/ and /nəfin/ rather than /nəθin/. Teaching
him that the digraph <th> represents the first sound in the
and the medial consonant in nothing makes him pronounce words
not in his dialect and throws a barrier across his progress
in associating sound and print.

New Reading Materials and Sound Divergence Among Dialects

Recent attempts at producing beginning reading materials
which have regular one-to-one correspondence between letters
and phonemes will not solve this problem and may actually
compound it since there will be a tendency for teachers to
assume that the matched correspondence of sound and letter
is to be uniform throughout the reading materials. For
example, they might assume frog and log to have the same
vowel sound and so teach the sounds to be the same when a
student might well use /a/ as in father in one and /ɔ/ as in
caught in the other. The matched phonemic-graphemic books
assume that there is a uniform spoken set of sounds that can
by ingenuity and counting of data be inscribed with a uniform
written alphabet. This is not true, when the spoken language
is viewed as a national-international phenomenon or when it
is viewed as a local phenomenon in a heterogeneous cultural
country as one of our urban centers.

Transcription of the sound language in ITA faces the
same problems. It has a wider alphabet and can therefore
transcribe more literary and sensible English than the limited
lexicon of the American linguistic readers. The British ITA
materials, however, cannot be read literally except with the
"received pronunciation" of the BBC. When as an American I
read about "levers" in an ITA book I must say /liyvərz/.
The principle that spelling is the same across dialects is
sacrificed and ITA spelling requires pronunciation narrowed

to one special class dialect. Teachers using these materials
need to make some adjustments for the dialects used by them-
selves and their students. There may be, no doubt is, a
spoken language in common but it is not so uniform as is the
common spelling system.

Another place where sound divergence among dialects af-
fects the handling of reading materials is the traditional
sets of homophones. Homophones, words that sound alike, will
vary from dialect to dialect. Been and bin are homophones in
my speech. In another dialect been would sound the same as
bean and in still another Ben and been would be sounded alike.
Bidialectal students may bring up new sets of homophones.
One teacher asked her class to use so in a sentence. "I don't
mean sew a dress", she said. "I mean the other so." "I got
a so on my leg", responded one of her pupils.

GRAMMAR DIVERGENCE

The Suffix

Inflectional changes in words involve using suffixes or
internal changes in words to change case or tense. In cer-
tain dialects of American English speakers say He see me
rather than He sees me. They are not leaving off an s.
There isn't any in their dialect. Similarly, plurals may
not use an s form. I got three brother, is common in Ap-
palachian speech. One teacher reported to me that her pupils
could differentiate between crayon and crayons as written
words and respond to the difference by selecting plural and
singular illustrations, but they read the words the same,
one crayon, two /kræyən/. The problem is not an inability
to see or say the s. It doesn't seem to belong in the pro-
nunciation of crayons. The inflectional ending s to indicate
plural is not in the grammar of this dialect.

Most Americans will add /əz/ to form plurals of words

ending in /s/ /z/ /š/ /ǰ/ /č/ as in busses, mazes, washes,
colleges, churches, but in the Blue Ridge Mountains this end-
ing also goes with words ending in /sp/, /st/, /sk/ as in
/waspəz/ /pohstəz/ /tæskəz/ (H.A. Gleason, An Introduction
to Descriptive Linguistics, New York: Holt, Rinehart and
Winston, p. 62). This kind of difference will be reflected
in the child's reading. The differences are systematic within
the child's dialect. In terms cf the school and teacher they
may be divergent, or as we say, incorrect, but in terms of the
reader and his speech community they are convergent, that is,
correct.

No only suffixes vary, but also verb forms and verb
auxiliaries. When a child says, "I here, teacher", as the
teacher calls the roll, he is not being incomplete. No link-
ing verb is needed in this type of utterance in his dialect.
There is a difference in the syntax of his dialect and other
American English dialects. Fortunately such differences are
minor in American English. One area of difference seems to
be the use of verb forms and verb markers. We was going,
They done it, We come home, all are examples of this phe-
nomenon.

Vocabulary Divergence

An area of dialect divergence that people are most aware
of is vocabulary. Most people are aware that gym shoes in
Detroit are sneakers in New York, that in Chicago you may
throw but in Little Rock you chunk, that a Minnesota lake
would be a pond in New Hampshire. Perhaps there is less
awareness of words which have similar but not identical
meanings in different dialects. All words have a range of
meaning rather than a single meaning. This range may shift
from place to place. The meaning of carry may be basically
the same in two dialects but some uses will be correct in
one dialect but not in the other.

Vocabulary differences among dialects may cause reading difficulty and must be compensated for by the teacher who uses texts printed for a national market.

I've dealt primarily here with the barriers to learning how to read that result when the readers have divergent languages. There are of course other important problems which grow out of the differences in experience, values, and general subculture of the divergent learners. Readers can't comprehend materials which are based on experience and concepts outside their background and beyond their present development.

The Reading Program for Divergent Speakers

Let's address ourselves to a final question. What is currently happening as the divergent speaker learns to read? I've found that divergent speakers have a surprising tendency to read in book dialect. In their oral reading they tend to use phonemes that are not the ones they use in oral language. Their reading often sounds even more wooden and unnatural than most beginners. There is some tendency to read their own dialect as they gain proficiency, but in general it appears that teachers are more successful in teaching preferred pronunciations than reading. What is lacking is the vital link between written and oral language that will make it possible for children to bring their power over the oral language to bear on comprehending written language.

There seem to be three basic alternatives that schools may take in literacy programs for divergent speakers. First is to write materials for them that are based on their own dialect, or rewrite standard materials in their dialect. A second alternative is to teach the children to speak the standard dialect before teaching them to read in the standard dialect. The third alternative is to let the children read the standard materials in their own dialect, that is, to accept the language of the learners and make it their

medium of learning. The first alternative seems to be im-
practical on several counts. Primarily the opposition of the
parents and the leaders in the speech community must be reck-
oned with. They would reject the use of special materials
which are based on a non-prestigious dialect. They usually
share the view of the general culture that their speech is
not the speech of cultivation and literature. They want
their children to move into the general culture though they
are not sure how this can be brought about.

The second alternative is impractical on pedagogical
grounds in that the time required to teach children who are
not academically oriented to another dialect of the language,
which they feel no need to learn, would postpone the teaching
of reading too long. Many would never be ready to learn to
read if readiness depended on losing their speech divergence
in the classroom. The problem is not simply one of teaching
children a new dialect. Children, the divergent among them,
certainly have facility in language learning. The problem
involves the extinction of their existing dialect, one which
receives continuous reinforcement in basic communications out-
side of the classroom. Labov's research in New York indicates
that divergent speakers do not seem to make a conscious ef-
fort to use language forms which they recognize as socially
preferred until adolescence. Younger children may hear dif-
ferences but lack the insight to realize which forms are
socially preferred. Of course, teenagers may deliberately
avoid preferred forms, too, as they reject adult ways and
adult values.

In essence the child who is made to accept another dia-
lect for learning must accept the view that his own language
is inferior. In a very real sense, since this is the language
of his parents, his family, his community, he must reject his
own culture and himself, as he is, in order to become something

else. This is perhaps too much to ask of any child. Even
those who succeed may carry permanent scars. The school may
force many to make the choice between self-respect and school
acceptance. And all this must be accomplished on the faith
of the learner that by changing his language he will do him-
self some good. As one teenager remarked to me, "Ya man, alls
I gotta do is walk right and talk right and they gonna make
me president of the United States."

The only practical alternative I feel is the third one.
It depends on acceptance by the school and particularly by
the teacher of the language which the learner brings to
school. Here are some key aspects of this approach:

1. Literacy is built on the base of the child's existing
    language.
2. This base must be a solid one. Children must be helped
    to develop a pride in their language and confidence in
    their ability to use their language to communicate their
    ideas and express themselves.
3. In reading instruction, the focus must be on learning to
    read. No attempt to change the child's language must be
    permitted to enter into this process or interfere with it.
4. No special materials need to be constructed but children
    must be permitted, actually encouraged, to read the way
    they speak. Experience stories must basically be in their
    language.
5. Any skill instruction must be based on a careful analysis
    of their language.
6. Reading materials and reading instruction should draw as
    much as possible on experiences and settings appropriate
    to the children. While special dialect-based materials
    are impractical, we may nonetheless need to abandon our
    notion of universally usable reading texts and use a

variety of materials selected for suitability for the
particular group of learners.

7. The teacher will speak in his own natural manner and pre-
sent by example the general language community, but the
teacher must learn to understand and accept the children's
language. He must study it carefully and become aware of
the key elements of divergence that are likely to cause
difficulty. Langston Hughes has suggested an apt motto
for the teacher of divergent speakers: "My motto as I
live and learn, is dig, and be dug in return."

My own conviction is that even after literacy has been
achieved future language change cannot come about through the
extinction of the native dialect and the substitution of
another. I believe that language growth must be a growth out-
ward from the native dialect, an expansion which eventually
will encompass the socially preferred forms but retain its
roots. The child can expand his language as he expands his
outlook, not rejecting his own sub-culture but coming to see
it in its broader setting. Eventually he can achieve the
flexibility of language which makes it possible for him to
communicate easily in many diverse settings and on many levels.

I'd like to close with a plea. You don't have to accept
what I've said. I don't ask that you believe or that you
agree with my point of view. My plea is that you listen to
the language of the divergent. Listen carefully and objec-
tively. Push your preconceptions and your own ethnocentrisms
aside and listen. I think that you'll find beauty and form
and a solid base for understanding and communication. And as
you dig you'll find that you are indeed dug in return.

SOME SOURCES OF READING PROBLEMS FOR NEGRO SPEAKERS OF NONSTANDARD ENGLISH

by William Labov

It seems natural to look at any educational problem in terms
of the particular type of ignorance which is to be overcome.
In this discussion, we will be concerned with two opposing
and complementary types:

> ignorance of standard English rules on the part of
> speakers of nonstandard English

> ignorance of nonstandard English rules on the part
> of teachers and text writers

In other words, the fundamental situation that we face is one
of reciprocal ignorance, where teacher and student are igno-
rant of each other's system, and therefore of the rules needed
to translate from one system to another.

The consequences of this situation may be outlined in
the following way. When the teacher attempts to overcome the
first kind of ignorance by precept and example in the class-
room, she discovers that the student shows a strong and

. . . .

inexplicable resistance to learning the few simple rules that
he needs to know. He is told over and over again, from the
early grades to the twelfth, that -ed is required for the
past participle ending, but he continues to write:

I have live here twelve years.

and he continues to mix up past and present tense forms in
his reading. In our present series of interviews with Harlem
youngsters from ten to sixteen years old, we ask them to cor-
rect to classroom English such sentences as the following:[1]

He pick me.
He don't know nobody.
He never play no more, man.
The man from U.N.C.L.E. hate the guys from Thrush.

Words such as man and guys are frequently corrected, and
ain't receives a certain amount of attention. But the double
negative is seldom noticed, and the absence of the grammatical
signals -s and -ed is rarely detected by children in the fifth,
sixth, or seventh grades. There can be little doubt that their
ignorance of these few fundamental points of English inflection
is connected with the fact that most of them have difficulty
in reading sentences at the second grade level.

There are many reasons for the persistence of this ig-
norance. Here I will be concerned with the role played by
the second type of ignorance: the fact that the child's teach-
er has no systematic knowledge of the nonstandard forms which
oppose and contradict standard English. Some teachers are
reluctant to believe that there are systematic principles in
nonstandard English which differ from those of standard Eng-
lish. They look upon every deviation from schoolroom English
as inherently evil, and they attribute these mistakes to
laziness, sloppiness, or the child's natural disposition to
be wrong. For these teachers, there is no substantial dif-
ference in the teaching of reading and the teaching of geog-
raphy. The child is simply ignorant of geography; he does

not have a well-formed system of nonstandard geography to be
analyzed and corrected. From this point of view, teaching
English is a question of imposing rules upon chaotic and
shapeless speech, filling a vacuum by supplying rules where
no rules existed before.

Other teachers are sincerely interested in understanding
the language of the children, but their knowledge is fragmen-
tary and ineffective. They feel that the great difficulties
in teaching Negro and Puerto Rican children to read are due
in part to the systematic contradictions between the rules
of language used by the child and the rules used by the
teacher. The contribution which I hope to make here is to
supply a systematic basis for the study of nonstandard Eng-
lish of Negro and Puerto Rican children, and some factual
information, so that educators and text writers can design
their teaching efforts with these other systems in mind.

Priority of Problems

Within the school curriculum, there seems to be an order
of priority of educational problems that we face in large
urban centers. Many skills have to be acquired before we
can say that a person has learned standard English.[2] The
following list is a scale of priority that I would suggest
as helpful in concentrating our attention on the most im-
portant problems:

a. Ability to understand spoken English (of the teacher).
b. Ability to read and comprehend.
c. Ability to communicate (to the teacher) in spoken
    English.
d. Ability to communicate in writing.
e. Ability to write in standard English grammar.
f. Ability to spell correctly.
g. Ability to use standard English grammar in speaking.
h. Ability to speak with a prestige pattern of pro-
    nunciation (and avoid stigmatized forms).

I would revise this list if it appeared that the teacher could
not understand literally the speech or writing of the child;

weaknesses in c or d could conceivably interfere with the
solution to b. But considering all possibilities, this list
would be my best estimate, as a relative outsider to the
field of elementary education; it is of course subject to
correction by educators.

In dealing with children from English-speaking homes,
we usually assume a. In the extreme cases where the child
cannot understand the literal meaning of the teacher, we
have to revise our approach to teach this ability first.
For the most part, however, we take the first academic
task of the child to be b, developing the ability to read
and comprehend. Certainly reading is first and most urgent
in terms of its effect on the rest of learning, and it is
most seriously compromised in the schools of the ghetto
areas in large Northern cities. The problem of reading is
so striking today that it offers a serious intellectual
challenge as well as a pressing social problem. One must
understand why so many children are not learning to read,
or give up any claim to understand the educational process
as a whole.

Structural vs. Functional Conflicts

We have dealt so far with a series of abilities. Ob-
viously the desire to learn is in some way prior to the act
of learning. Our own current research for the Office of
Education is concerned with two aspects of the problem:[3]

(a) Structural conflicts of standard and nonstandard
English: interference with learning ability stem-
ming from a mismatch of linguistic structures.

(b) Functional conflicts of standard and nonstandard
English: interference with the desire to learn
standard English stemming from a mismatch in the
functions which standard and nonstandard English
perform in a given culture.

In the discussion that follows, we will be concerned only
with the first type of conflict.

We should also consider whose speech, and whose learning problems, must be analyzed. Here again there is an order of priority, based on the numbers of people involved, the extent of neglect, and the degree of structural differences involved. In these terms, the educational problems of the Negro children in large cities must be considered most pressing; secondly, those of Puerto Rican and Mexican children from Spanish-speaking homes; and third, the problems of white youth from Appalachian backgrounds and other underprivileged areas.

Is there a Negro speech pattern? This question has provoked a great deal of discussion in the last few years, much more than it deserves. At many meetings on educational problems of ghetto areas, time which could have been spent in constructive discussion has been devoted to arguing the question as to whether Negro dialect exists. The debates have not been conducted with any large body of factual information in view, but rather in terms of what the speakers wish to be so, or what they fear might follow in the political arena.

For those who have not participated in such debates, it may be difficult to imagine how great are the pressures against the recognition, description, or even mention of Negro speech patterns.[4] For various reasons, many teachers, principals, and civil rights leaders wish to deny that the existence of patterns of Negro speech is a linguistic and social reality in the United States today. The most careful statement of the situation as it actually exists might read as follows: Many features of pronunciation, grammar, and lexicon are closely associated with Negro speakers—so closely as to identify the great majority of Negro people in the Northern cities by their speech alone.

The match between this speech pattern and membership in the Negro ethnic group is of course far from complete. Many Negro speakers have none—or almost none—of these features.

Many Northern whites, living in close proximity to Negroes,
have these features in their own speech. But this overlap
does not prevent the features from being identified with
Negro speech by most listeners: we are dealing with a stereo-
type which provides correct identification in the great major-
ity of cases, and therefore with a firm base in social reality.
Such stereotypes are the social basis of language perception;
this is merely one of many cases where listeners generalize
from the variable data to categorical perception in absolute
terms. Someone who uses a stigmatized form 20 to 30 percent
of the time will be heard as using this form all of the time.[5]
It may be socially useful to correct these stereotypes in a
certain number of individual cases, so that people learn to
limit their generalizations to the precise degree that their
experience warrants: but the overall tendency is based upon
very regular principles of human behavior, and people will
continue to identify as Negro speech the pattern which they
hear from the great majority of the Negro people that they
meet.

In the South, the overlap is much greater. There is
good reason to think that the positive features of the Negro
speech pattern all have their origin in dialects spoken by
both Negroes and whites in some parts of the South. Histor-
ically speaking, the Negro speech pattern that we are deal-
ing with in Northern cities is a regional speech pattern.
We might stop speaking of Negro speech, and begin using the
term "Southern regional speech", if that would make the
political and social situation more manageable. But if we
do so, we must not deceive ourselves and come to believe that
this is an accurate description of the current situation.
The following points cannot be overlooked in any such dis-
cussion:

   1. For most Northern whites, the only familiar example

of Southern speech is that of the Negro people they hear,
and these Southern features function as markers of Negro
ethnic membership, not Southern origin.

2. Many characteristic features of Southern speech have
been generalized along strictly ethnic lines in Northern
cities. For example, the absence of a distinction between
/i/ and /e/ before nasals [pin equal to pen] has become a
marker of the Negro group in New York City, so that most
young Negro children of Northern and Southern background
alike show this feature while no white children are affected.

3. In this merger of Northern and Southern patterns in
the Northern Negro communities, a great many Southern features
are being eliminated. Thus in New York and other Northern
cities, we find the young Negro people do not distinguish
four and for, which and witch; while monophthongization of
high and wide is common, the extreme fronting of the initial
vowel to the position of cat or near it, is less and less
frequent; the back upglide of ball and hawk, so characteris-
tic of many Southern areas, is rarely heard; grammatical
features such as the perfective auxiliary done in he done
told me, or the double modal of might could, are becoming
increasingly rare. As a result, a speaker fresh from the
South is plainly marked in the Northern Negro communities,
and his speech is ridiculed. Negro speech is thus not to be
identified with Southern regional speech. [Moreover, there
are a small but significant number of features of Negro
speech which are not shared by whites in the South, such as
the deletion of the reduced and contracted 's representing
forms of is to yield such sentences as He crazy.]

4. The white Southern speech which is heard in many
Northern cities—Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland—is the Southern
Mountain pattern of Appalachia, and this pattern does not
have many of the phonological and grammatical features of
Negro speech to be discussed below in this paper.

5. Many of the individual features of Negro speech can
be found in Northern white speech, as we will see, and even
more so in the speech of educated white Southerners. But the
frequency of these features, such as consonant cluster simpli-
fication, and their distribution in relation to grammatical
boundaries, is radically different in Negro speech, and we
are forced in many cases to infer the existence of different
underlying grammatical forms and rules.

We can sum up this discussion of the Southern regional
pattern by saying that we are witnessing the transformation
of a regional speech pattern into a class and ethnic pattern
in the Northern cities. This is not a new phenomenon; it
has occurred many times in the history of English. Accord-
ing to H. Kökeritz and H.C. Wyld, such a process was taking
place in Shakespeare's London, where regional dialects from
the east and southeast opposed more conservative dialects
within the city as middle class and lower class speech against
aristocratic speech.[6] We see the same process operating today
in the suburbs of New York City; where the Connecticut and
New Jersey patterns meet the New York City pattern, in the
overlapping areas, the New York City pattern becomes asso-
ciated with lower socioeconomic groups.[7]

The existence of a Negro speech pattern must not be con-
fused of course with the myth of a biologically, racially,
exclusively Negro speech. The idea that dialect differences
are due to some form of laziness or carelessness must be re-
jected with equal firmness. Anyone who continues to endorse
such myths can be refuted easily by such subjective reaction
tests as the Family Background test which we are using in our
current research in Harlem. Sizable extracts from the speech
of fourteen individuals are played in sequence for listeners
who are asked to identify the family backgrounds of each.[8]
So far, we find no one who can even come close to a correct

identification of Negro and white speakers. This result does
not contradict the statement that there exists a socially
based Negro speech pattern: it supports everything that I have
said above on this point. The voices heard on the test are
the exceptional cases: Negroes raised without any Negro
friends in solidly white areas; whites raised in areas domin-
ated by Negro cultural values; white Southerners in Gullah-
speaking territory; Negroes from small Northern communities
untouched by recent migrations; college educated Negroes who
reject the Northern ghetto and the South alike. The speech
of these individuals does not identify them as Negro or white
because they do not use the speech patterns which are char-
acteristically Negro or white for Northern listeners. The
identifications made by these listeners, often in violation
of actual ethnic membership categories, show that they res-
pond to Negro speech patterns as a social reality.

Relevant Patterns of Negro Speech

        One approach to the study of nonstandard Negro speech
is to attempt a complete description of this form of language
without direct reference to standard English. This approach
can be quite revealing, and can save us from many pitfalls
in the easy identification of forms that are only apparently
similar. But as an overall plan, it is not realistic. We
are far from achieving a complete description of standard
English, to begin with; the differences between nonstandard
Negro speech and standard English are slight compared to
their similarities; and finally, some of these differences
are far more relevant to reading problems than others. Let
us therefore consider some of the most relevant patterns of
Negro speech from the point of view of reading problems.

        Some Negro-white differences are plainly marked and
easy for any observer to note. In the following examples,
the Negro forms are patterns which frequently occur in our

recordings of individual and group sessions with boys from
10 to 17 years old—ranging from careful speech in face-to-
face interaction with adults to the most excited and spon-
taneous activity within the primary (closed network) group:[9]

Negro	White
It don't all be her fault.	It isn't always her fault.
Hit him upside the head.	Hit him in the head.
The rock say "Shhh!"	The rock went "Shhh!"
I'm a shoot you.	I'm g'na shoot you.
I wanna be a police.	I wanna be a policeman.
Ah 'on' know. [a o no]	I d'know. [aᴵdnoᵁ]

Now consider the following examples, in which Negro-white
differences are less plainly marked and very difficult for
most people to hear:

Negro	White
He [pæsɨm] yesterday.	He [pæsɖɨm] yesterday.
Give him [ðe⊦] book.	Give him [ðɛ⊥] book.
This [jɔːɤ] place?	This [jɔːᵊ] place?
[ðæs] Nick boy.	[ðæᵗs] Nick's boy.
He say, [kæːᵊl] is.	He says, [kærᵊl] is.
My name is [bu].	My name is [bu?].

This second series represents a set of slight phonetic dif-
ferences, sometimes prominent, but more often unnoticed by
the casual listener. These differences are much more signifi-
cant than the first set in terms of learning and reading stand-
ard English. In truth, the differences are so significant that
they will be the focus of attention in the balance of this
paper. The slight phonetic signals observed here indicate
systematic differences that can lead to reading problems and
problems of being understood.

Corresponding to the phonetic transcriptions on the left,
we can and do infer such grammatical constructions and lexi-
cal forms as:

He pass him yesterday.
Give him they book.
This you-all place?

That's Nick boy.
He say, Ca'ol is.
My name is Boo.

Each of these sentences is representative of a large class
of phonological and grammatical differences which mark non-
standard Negro speech as against standard English.   The most
important are those in which large scale phonological dif-
ferences coincide with important grammatical differences.
The result of this coincidence is the existence of a large
number of homonyms in the speech of Negro children which are
different from the set of homonyms in the speech system used
by the teacher. If the teacher knows about this different
set of homonyms, no serious problems in the teaching of read-
ing need occur; but if the teacher does not know, there are
bound to be difficulties.

The simplest way to organize this information seems to
be under the headings of the important rules of the sound
system which are affected. By using lists of homonyms as
examples, it will be possible to avoid a great deal of pho-
netic notation, and to stay with the essential linguistic
facts. In many cases, the actual phonetic form is irrele-
vant: it is the presence or absence of a distinction which
is relevant. Thus, for example, it makes no differences
whether a child says [pɪn] or [pɪən] or [peːən] or [pɛn] for
the word pen; what counts is whether or not this word is
distinct from pin. The linguistic fact of interest is the
existence of contrast, not the particular phonetic forms that
are heard from one moment to another. A child might seem to
distinguish [pɪn] and [pɛn] in Northern style in one pair of
sentences, but if the basic phonemic contrast is not present,
the same child might reverse the forms in the next sentence,
and say [pɪn] for ink pen and [pɛn] for safety pin. A lin-
guistic orientation will not supply teachers with a battery

of phonetic symbols, but rather encourage them to observe
what words can or cannot be distinguished by the children
they are teaching.

Some Phonological Variables and Their Grammatical Consequences

    1. r-lessness. There are three major dialect areas in
the Eastern United States where the r of spelling is not pro-
nounced as a consonant before other consonants or at the ends
of words: Eastern New England, New York City, and the South
(Upper and Lower). Thus speakers from Boston, New York,
Richmond, Charleston, or Atlanta will show only a lengthened
vowel in car, guard, for, etc., and usually an obscure center-
ing glide [schwa] in place of r in fear, feared, care, cared,
moor, moored, bore, bored, etc. This is what we mean by
r-less pronunciation. Most of these areas have been strongly
influenced in recent years by the r-pronouncing pattern which
is predominant in broadcasting, so that educated speakers,
especially young people, will show a mixed pattern in their
careful speech.[10] When the original r-less pattern is pre-
served, we can obtain such homonyms as the following:[11]

        guard = god   par = pa
        nor   = gnaw   fort = fought
        sore = saw   court = caught

and we find that yeah can rhyme with fair, idea with fear.

    Negro speakers show an even higher degree of r-lessness
than New Yorkers or Bostonians. The r of spelling becomes a
schwa or disappears before vowels as well as before consonants
or pauses. Thus in the speech of most white New Yorkers, r
is pronounced when a vowel follows in four o'clock; even
though the r is found at the end of a word, if the next word
begins with a vowel, it is pronounced as a consonantal [r].
For most Negro speakers, r is still not pronounced in this
position, and so never heard at the end of the word four.
The white speaker is helped in his reading or spelling by

the existence of the alternation: [fɔ:fi:t, fɔrəklak], but
the Negro speaker has no such clue to the underlying (spell-
ing) form of the word <u>four</u>. Furthermore, the same Negro
speaker will often not pronounce intervocalic <u>r</u> in the middle
of a word, as indicated in the dialect spelling <u>inte'ested</u>,
<u>Ca'ol</u>. He has no clue, in his own speech, to the correct
spelling form of such words, and may have another set of
homonyms besides those listed above:

> Carol   = Cal
>
> Paris   = pass
>
> terrace = test

2. <u>1-lessness</u>. The consonant <u>1</u> is a liquid very similar
to <u>r</u> in its phonetic nature. The chief difference is that
with <u>1</u> the center of the tongue is up, and the sides are down,
while with <u>r</u> the sides are up but the center does not touch
the roof of the mouth. The pattern of <u>1</u>-dropping is very
similar to that of <u>r</u>, except that it has never affected en-
tire dialect areas in the same sweeping style.[12] When <u>1</u>
disappears, it is often replaced by a back unrounded glide,
sometimes symbolized [ɤ], instead of the center glide that
replaces <u>r</u>; in many cases, <u>1</u> disappears entirely, especially
after the back rounded vowels. The loss of <u>1</u> is much more
marked among the Negro speakers we have interviewed than
among whites in Northern cities, and we therefore have much
greater tendencies towards such homonyms as:

> toll = toe   all   = awe
>
> help = hep   Saul = saw
>
> tool = too   fault = fought

3. <u>Simplification of consonant clusters</u>. One of the
most complex variables appearing in Negro speech is the gen-
eral tendency towards the simplification of consonant clusters
at the ends of words. A great many clusters are involved,
primarily those which end in /t/ or /d/, /s/ or /z/.[13] We are

actually dealing with two distinct tendencies: (1) a general
tendency to reduce clusters of consonants at the ends of
words to single consonants, and (2) a more general process
of reducing the amount of information provided after stressed
vowels, so that individual final consonants are affected as
well. The first process is the most regular and requires the
most intensive study in order to understand the conditioning
factors involved.

   The chief /t,d/ clusters that are affected are (roughly
in order of frequency) /-st, -ft, -nt, -nd, -ld, -zd, -md/.
Here they are given in phonemic notation; in conventional
spelling we have words such as past, passed, lift, laughed,
bent, bend, fined, hold, poled, old, called, raised, aimed.
In all these cases, if the cluster is simplified, it is the
last element that is dropped. Thus we have homonyms such as:

       past = pass   mend = men
       rift = riff   wind = wine
       meant = men   hold = hole

If we combine the effect of -ld simplification, loss of -l,
and monophthongization of /ay/ and /aw/, we obtain

       [šiwa:ɤ]   She wow! = She wild!

and this equivalence has in fact been found in our data. It
is important to bear in mind that the combined effect of sev-
eral rules will add to the total number of homonyms, and even
more, to the unexpected character of the final result:

       told = told = toe

   The first impression that we draw, from casual listening,
is that Negro speakers show much more consonant cluster simpli-
fication than white speakers. But this conclusion is far from
obvious when we examine the data carefully. Table 1 shows the
total simplification of consonant clusters for two speakers:
BF is a Negro working class man, 45 years old, raised in New
York City; AO is a white working class man, of Austrian-German

background, 56 years old, also raised in New York City but
with little contact with Negroes.

Table 1

Overall Simplification of /t,d/ Consonant Clusters
For One Negro and One White New York City Speaker

	BF (Negro)		AO (White)	
	Number Simplified	Total Clusters	Number Simplified	Total Clusters
/-st/	29	37	18	23
/-ft/	7	9	0	2
/-nt/	8	16	14	29
/-nd/	8	14	8	14
/-ld/	8	15	2	4
/-zd/	5	8	3	4
/-md/	2	3	0	1
other	4	4	1	4
Total	71	106	46	81

The overall percentage of simplification for BF is 67
percent, not very much more than AO, 57 percent. Further-
more, the individual clusters show remarkably similar pat-
terns: for the larger cells, the percentages are almost iden-
tical. It is true that the social distribution of this fea-
ture is wider for Negroes than for whites, but the sharpest
differences are not in this particular phonetic process. As
we shall see below, it is in the nature of the grammatical
conditioning that restricts the deletion of the final con-
sonant.

The other set of clusters which are simplified are those
ending in /-s/ or /-z/, words like axe /æks/, six /siks/,
box /baks/, parts /parts/, aims /eymz/, rolls /rowlz/, leads
/liydz/, besides /bisaydz/, John's /džanz/, that's /ðæts/,
it's /its/, its /its/. The situation here is more complex
than with the /t,d/ clusters, since in some cases the first
element of the cluster is lost, and in other cases the second

element.[14] Furthermore, the comparison of the same two speakers as shown above shows a radical difference (see Table 2).

Table 2

Overall Simplification of /s,z/ Consonant Clusters
For One Negro and One White New York City Speaker

BF (Negro)			AO (White)		
1st Cons. Dropped	2nd Cons. Dropped	Total Clusters	1st Cons. Dropped	2nd Cons. Dropped	Total Clusters
31	18	98	6	4	69

This overall view of the situation is only a preliminary to a much more detailed study, but it does serve to show that the simplification of the /s,z/ clusters is much more characteristic of Negro speakers than of white speakers. The comparison of these two speakers is typical of the several hundred Negro and white subjects that we have studied so far in our current research.

In one sense, there are a great many homonyms produced by this form of consonant cluster simplification, as we shall see when we consider grammatical consequences. But many of these can also be considered to be grammatical differences rather than changes in the shapes of words. The /t,d/ simplification gives us a great many irreducible homonyms, where a child has no clue to the standard spelling differences from his own speech pattern. Though this is less common in the case of /s,z/ clusters, we have

six = sick   Max = Mack

box = bock   mix = Mick

as possible homonyms in the speech of many Negro children.

4. <u>Weakening of final consonants</u>. It was noted above that the simplification of final consonant clusters was part of a more general tendency to produce less information after stressed vowels, so that final consonants, unstressed final

vowels, and weak syllables show fewer distinctions and more
reduced phonetic forms than initial consonants and stressed
vowels. This is a perfectly natural process in terms of the
amount of information required for effective communication,
since the number of possible words which must be distinguished
declines sharply after we select the first consonant and vowel.
German and Russian, for example, do not distinguish voiced and
voiceless consonants at the ends of words. However, when this
tendency is carried to extremes (and a nonstandard dialect
differs radically from the standard language in this respect),
it may produce serious problems in learning to read and spell.

This weakening of final consonants is by no means as
regular as the other phonological variables described above.
Some individuals appear to have generalized the process to
the point where most of their syllables are of the CV type,
and those we have interviewed in this category seem to have
the most serious reading problems of all. In general, final
/t/ and /d/ are the most affected by the process. Final /d/
may be devoiced to a [t]-like form, or disappear entirely.
Final /t/ is often realized as glottal stop, as in many Eng-
lish dialects, but more often disappears entirely. Less
often, final /g/ and /k/ follow the same route as /d/ and
/t/: /g/ is devoiced or disappears, and /k/ is replaced by
glottal stop or disappears. Final /m/ and /n/ usually re-
main in the form of various degrees of nasalization of the
preceding vowel. Rarely, sibilants /s/ and /z/ are weakened
after vowels to the point where no consonant is heard at all.
As a result of these processes, one may have such homonyms
as:

Boot = Boo[15]	seat = seed = see
road = row	poor = poke = pope[16]
feed = feet	bit = bid = big

It is evident that the loss of final /l/ and /r/,

discussed above, is another aspect of this general weakening of final consonants, though of a much more regular nature than the cases considered in this section.

5. <u>Other phonological variables</u>. In addition to the types of homonymy singled out in the preceding discussion, there are a great many others which may be mentioned. They are of less importance for reading problems in general, since they have little impact upon inflectional rules, but they do affect the shapes of words in the speech of Negro children. There is no distinction between /i/ and /e/ before nasals in the great majority of cases. In the parallel case before /r/, and sometimes /l/, we frequently find no distinction between the vowels /ih/ and /eh/. The corresponding pair of back vowels before /r/ are seldom distinguished: that is, /uh/ and /oh/ fall together. The diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ are often monophthongized, so that they are not distinguished from /ah/. The diphthong /oy/ is often a monophthong, especially before /l/, and cannot be distinguished from /ɔh/.

Among other consonant variables, we find the final fricative /θ/ is frequently merged with /f/, and similarly final /ð/ with /v/. Less frequently, /θ/ and /ð/ become /f/ and /v/ in intervocalic position. Initial consonant clusters which involve /r/ show considerable variation: /str/ is often heard as /skr/; /šr/ as [sw, sr, sɸ]. In a more complex series of shifts, /r/ is frequently lost as the final element of an initial cluster.

As a result of these various phonological processes, we find that the following series of homonyms are characteristic of the speech of many Negro children:

pin	= pen	beer	= bear	poor	= pour
tin	= ten	cheer	= chair	sure	= shore
since	= cents	steer	= stair	moor	= more
		peel	= pail		

find = found = fond	boil = ball
time = Tom	oil = all
pound = pond	

| Ruth = roof | stream = scream |
| death = deaf | strap = scrap |

Changes in the Shapes of Words

The series of potential homonyms given in the preceding sections indicate that Negro children may have difficulty in recognizing many words in their standard spellings. They may look up words under the wrong spellings in dictionaries, and be unable to distinguish words which are plainly different for the teacher. If the teacher is aware of these sources of confusion, she may be able to anticipate a great many of the children's difficulties. But if neither the teacher nor the children are aware of the great differences in their sets of homonyms, it is obvious that confusion will occur in every reading assignment.

However, the existence of homonyms on the level of a phonetic output does not prove that the speakers have the same sets of mergers on the more abstract level which corresponds to the spelling system. For instance, many New Yorkers merge _sore_ and _saw_ in casual speech, but in reading style, they have no difficulty in pronouncing the /r/ where it belongs. Since the /r/ in _sore_ reappears before a following vowel, it is evident that an abstract //r//[17] occurs in their lexical system: //sor//. Thus the standard spelling system finds support in the learned patterns of careful speech, and in the alternations which exist within any given style of speech.

The phonetic processes discussed above are often considered to be "low level" rules—that is, they do not affect the underlying or abstract representations of words. One

piece of evidence for this view is that the deletable final
/r, l, s, z, t, d/ tend to be retained when a vowel follows
at the beginning of the next word. This effect of a follow-
ing vowel would seem to be a phonetic factor, restricting
the operation of a phonetic rule; in any case, it is plain
that the final consonant must "be there" in some abstract
sense, if it appears in this prevocalic position. If this
were not the case, we would find a variety of odd final con-
sonants appearing, with no fixed relation to the standard
form.[18]

For all of the major variables that we have considered,
there is a definite and pronounced effect of a following
vowel in realizing the standard form. Fig. 1 shows the ef-
fect of a following vowel on final /-st/ in the speech of
four Negro and three white subjects. In every case, we find
that the percent of simplification of the cluster falls when
a vowel follows.
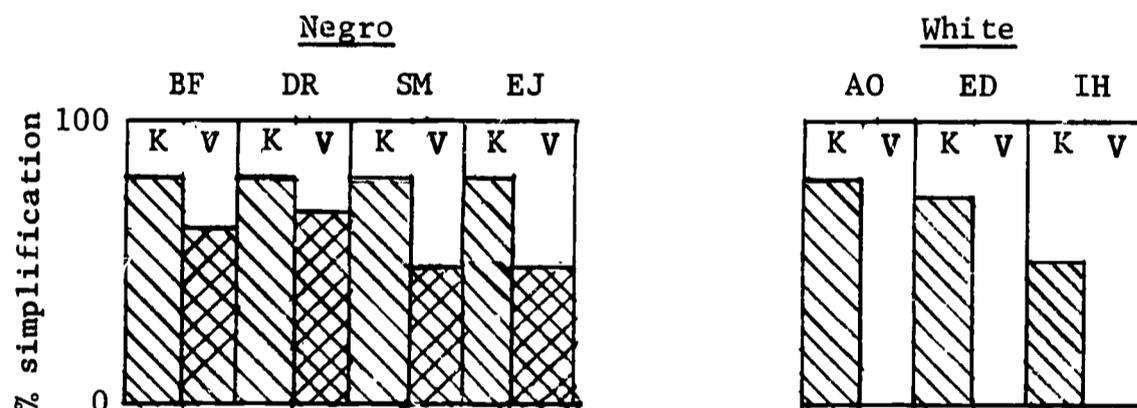
Fig. 1.   Effect of a Following Vowel on /-st/ Final Clusters
          for Four Negro and Three White Speakers

The same argument, however, can be used to argue that
the Negro speakers have underlying forms considerably differ-
ent from those of white speakers. The white speakers showed
almost as much overall simplification of the clusters before
a following consonant, but none at all before a following

vowel: in other words, their abstract forms were effectively
equivalent to the spelling forms. The Negro speakers showed
only a limited reduction in the degree of simplification when
a vowel followed.

We can explore this situation more carefully when we
consider grammatical conditioning. But we can point to ˄ ae
situation which suggests the existence of nonstandard under-
lying forms. In the most casual and spontaneous speech of
the young Negro people whose language we have been examining,
the plural //-s// inflection is seldom deleted. It follows
the same phonetic rules as in standard English: (1) after
sibilants /s, z, š, ž/, the regular plural is [əz]; (2) after
other voiceless consonants, [s]; and (3) elsewhere, [z]. The
regular form of the plural after a word like test, desk, is
[s], as in [desks]. If the rules were so ordered that we
began with the abstract form //desk//, added the //-s//, and
then deleted the /k/ in the consonant cluster simplification
process, we would find the final phonetic form [dɛs:]. We
do in fact sometimes find this form, in a context which im-
plies the plural. But more often, we find [dɛsəz, gosəz,
tosəz] as the plurals of desk, ghost and toast.

[A form such as [dɛsəz] is consistent with an order of
the rules which begins with //des//, or reduces //desk//
immediately to /des/. Then the plural //-s// is added, and
the phonetic rules give us [dɛsəz]. It should be emphasized
that those speakers who use this form do so consistently,
frequently, and in the most careful speech; it is not a slip
of the tongue. On the contrary, clusters such as -sps, -sts,
-sks are almost impossible for many Negro children to articu-
late. Even with direct modeling, they find it extremely
difficult to repeat the standard forms of wasps, lists,
desks, etc.[18a] It is quite common for children to produce
under pressure such forms as [lɪstsəsəsəs], a recursive

process, as a result of their efforts to produce the -sts
cluster.

Forms such as singular [dɛs], plural [dɛsəz] give no
support for an underlying spelling form desk. It is true
that they are not inconsistent with a spelling desk, for an
automatic rule simplifies -sks in 100 percent of the cases,
changing -sk+s to -s+s. But there is no way for the Negro
child to differentiate mess, messes from des', desses, on the
basis of his own native speech forms. Therefore he can only
memorize from school lessons which words have final conson-
ants after -s. In the case of verbs such as test, and their
derived nouns, there is no problem, for the form testing
preserves the final -t; but most words in this class have no
derived forms or inflectional forms in which a vowel follows
the stem. When the next word begins with a vowel, the effect
is often not strong enough to bring out the underlying final
consonant in the speech of adults, and the listener does not
hear the full form as regularly as he does in testing. There
are, of course, dialects which resolve this problem in other
ways by changing the rules for epenthetic vowels, yielding
deskes, testes and waspes, but this is more characteristic
of white Appalachian speech than Southern Negro speech.]

Grammatical Correlates of the Phonological Variables

As we examine the various final consonants affected by
the phonological processes, we find that these are the same
consonants which represent the principal English inflections.
The shifts in the sound system therefore often coincide with
grammatical differences between nonstandard and standard
English, and it is usually difficult to decide whether we
are dealing with a grammatical or a phonological rule. In
any case, we can add a great number of homonyms to the lists
given above when we consider the consequences of deleting
final /r/, /l/, /s/, /z/, /t/, and /d/.

1. <u>The possessive</u>. In many cases, the absence of the possessive //-s// can be interpreted as a reduction of consonant clusters, although this is not the most likely interpretation. The //-s// is absent just as frequently after vowels as after consonants for many speakers. Nevertheless, we can say that the overall simplification pattern is favored by the absence of the //-s// inflection. In the case of //-r//, we find more direct phonological influence: two possessive pronouns which end in /r/ have become identical to the personal pronoun:

[ðeɪ] book   not   [ðɛ:ə] book

In rapid speech, one can not distinguish <u>you</u> from <u>your</u> from <u>you-all</u>. This seems to be a shift in grammatical forms, but the relation to the phonological variables is plain when we consider that <u>my</u>, <u>his</u>, <u>her</u>, and <u>our</u> remain as possessive pronouns. No one says <u>I book</u>, <u>he book</u>, <u>she book</u> or <u>we book</u>, for there is no phonological process which would bring the possessives into near-identity with the personal pronouns.[19]

2. <u>The future</u>. The loss of final /l/ has a serious effect on the realization of future forms:

you'll = you   he'll = he
they'll = they   she'll = she

In many cases, therefore, the colloquial future is identical with the colloquial present. The form <u>will</u> is still used in its emphatic or full form, and the <u>going to</u> is frequent, so there is no question about the grammatical category of the future.[20] One form of the future with very slight phonetic substance is preserved, the first person <u>I'm a shoot you</u>: there is no general process for the deletion of this <u>m</u>.

3. <u>The copula</u>. The verb forms of <u>be</u> are frequently not realized in sentences such as <u>you tired</u> or <u>he in the way</u>. If we examine the paradigm, we find that it is seriously affected by phonological processes:

$$I'm \neq I \qquad we're = we$$
$$you're \simeq you \qquad you're \simeq you$$
$$he's \quad ? \quad he \qquad they're = they$$

The loss of final /z/ after vowels is not so frequent as to
explain the frequency of the absence of -s in he's, and it
is reasonable to conclude that grammatical rules have been
generalized throughout the paradigm—still not affecting I'm
in the same way as the others, as we would expect, since
phonological rules are not operating to reduce /m/.

4. The past. Again, there is no doubt that phonological
processes are active in reducing the frequency of occurrence
of the /t,d/ inflection.

$$pass = past = passed \qquad pick = picked$$
$$miss = mist = missed \qquad loan = loaned$$
$$fine = find = fined \qquad raise = raised$$

At the same time, there is no question about the existence of
a past tense category. The irregular past tense forms, which
are very frequent in ordinary conversation, are plainly
marked as past no matter what final simplification takes place.

I told him [atoɪm]   he kept mine [hikɛpmaɪn]

The problem which confronts us concerns the form of the regu-
lar suffix //-ed//. Is there such an abstract form in the
structure of the nonstandard English spoken by Negro chil-
dren? The answer will make a considerable difference both
to teaching strategy and our understanding of the reading
problems which children face. To approach this problem, we
have used a variety of methods which it may be helpful to
examine in detail.

The Problem of the -ed Suffix

The first approach to this problem is through a study of
the quantitative distribution of the forms as spoken by Negro
and white subjects in a variety of stylistic contexts. We
contrast the simplification of consonant clusters in two

situations: where the /t/ or /d/ represents a part of the
root form itself [D_{MM}] and where the /t/ or /d/ represents
the grammatical suffix of the past tense [D_P]. Fig. 2 shows
the results for the speakers BF and AO who were first con-
sidered in Tables 1 and 2.

The Negro speaker BF shows almost the same degree of
consonant cluster simplification when the /t,d/ represents
a past tense as when it is a part of the original root. On
the other hand, the white speaker AO simplifies very few
past tense clusters. We can interpret these results in two
ways: (a) BF has a generalized simplification rule without
grammatical conditioning, while AO's simplification rule is
strongly restricted by grammatical boundaries, or (b) BF's
underlying grammar is different. If we were to rewrite his
grammar to show -ed morphemes only where phonetic forms
actually appear, his consonant cluster rule would look much
the same as AC's. Without attempting to decide this issue
now, let us examine a Negro speaker in several styles, and
see if the -ed is affected by the shift.

Fig. 3 shows the percent of /t,d/ clusters simplified
by DR, a Negro woman raised in North Carolina. On the left,
we see the simplification of both D_{MM} and D_P in intimate
family style, discussing a recent trip to North Carolina
with a close relative. The pattern is similar to that of
BF, with no differentiation of D_{MM} and D_P. But on the right
we find a sharp differentiation of the two kinds of clusters:
this is the careful style used by DR in a face-to-face inter-
view with a white stranger. Fig. 3 shows us that the gram-
matical constraint which DR uses in careful speech is quite
similar to the pattern used by the white speaker AO.

Stylistic context is obviously important in obtaining
good information on the underlying grammatical system of
Negro speakers. We may therefore profit from considering

WILLIAM LABOV
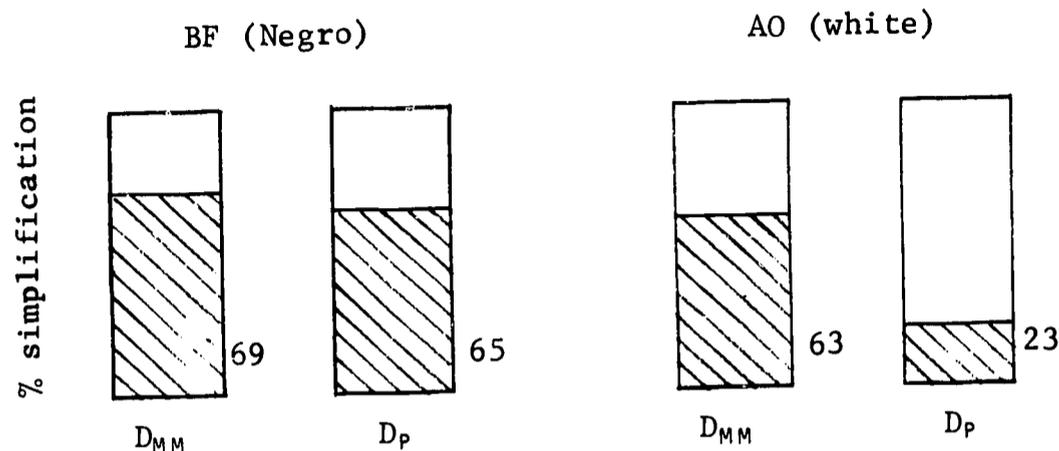
Fig. 2. Effect of Grammatical Status on /t,d/ of Final
Clusters for One Negro and One White Speaker
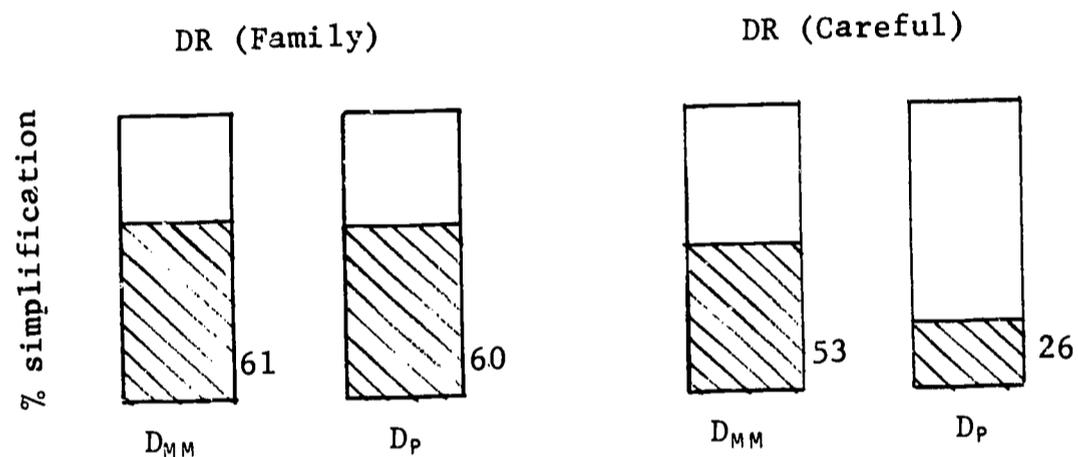
D_{MM}: /t,d/ final in monomorphemic (root) clusters
D_P : /t,d/ final as past tense -ed morpheme

Fig. 3. Effect of Stylistic Level and Grammatical Status
on /t,d/ of Final Clusters for One Negro Speaker

data where this factor is controlled. Fig. 4 shows the over-
all consonant cluster simplification patterns for two groups
of Negro boys: the Thunderbirds, 10 to 12 years old, and the
Cobras, 14 to 16. These are two peer groups which form
closed networks. Most of the boys are poor readers, and
they represent the groups which respond least to middle-class
educational norms. In the interviews which provided this
data, the groups were recorded in circumstances where they
used the most excited and spontaneous speech, interacting
with each other, and with only moderate influence from
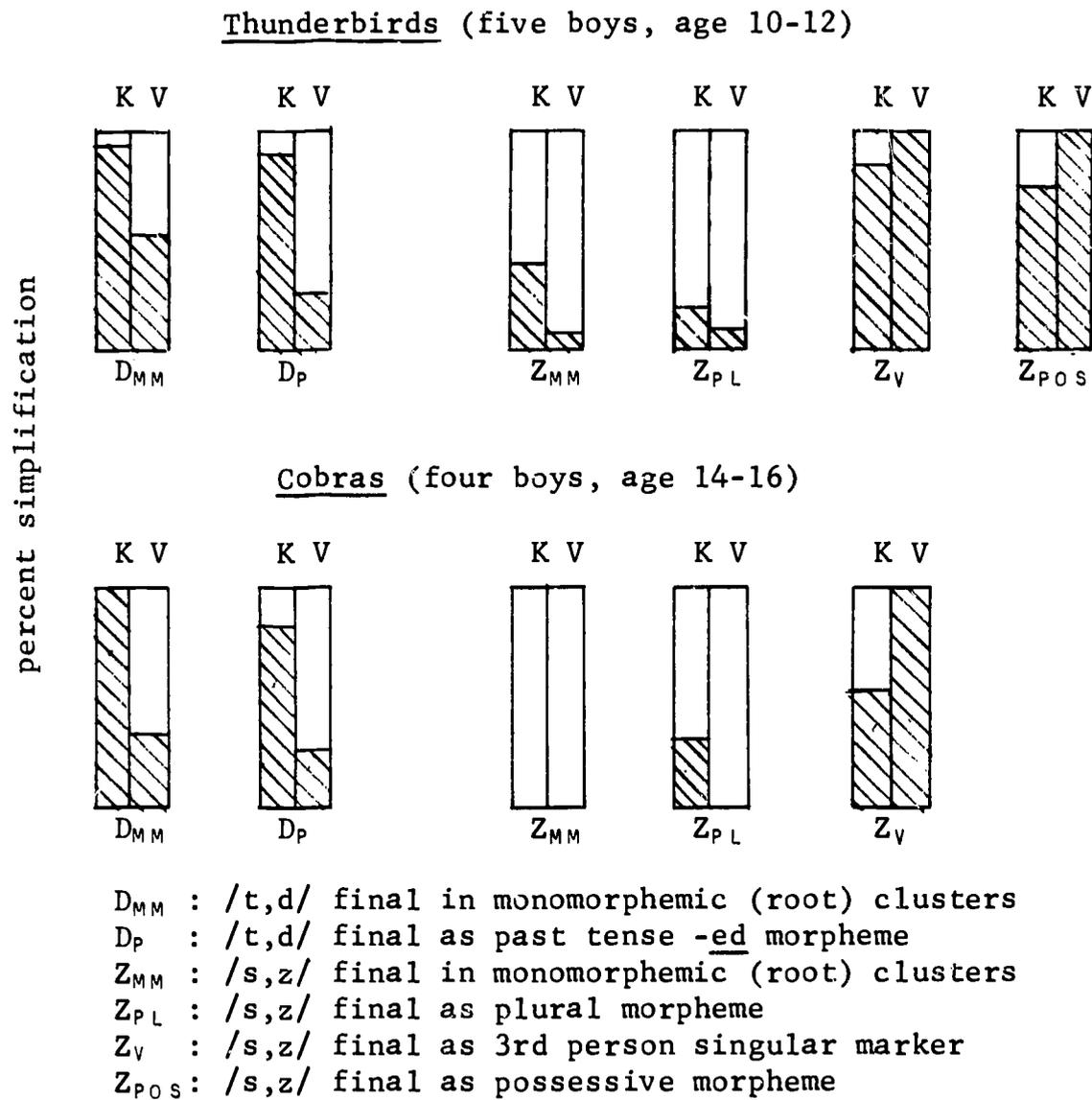
Fig. 4. Simplification of /t,d/ and /s,z/ Final Clusters for
        Two Groups of Negro Boys From South Central Harlem

D_{MM} : /t,d/ final in monomorphemic (root) clusters
D_P : /t,d/ final as past tense -ed morpheme
Z_{MM} : /s,z/ final in monomorphemic (root) clusters
Z_{PL} : /s,z/ final as plural morpheme
Z_V : /s,z/ final as 3rd person singular marker
Z_{POS}: /s,z/ final as possessive morpheme

outsiders. Each boy was recorded on a separate track, from
a microphone placed only a few inches away from his mouth.
(Recordings made with a single group microphone are of little
value for this type of group interaction since only a small
part of the data is recovered.)

The Thunderbirds show a very high percentage of simpli-
fication of clusters before consonants: 61 out of 63 for
nongrammatical clusters, and 21 out of 23 for grammatical
clusters. But before following vowels, only 7 out of 14

nongrammatical clusters were simplified, and even fewer—3
out of 13—for grammatical clusters.

We can conclude from these figures that there is a solid
basis for the recognition of an -ed suffix: grammatical status
does make a difference when the unfavorable phonological en-
vironment is set aside. Secondly, we can see that there is
a good basis for approximating the lexical forms of standard
English: 50 percent of the root clusters conformed to the
standard forms in a favorable environment. From another
point of view, however, one might say that in half the cases,
the boys gave no evidence that they would recognize such
spellings as test or hand as corresponding to their [tɛs]
and [hæn].

The Cobras, some four years older, are very similar in
their /t,d/ pattern. The phonological conditioning has be-
come even more regular—that is, the effect of the following
vowel is more extreme. All of the root clusters are simpli-
fied before consonants, but only a small percentage before
vowels. The effect of grammatical status is no stronger,
however. We may conclude that the process of growing up has
brought better knowledge of the underlying lexical forms of
standard English, but the status of the -ed morpheme is still
about the same.

Perception testing. A second approach to the problem of
the -ed suffix is through perception testing. It is possible
that the speakers are not able to hear the difference between
[pɪk] and [pɪkt], [mɛs] and [mɛst]. If the phonological re-
duction rule was regular enough, this might be the case. We
explore this possibility by a perception test of the follow-
ing form. The subject listens to a series of three words:
[mɛs, mɛst, mɛs], and is asked to say which one is different.
The test is repeated six times, with various random combin-
ations of the two possibilities. Then a second series is

given with /-st/ before a vowel: [mɛsʌp, mɛstʌp, mɛsʌp], etc.
A person who can hear the distinctions will give a correct
response in six out of six, or five out of six trials.

The Thunderbirds had no difficulty with the perception
test. Three of the boys had perfect scores, and only one
showed definite confusion—in fact, the one boy who came
closest to standard English norms on the other tests des-
cribed below. It is true that many Negro youngsters have
great difficulty in perceiving phonemic contrasts which are
not made in their own dialect; but in this particular case,
perception of the /-t ~ -st/ distinction has less relevance
to the grammatical status of -ed than any of the other means
of investigation.

Classroom correction tests. A third means of approaching
the grammatical status of -ed is through the classroom cor-
rection tests mentioned earlier in the discussion. The sub-
jects are asked to change certain sentences to correct school-
room English, starting with easy examples like I met three
mens. Several sentences are relevant to the -ed problem:

>He pick me.
>I've pass my test.
>Last week I kick Donald in the mouth, so the
>   teacher throwed me out the class.

As a whole, results on the classroom correction tests show
that the Thunderbirds and the Cobras have little ability to
detect the absence of -ed as a grammatical element to be cor-
rected. They focus upon ain't, or man in He never play no
more, man, but not upon the -ed. Among the Thunderbirds,
only one of the five boys had this ability to supply -ed,
and the Cobras showed no greater perception of the status of
this element.[21]

The -ed reading test. The most effective way of deter-
mining the grammatical significance of -ed for the groups we
have been working with is through a series of sentences in

the reading texts used in our interviews. The relevant sen-
tences are as follows:

    (a)   Last month I read five books.
    (b)   Tom read all the time.
    (c)   Now I read and write better than Alfred does.
    (d)   When I passed by, I read the posters.
    (e)   When I liked a story, I read every word.
    (f)   I looked for trouble when I read the news.

These sentences depend upon the unique homograph read to indi-
cate whether the reader is interpreting the -ed suffix as a
past tense signal. The first three sentences show whether
the reader can use the time indicators last month, now, and
the absence of -s to distinguish correctly between [ri:d]
and [rɛd]. In sentences (d), (e), and (f) the reader first
encounters the -ed suffix, which he may or may not pronounce.
If he interprets this visual signal as a sign of the past
tense, he will pronounce read as [rɛd]; if not, he is apt to
say [ri:d]. The distance between the -ed suffix and the
word read is kept as short as possible in sentence (d), so
that here at least there is no problem of understanding -ed
and then forgetting it.

    The overall results of this test show that -ed is inter-
preted correctly less than half the time by the Thunderbirds—
less often than the -ed suffix is pronounced. The Cobras
show no material improvement in this respect. For each group,
only one boy was able to approximate the standard English
performance in this test.

    We can conclude that the original inferences drawn from
Fig. 4, based on linguistic performance in spontaneous speech,
are supported by various other approaches to the -ed problem.
The degree of uncertainty registered in the D_p column for
consonant clusters, even before vowels, indicates that the
-ed cannot function as an effective marker of the past tense
for many children. Though the Cobras are four years older

than the Thunderbirds, they show little change in their use
of -ed. It is also true that some children—a minority in
this case—can recognize -ed as a past tense marker, and use
it effectively in reading, even though they usually do not
pronounce it.

Grammatical Status of the //-s// Suffixes

The same quantitative method which was effective in
interpreting the status of -ed can be used to analyze the
various -s suffixes used by Negro children. Fig. 4 provides
information on consonant cluster simplification as it affects
four different categories of -s:[22]

Z_{MM} monomorphemic -s in root clusters: axe, box
Z_{PL} the plural -s
Z_V the 3rd person singular marker of the verb
Z_{POS} the possessive -'s

For each category, we can compare the extent of simplifica-
tion before consonants and before vowels.

In the case of root clusters, the Thunderbirds show
only a moderate tendency to drop the final element before
consonants, and a very small tendency before vowels. In
other words, the standard forms are intact. For the Cobras,
this -s is always present.

The plural is rarely lost, and shows the usual effect
of the following vowel. We can conclude that the plural in-
flection is the same for the Thunderbirds, the Cobras, and
standard English.

In the case of the third person singular marker and the
possessive, an extraordinary reversal is found. For the
Thunderbirds, the situation can be summarized as follows:

Z_V	-K	-V
simplified	17	12
not simplified	4	0

Not only is the extent of simplification higher in Z_V than
for Z_{PL}, but the direction of influence of a following vowel

is reversed. No clusters at all appeared in the most favor-
able environment for the phonological rule. We can infer
that this is no longer effectively described as consonant
cluster simplification, but rather as a grammatical fact.
The third person singular marker //-s// does not exist in
the particular grammar being used here. The same argument
holds for the possessive //-s// marker, though as noted
above, we cannot extend this argument to infer a loss of the
possessive in general.

A striking fact about this situation is that the older
group has gained in several respects as far as approximation
to standard English forms is concerned, but their development
has not affected the grammatical status of the third person
singular marker.

Consequences for the Teaching of Reading

Let us consider the problem of teaching a youngster to
read who has the general phonological and grammatical char-
acteristics just described. The most immediate way of ana-
lyzing his difficulties is through the interpretation of his
oral reading. As we have seen, there are many phonological
rules which affect his pronunciation, but not necessarily
his understanding of the grammatical signals or his grasp of
the underlying lexical forms. The two questions are distinct:
the relations between grammar and pronunciation are complex,
and require careful interpretation.

If a student is given a certain sentence to read, say
He passed by both of them, he may say [hi pæs ba^I bof ə dɛm].
The teacher may wish to correct this bad reading, perhaps by
saying, "No, it isn't [hi pæs ba^I bof ə dɛm], it's [hi pæst
ba^I boθ əv ðɛm]." One difficulty is that these two utterances
may sound the same to many children—both the reader and those
listening—and they may be utterly confused by the correction.
Others may be able to hear the difference, but have no idea

of the significance of the extra [t] and the interdental
forms of th-. The most embarrassing fact is that the boy
who first read the sentence may have performed his reading
task correctly, and understood the -ed suffix just as it
was intended. In that case, the teacher's correction is
completely beside the point.

We have two distinct cases to consider. In one case,
the deviation in reading may be only a difference in pro-
nunciation on the part of a child who has a different set of
homonyms from the teacher. Here, correction might be quite
unnecessary. In the second case, we may be dealing with a
boy who has no concept of -ed as a past tense marker, who
considers the -ed a meaningless set of silent letters. Ob-
viously the correct teaching strategy would involve distin-
guishing these two cases, and treating them quite differ-
ently.

How such a strategy might be put into practice is a
problem that educators may be able to solve by using infor-
mation provided by linguists. As a linguist, I can suggest
several basic principles derived from our work which may be
helpful in further curriculum research and application.

1. In the analysis and correction of oral reading,
teachers must begin to make the basic distinction between
differences in pronunciation and mistakes in reading. Infor-
mation on the dialect patterns of Negro children should be
helpful toward this end.

2. In the early stages of teaching reading and spell-
ing, it may be necessary to spend much more time on the
grammatical function of certain inflections, which may have
no function in the dialect of some of the children. In the
same way, it may be necessary to treat the final elements of
certain clusters with the special attention given to silent
letters such as b in lamb.

3. A certain amount of attention given to perception
training in the first few years of school may be extremely
helpful in teaching children to hear and make standard Eng-
lish distinctions. But perception training need not be com-
plete in order to teach children to read. On the contrary,
most of the differences between standard and nonstandard
English described here can be taken as differences in the
sets of homonyms which must be accepted in reading patterns.
On the face of it, there is no reason why a person cannot
learn to read standard English texts quite well in a non-
standard pronunciation. Eventually, the school may wish to
teach the child an alternative system of pronunciation. But
the key to the situation in the early grades is for the
teacher to know the system of homonyms of nonstandard English,
and to know the grammatical differences that separate her own
speech from that of the child. The teacher must be prepared
to accept the system of homonyms for the moment, if this will
advance the basic process of learning to read, but not the
grammatical differences. Thus the task of teaching the child
to read -ed is clearly that of getting him to recognize the
graphic symbols as a marker of the past tense, quite distinct
from the task of getting him to say [pæst] for passed.

If the teacher has no understanding of the child's gram-
mar and set of homonyms, she may be arguing with him at cross
purposes. Over and over again, the teacher may insist that
cold and coal are different, without realizing that the child
perceives this as only a difference in meaning, not in sound.
She will not be able to understand why he makes so many odd
mistakes in reading, and he will experience only a vague con-
fusion, somehow connected with the ends of words. Eventually,
he may stop trying to analyze the shapes of letters that fol-
low the vowel, and guess wildly at each word after he deci-
phers the first few letters. Or he may lose confidence in

the alphabetic principle as a whole, and try to recognize
each word as a whole. This loss of confidence seems to occur
frequently in the third and fourth grades, and it is charac-
teristic of many children who are effectively nonreaders.

The sources of reading problems discussed in this paper
are only a few of the causes of poor reading in the ghetto
schools. But they are quite specific and easily isolated.
The information provided here may have immediate application
in the overall program of improving the teaching of reading
to children in these urban areas.

NOTES

1. The research described here is a part of Cooperative
    Research Project No. 3091, U.S. Office of Education:
    "A Preliminary Study of the Structure of English Used by
    Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City." For
    much of the field work and analysis, I am indebted to
    Paul Cohen, Clarence Robins, John Lewis, Jr., and Joshua
    Waletzky of the project staff. The Final Report on Co-
    operative Research Project 3091 is available through
    ERIC, ED 010 688.

2. See "Stages in the Acquisition of Standard English," in
    Roger Shuy (ed.), Social Dialects and Language Learning
    (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of
    English, 1965), pp. 77-103.

3. The continuing research discussed here is part of Co-
    operative Research Project No. 3288, U.S. Office of Edu-
    cation, "A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro
    and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City." The Final
    Report on Cooperative Research Project 3288 will be
    available through ERIC at the end of 1968.

4. These observations are based upon experience with many
    teachers of English, Negro and white, at summer reading
    institutes, conferences on social dialects, principals'
    conferences, and other meetings where the speech of Negro
    people in urban ghettos has been discussed.

5. Many examples of this stereotyping process are discussed

in William Labov, The Social Stratification of English
in New York City (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied
Linguistics, 1966).

6. H. Kökeritz, Shakespeare's Pronunciation (New Haven: Yale
   University Press, 1953); and H.C. Wyld, A History of
   Modern Colloquial English (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1920).

7. Such a phenomenon can be observed in suburban Bergen
   County, along the boundary of the New York City dialect
   area. In Closter, N.J., for example, the socioeconomic
   differentiation of speakers by r-pronunciation seems to
   be much more extreme than in the city itself: middle-
   class children may pronounce final and preconsonantal
   /r/ consistently, while working-class children will be
   completely r-less, and this difference is maintained over
   a wide range of stylistic contexts.

8. The forms for the Family Background test give the listen-
   er a limited choice of ethnic backgrounds: Irish, Afro-
   American, Spanish, Jewish, German, and Other White.
   Within each category, one can specify "S" Southern, "N"
   Northern, or "W" Western.

9. These data are derived from series of interviews with
   individuals and groups in South Central Harlem and ex-
   ploratory interviews in other Northern cities: Boston,
   Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago.

10. In New York City, the correlation of /r/ and stylistic
    context follows a very regular pattern, as discussed in
    The Social Stratification of English in New York City,
    and other references cited above. Negro speakers are
    especially sensitive to the prestige status of /r/. The
    systematic shift indicates the importance of controlling
    the stylistic factor, as well as socioeconomic factors,
    in gathering data on speech patterns.

11. In many cases, pairs such as guard-god, nor-gnaw, are
    differentiated by vowel quality. For most Negro speakers
    in Northern cities, they are identical. Pairs such as
    sore-saw or court-caught, which oppose M.E. closed o
    before r to long open o, are differentiated more often
    by vowel quality, especially among older people. In any
    case, the lists of homonyms given here and elsewhere are
    given as examples of possible homonyms illustrative of
    large classes of words that are frequently identical.

    It should be noted that words with mid-central vowels

before r do not follow the r-less patterns discussed
here; r appears much more frequently in such words as
work, shirt, bird, even when it is not used after other
vowels.

12.   One English dialect which shows systematic 1-lessness is
      Cockney, as described in E. Sivertsen, Cockney Phonology
      (Oslo, 1960).

13.   When the /t/ or /d/ represents a grammatical inflection,
      these consonants are usually automatic alternants of the
      same abstract form //ed//. Phonetic rules delete the
      vowel (except after stems ending in /t/ or /d/, and we
      then have /t/ following voiceless consonants such as
      /p, s, š, k/ and /d/ in all other cases. In the same
      way /s/ and /z/ are coupled as voiceless and voiced
      alternants of the same //s// inflection. But in clusters
      that are a part of the root, we do not have such auto-
      matic alternation.

14.   The loss of the first element—that is, assimilation to
      the following /s/—is most common in forms where the /s/
      represents the verb is or the pronoun us as in it's,
      that's and let's. In none of these cases is there a
      problem of homonymy, even in the case of let's where
      there is no likelihood of confusion with less. This type
      of simplification will therefore not be considered in any
      further detail. It should be noted that "simplification"
      in regard to the loss of final /s/ is merely a device for
      presenting the data: as we will see, there are several
      cases where we are forced to conclude that the /s/ is not
      there to begin with.

15.   This homonym was troublesome to us for some time. One
      member of the Thunderbirds is known as "Boo." We did not
      notice the occasional glottal stop which ended this word
      as a functional unit for some time; eventually we began
      to suspect that the underlying form was "Boot." This was
      finally confirmed when he appeared in sneakers labeled
      BOOT.

16.   The word poor is frequently pronounced with a mid-vowel
      [po] even by those who do not have a complete merger of
      such pairs as sure-shore, moor-more. One of our Gullah-
      influenced South Carolina informants on Saint Helena
      Island is named Samuel Pope or Polk, but we cannot de-
      termine which from his pronunciation.

17.   The // // notation encloses morphophonemic forms—that

is, forms of words which are the most abstract repre-
sentation underlying the variants that occur in particu-
lar environments as determined by some regular process.
English spelling is, on the whole, morphophonemic rather
than phonemic: the stem academ-, for example, is spelled
the same way even though it is pronounced very differ-
ently in academy, academic, academe and academician.

[The situation in regard to r is not quite this regu-
lar in white working-class speech. "Intrusive r" does
appear at the end of saw in I saw a parade, and conso-
nantal [r] is sometimes not pronounced in sore arm. But
the general pattern indicated above prevails and provides
enough support for the spelling forms.]

18.   This is precisely what does happen when final consonants
      are lost in words that have no spelling forms, no cor-
      relates in careful speech, and no regular morphophonemic
      alternation. Terms used in preadolescent culture will
      occur with a profusion of such variants (which may be
      continued in the adolescent years). For example, in
      Chicago the term for the base used in team versions of
      Hide-and-Seek is the goose. This is derived from the
      more general term gu:l with loss of final /l/—a dialect
      form of goal. (Cf. the alternation Gould and Gold in
      proper names.) A similar phenomenon occurs in New York
      City, where the same item is known as the dent—related
      to older den. It is worth noting that both of these
      cases are characteristic of language change among the
      Negro speakers we are discussing, and illustrate the un-
      checked consequences of the homonymy we are considering.
      A more extreme case may be cited: in one group of teen-
      age Negro boys, the position known elsewhere as War Lord
      (the member who arranges the details for gang fights)
      has shifted to a term with the underlying form //war
      dorf//, or possibly //waldorf// or //ward f//.

18[a]. [For an account of these repetition tests, see Cooperative
        Research Report 3288.]

19.   In the Creole-based English of Trinidad, however, we do
      find regularly the forms he book, she book, etc. The
      grammatical differences between Trinidadian English and
      standard English are therefore much greater than those
      between nonstandard American Negro English and standard
      English. In the same way, we find the past tense irregu-
      lar forms preserved in the dialects we are studying, but
      only the unmarked stem he give, he tell in Trinidad.
      See D. Solomon, "The System of Predication in the Speech
      of Trinidad," Columbia University Master's Essay, 1966.

20.   Given this situation, it is evident that more colloquial
      reading texts with contracted forms he'll and you'll
      will not be easy for Negro children to read. The tra-
      ditional uncontracted he will and you will may seem
      slightly artificial to some, but will not involve the
      problems of homonymy discussed here.

21.   In the classroom correction test, the same problem arises
      which affects any test given in the schoolroom: how hard
      is the subject trying to give the right answer? It is
      likely that the boy's general orientation toward the
      schoolroom would tend to reduce the amount of effort they
      put into this particular test; but we can base our con-
      clusions on the type of grammatical feature which is
      noticed and corrected, rather than the total number cor-
      rected.

22.   Two other types of //-s// can be isolated: the adverbial
      /s/ of besides, sometimes, etc., and the various con-
      tracted forms mentioned above: that's, it's and let's.
      The first is not frequent enough to provide good data
      for the small groups discussed here, and the second type
      shows a loss of the first element of the cluster with no
      grammatical effect.

ORTHOGRAPHY IN READING MATERIALS FOR

BLACK ENGLISH SPEAKING CHILDREN

by Ralph W. Fasold

Reading is the process of relating written symbols to units
of spoken language. There are only two basic ways in which
writing systems represent speech. In a writing system based
on morphological reference, each meaningful unit of spoken
language is represented by a separate symbol regardless of
how it is pronounced. This system is essentially the nature
of Chinese orthography, and accounts for the fact that written
Chinese is intelligible to speakers of different Chinese lan-
guages. Since there is no reference to pronunciation in the
writing system, the same symbols can be used to represent
different languages so long as those languages have roughly
the same lexical items and roughly the same syntax, even
when the lexical items are pronounced very differently in the
various languages.

The other system identifies meaningful units less dir-
ectly. In this kind of writing system, the symbols refer to
the phonological aspects of the units. Two variations of
writing systems with phonological reference have developed.
One of these is the <u>alphabet</u>, in which each symbol refers to
a sound segment; the other is the <u>syllabary</u>, in which each
symbol refers to a whole syllable. The writing system used
in English is an alphabet, and each letter ideally stands for
one segment in English phonology.

However, the sound segments recognized by modern lin-
guistics exist on various levels of abstraction. This fact

leads to the question: At what level of abstraction could the
English writing system best represent the segments of English
phonology? Once this is determined, it seems reasonable to
ask to what extent the English spelling system actually does
represent these segments. A given spelling is <u>correct</u> with
respect to this representation if it accurately reflects the
segments at that level. A spelling is <u>conventional</u> if it is
the usual spelling for this word. For example, if the seg-
ments of the word 'fat' at the appropriate level of abstrac-
tion are [fæt] and <u>f</u> is the symbol which represents [f], <u>a</u>
is the symbol for [æ], and <u>t</u> is the symbol for [t], then
<u>fat</u> is the correct spelling, and, since <u>fat</u> is the usual
spelling for the word, it is also conventional. If the seg-
ments of the word 'cat' at this same level of abstraction are
[kæt] and the symbol for [k] is <u>k</u>, and the symbols for [æ]
and [t] are <u>a</u> and <u>t</u> respectively, then <u>kat</u> is the correct
spelling for 'cat'. But since the accepted spelling is <u>cat</u>,
the spelling is not conventional. If the appropriate seg-
ments of the word 'rough' are [rʌf], then the spelling <u>rough</u>,
while it is conventional, is not correct. Finally, if some-
one were to spell 'mat' as <u>mta</u>, the spelling would be neither
correct nor conventional. When the relationship between
phonology and the writing system has been established, the
next step is to analyze the ways in which conventional spell-
ings are incorrect and to devise methods for teaching the
child to handle these failures in the writing system.

One conceivable answer to the question of level of ab-
straction is that the alphabet should represent phonetic seg-
ments. In this view, the reader would have a mark on paper
for every acoustic feature perceivable to the human ear.
There are overwhelming objections to this view. First, be-
cause there are so many perceivable acoustic differences in
speech sounds, the alphabet would need to contain a tremendous

number of symbols. Second, the English alphabet is clearly
not designed to handle this task, since it contains only 26
symbols. Third, the acoustic features of the pronunciation
of any given word vary from one utterance of the word to
another. In addition, it is obvious that not all acoustic
features need to be marked, since only some of them are used
to keep lexical items separate from each other. Only those
which serve to separate lexical items need to be indicated
in the orthography.

The most popular answer to these objections is that the
writing system should represent segments at the phonemic
level. By phonemic analysis, the tremendous variety of
speech sounds is reduced to a relatively few segments which
are distinctive. As a result, the phonemic spelling prin-
ciple has been proposed. According to this principle, the
ideal writing system would have only one symbol for one pho-
neme. The success of an existing orthography would be deter-
mined by its degree of deviation from this ideal. This sug-
gests a certain strategy for the teaching of reading, i.e.
that words whose conventional spellings conform to the pho-
nemic principle be taught first and other words be intro-
duced later, as anomalies. A phonemic writing system has
many advantages over a phonetic one. The number of necessary
symbols is reduced to a manageable number and the degree of
deviation from conventional spelling is greatly reduced. In
a phonetic writing system, there is no justification for
using the same symbol for the [p] in 'spit' and the [pʰ] in
'pit', since there is noticeably greater aspiration on the
[pʰ] in 'pit'. But by phonemic analysis, both sounds are
assigned to the same phoneme and can justifiably be written
with the same symbol. On the other hand, the spelling of a
word such as mussel cannot be justified, since the phonemes
of this word are something like /mʌsɨl/. The spelling mussel

fails to conform to the phonemic principle in several ways.
The first vowel should not be spelled with a u since this
symbol is needed for the vowel of words like 'put' (pho-
nemically /put/) and for part of the complex vowel nucleus
of words like 'spoon' (phonemically /spuwn/). The double s
is inappropriate because two symbols are used for only one
phoneme. The spelling e for the phoneme /ɨ/ is not correct
since the e of 'bet' is not the same as the e of 'mussel',
and the symbol e is generally used for the former.

While the phonemic principle results in a great reduc-
tion in the number of necessary symbols as compared with
phonetic writing, and while its application considerably
reduces the number of inappropriate spellings in the con-
ventional orthography, it still leaves a number of spelling
anomalies in the conventional system. More serious, the
justification of the phoneme as a linguistic entity has been
called into serious question.[1] If the phoneme is not a real
entity, it can hardly be the basis for the most appropriate
writing system.

An alternative to the phonemic spelling principle has
recently been suggested. In this view, alphabetic symbols
represent phonological segments on a more abstract level.
In generative phonology, there are at least two alternatives
for what this level would be. The alphabetic symbols could
be said to represent segments of the lexical representation.
If this were the case, many conventional spellings would
fail to conform to the principle because the symbols are too
specific in reference. For the word 'street', to take an
extreme example, the first letter in the spelling street is
inappropriate to correspond to the first segment in the lexi-
cal representation, since the lexical representation need
only indicate that there is a segment preceding t. The nor-
mal constraints on the structure of English morphemes precludes

any segment but)s(in this position.[*] Similarly, the letter
_r_ represents the only segment possible in its position. A
more appropriate spelling to represent the lexical form of
'street' would be ∅t∅eet, with the zeroes merely indicating
that a segment is present.[2] The other possibility within the
framework of generative phonology is that the alphabetic
symbols represent segments which are fully specified in ac-
cordance with the redundancy conditions on the structure of
English morphemes, but not for any features determined by the
phonological rules proper. Richard Stanley has proposed that
phonological theory include a process by which lexical entries
with partially specified segments are replaced by a represen-
tation with all segments fully specified in this way.[3] This
is the level which seems most realistic and at the same time
closest to what the conventional English spelling actually
does represent.[4]

The arguments which show that there is an abstract but
linguistically justifiable level of phonology to which con-
ventional spelling corresponds most neatly are involved ones.[5]
As we have shown above, this spelling fails to meet the re-
quirements of the phonemic spelling principle in several ways.
But as Chomsky and Halle show, this is exactly the correct
spelling to represent the word 'mussel' before the phonolog-
ical rules proper apply. For a number of reasons, the pho-
nology of English must contain a rule which in one of its
applications reduces the vocalic nucleus)u(in abstract
representations to phonetic [ʌ]. With few exceptions, pho-
netic [ʊ] and [ʌ] are in complementary distribution in
American English, [ʊ] occurring following nonnasal labial
segments and preceding either double or final)l(or a

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* In the discussion that follows, alphabetic symbols that
  represent phonological segments on the abstract level are
  given between reversed parentheses, e.g.)s(,)u(, etc.

voiceless alveolopalatal consonant--)š(or)č(--and [ʌ] appear-
ing elsewhere.[6] If the underlying representations of words
containing phonetic [ʌ] are assumed to contain underlying
)u(, rules of great generality in English phonology will
automatically convert this)u(to [ʌ] in the proper environ-
ments.[7]

The word 'mussel' must also contain double)s(and
undergo a rule which deletes the first of two identical con-
sonants. English phonology contains a rule which voices
)s(intervocalically. Pairs like 'resent' and 'consent',
and 'resist' and 'consist', illustrate this rule. In 'resent'
and 'resist', the orthographic s is intervocalic and is pro-
nounced [z]. In 'consent' and 'consist', the operation of
this voicing rule is blocked by the presence of)n(, and the
s is pronounced as a voiceless [s]. Similarly, 'dissemble'
(phonetically [dɪsɛmbl̩]) contains a voiceless fricative while
'resemble' (phonetically [riyzɛmbl̩]) has the voiced counter-
part. The presence of [s] in 'dissemble' can be explained if
we assume that the underlying form of the word has double
)s(. If this is the case, neither)s(is intervocalic and
the)s(-voicing rule does not apply. At the same time, this
assumption neatly fits the analysis of 'dissemble' into the
prefix 'dis' and the stem 'semble'. But since 'dissemble' is
not pronounced with a geminate [s], there must be a rule which
simplifies geminate consonant clusters. If we extend this
analysis to 'mussel', we can preserve the generality of the
voicing of intervocalic [s] and still account for the pro-
nunciation [mʌsl̩].[8]

Finally, English reduction rules will reduce)el(to
[l̩].

These facts about English phonology lead to the conclu-
sion that the abstract representation of the word 'mussel'
is, in fact,)mussel(. The rules we have discussed derive

the pronunciation [mʌsḷ] from this representation in the
following way:

Underlying representation:	mussel
u → ʌ rule:	mʌssel
Voicing of intervocalic s:	(does not apply)
Geminate cluster simplification rule:	mʌsel
Reduction rule:	mʌsḷ

While the spelling <u>mussel</u> is inadequate either phonetically
or phonemically, it is precisely correct for the represen-
tation of the sort of underlying form suggested by Stanley.
Chomsky and Halle point out that many other conventional
spellings are similarly appropriate.[9]

The view of the reading educator about the nature of
the relationship between speech and writing will have impli-
cations for the methodology used in teaching reading. Read-
ing involves two tasks: (1) to determine the identity of
words, and (2) to understand the grammatical relationships
between them. The first task is successfully achieved when
the reader associates a part of the printed matter with a
word in his language.[10] Because reading also involves the
second task, i.e. the understanding of the grammatical re-
lationships among words, it may seem that dealing with the
identification of words is not enough. In his book <u>Linguis-
tics and the Teaching of Reading</u>, Carl Lefevre draws atten-
tion to the whole sentence before treating word identification.
Since intonation plays an important role in determining syn-
tactic structure in spoken language, Lefevre suggests that
beginning readers should be taught to look for clues to in-
tonation on the printed page. Lefevre believes that readers
will be able to determine the syntactic structure of a written
sentence by imagining what its intonation would be if it were
spoken.[11] However it seems more reasonable to suppose that
reading proceeds in exactly the reverse order. A reader can
determine the proper intonation of a written sentence only

from the syntactic structure. Punctuation is probably best
considered a device for marking off various kinds of phrases
and sentences rather than for indicating intonation directly.
Once the nature of the construction of a sentence is known
to the reader, he can supply the correct intonation because
of his knowledge of the language he is reading. Thus, in-
tonation seems to be of marginal importance to the reading
process. If a reader can identify written words and can
interpret punctuation marks, he has all the information he
needs in order to understand sentences. For this reason,
word identification is the sine qua non of successful read-
ing.

It will be our assumption that words are most efficiently
identified if the printed symbols are interpreted as referring
to phonological segments rather than as direct representations
of lexical items, as is true in Chinese.[12] Furthermore, we
assume that the English spelling system refers approximately
to the phonology of units at the level of lexical represen-
tation in the sense of generative phonology, plus the full
specification of redundant features according to the con-
straints on the form of English morphemes.

Given these assumptions, we are ready to address our-
selves to the specific problems of how children learn to
read. We are arguing that spellings like mussel are correct
even though they do not represent the surface pronunciation
of the word very well. One of the crucial arguments that
this spelling is correct involves the comparison of words
like 'consist' with 'resist', and 'resemble' with 'dissemble',
to establish the)s(-voicing and geminate consonant simplifi-
cation rules. If we suppose that a child learning his first
language uses evidence of this sort in some way in the pro-
cess of language learning, presumably he will not acquire
the language competence described by these rules until he

learns items like 'resist' and 'consist', 'resemble' and
'dissemble', and realizes that they related. Our argument
that _mussel_ is the correct way to spell 'mussel' assumes that
the reader has acquired the)s(-voicing and geminate conson-
ant simplification rules, among others. If he has not yet
acquired them, the conventional spelling of 'mussel' will be
anomalous.

There are a great many words in English for which the
conventional spellings can be shown correct in spite of the
fact that they do not directly reflect the actual prununci-
ations of the words. But nearly all of the arguments in
these cases depend on alternations among Latinate lexical
items. In order to show that _a_ is the correct letter to
represent superficially different vowels in 'sane' and
'sanity', and also that the _e_ in _sane_ represents a vowel that
is actually present in the underlying form of 'sane', it must
be assumed that the reader knows both of these words and many
others like them and also knows that they are related. Chil-
dren are likely to lack some of these crucial lexical items
in their vocabularies, and, as a result, many spellings that
are correct for educated adults would be anomalous to them.
If ghetto children have fewer of these Latinate words in their
vocabularies, this aspect of the problem of orthography would
be more acute for them than for other children. In any event,
the presence or absence of these crucial items for any given
child is an empirical question which would need to be answered
before the type of reading techniques we will suggest could be
put in effect.[13]

Further problems in teaching reading to some black chil-
dren arise because of the fact that they come to school speak-
ing the Negro dialect -- Black English. The middle-class
child brings to school essentially the same dialect that he
will be taught to read, i.e. standard English. The Black

English speaking child is asked to learn simultaneously the skill of reading and of speaking a new dialect which is different from his own in many important ways. To complicate the problem, his teacher often does not realize this, and what is worse, will condemn as "bad" those aspects of his dialect which differ from the standard dialect.[14] Chomsky and Halle indicate that they expect underlying forms to differ very little from dialect to dialect:

> There has, in other words, been little change in lexical representation since Middle English, and, consequently, we would expect (though we have not verified this in any detail) that lexical representation would differ very little from dialect to dialect in Modern English. If this assumption proves to be correct, it will follow that conventional orthography is probably fairly close to optimal for all Modern English dialects, as well as for the attested dialects of the past several hundred years.[15]

What is implicit in the above statement, however, is that all Modern English dialects are direct descendants of the Middle English dialects mentioned. In the case of Black English, a quite different history has been suggested. William A. Stewart has argued that modern Black English (he uses the term Negro non-standard dialect) can be traced to a variety of English creole which was used by slaves early in the history of European settlement of this continent.[16] Many of the features of this creole language originate in the African languages of the slaves. The early creole gradually became more like Standard American English, but many of the features of present-day Black English, in this view, are traceable to this creole and not to early British dialects. If some of these creole features have survived in modern Black English phonology, and furthermore, if they involve the underlying structure of lexical representations, it may well be that Chomsky and Halle's statement does not apply to this dialect of English. Most of the examples of

differences between Black English and Standard English which
Stewart gives are grammatical, but in one article he cites a
difference in phonemic contrast:[17]

Note that in this dialect there are no apico-dental fricatives,
standard English /ð/ and /θ/ showing up as /d/ and /t/ in
initial positions, and usually as /v/ and /f/ elsewhere.

Actually, this description is factually not quite right. The
Black English pronunciation of words which begin with [θ] in
Standard English has the affricate [tθ], if not the fricative
[θ] itself. As a result, the words 'thought' and 'taught'
are not homonyms in Black English and there is a phonemic
difference between /t/ and /tθ ~ θ/ in the dialect. However,
it could be argued that the dental fricative or affricate
phonemes are restricted to word-initial position in Black
English, as /h/ is in Standard English. That is, the apico-
dental consonants appear in word-initial position, but no-
where else. In every other position where a word appears in
Standard English with /θ/, for example, Black English has /f/.
Because of this, there is no problem of a phonemic contrast
in Standard English which is missing in Black English, but
there is a phonemic difference none the less. The problem
is that the phonemic composition of some words is different
in the two dialects. For example, the word 'tooth' is pho-
nemically /tuwθ/ in the standard dialect and /tuwf/ in Black
English. According to the phonemic spelling principle, the
spelling tooth is anomalous for the Black English speaker,
but not for the Standard English speaker.

But since we have seen that there is evidence that the
phonemic spelling principle is not appropriate as a guide for
teaching reading, this is not enough. We must ask what the
form of words like 'tooth' is in their underlying representa-
tions. At this level, we see that there is indeed a contrast
between the [f] which matches Standard English [θ], and the

[f] which matches Standard English [f]. In certain situations,
words with word-final [f] in Black English are pronounced with
a [t]. Consider the two sentences:

> Get off my bike!
> Come back with my bike!

One possible Black English pronunciation of these sentences is:

> [gɪt ɔf ma bayk]
> [kəm bæk wɪf ma bayk]

In rapid speech, the [f] in 'with' can be pronounced as [t],
but not the [f] in 'off':

> *[gɪt ɔt ma bayk]
> [kəm bæk wɪt ma bayk]

It is necessary, then, before the phonological rules apply, to
designate which kind of [f] is which. Given the system of
English phonology, it can be shown fairly convincingly that
the appropriate segment to represent the underlying final con-
sonant of 'with' is)θ(, even if it is never so pronounced.
To the extent that th is the proper spelling for this segment,
the final th spelling is correct for Black English as well as
for Standard English.

There may be words ending in th and pronounced with final
[f] in Black English which never fall into the environment in
which [t] can appear. For these, there is no motivation to
specify underlying)θ(. Since the pronunciation is always
[f], one would specify the underlying representation for these
words as containing)f(. The result is that while the th
spelling is correct for some words which end in th in con-
ventional spellings, f seems to be the correct spelling for
others.

A similar situation exists for words with medial th
spellings. A word like 'nothing' can be pronounced either
[nʌfn̩] or [nʌtn̩], whereas a word like 'stiffen' can be pro-
nounced only [stɪfn̩]. Other words spelled with medial th
(e.g. 'ether') never fall into the environment in which [t]

can be pronounced, so the correct spelling of these words,
by our principle, would be with f. Again, some th spellings
are correct (e.g. th is correct in 'nothing') and others are
not (e.g. the correct spelling of 'ether' would be efer).

But in deciding that some conventional th spellings are
incorrect, we are overlooking an important part of the evi-
dence. By far the majority of the people who use the [f]
pronunciation of conventionally spelled th do so only part of
the time. The rest of the time, [θ] is used. It could be
argued that the [θ] pronunciation is a borrowing from Stan-
dard English and has nothing to do with Black English pho-
nology. If this were the case, one would expect hypercor-
rection to extend the [θ] pronunciation to other words with
[f], so that one would observe not only both [wɪf] and [wɪθ]
for 'with', but [ɔf] and [ɔθ] for 'off'. But this does not
happen, since pronunciations like [ɔθ] are never heard.
Clearly, Black English speakers know which words are which.
The problem is how to account for this knowledge in a lin-
guistic description of the dialect. There are at least three
possible solutions. One of these would be to allow the lexi-
cal entries of the words which are sometimes pronounced with
[θ] to be marked as loanwords from Standard English which,
as a result, do not follow the constraints of Black English
phonology. The implication is that there are two words
'with'. One is given the underlying representation)wif(,
and is marked as a native word. The other is represented as
)wiθ(, and is marked as a loanword exempt from the ordinary
Black English constraints on the distribution of [θ].

Another solution is to assume that a speaker who uses
both [f] and [θ] pronunciations is really a bilingual. Any
sentence containing a [θ] pronunciation in medial or final
position is not a Black English sentence at all; rather, the
speaker has switched to his other language, Standard English.

However, there are innumerable cases in which a word spelled
with a final or medial th is pronounced with a [θ], but this
is the only feature in the entire sentence which must be con-
sidered Standard. To refer to this sort of situation as an
example of bilingual code-switching would make the concept of
code-switching meaningless.

The third solution is probably the best one. Since we
have already seen that there is intradialectal motivation for
recognizing underlying)θ(in some words which actually are
pronounced with [f], we could merely extend the device to
words which never are pronounced with [t] but sometimes are
pronounced with [θ].

There is even more evidence that the alternation between
[θ] and [f] is an integral part of the structure of Black Eng-
lish. Wolfram has shown that there are markedly more instances
of the [θ] pronunciation if the segment is in medial position
than if it is in final position.[18] This is the natural situ-
ation for the application of what Labov calls the variable
rule.[19] Labov observed that the frequency of application of
a phonological rule is often systematically determined by the
environment. He has formulated a modification of phonological
rule form in generative phonology so that the relative fre-
quency of application according to environment can be formally
indicated. It seems clear that such a rule for the variation
between [f] and [θ] is part of Black English phonology. This
being the case, word-medial and word-final)θ(is to be marked
in the underlying representation and undergoes this variable
rule. Underlying word-medial and word-final)f(does not.
These arguments lead us to the conclusion that the th spelling
is correct for Black English for virtually all words which are
spelled conventionally in this way.[20]

Another example of the relationship of phonological rule
to conventional orthography is the case of the final stop

devoicing in Black English. Words ending in final voiced
stops in the standard dialect end in the corresponding voice-
less stop in Black English. However, the preceding vowel
nucleus of such words is long in duration, like the vowel
nuclei of words ending in voiced consonants in Standard Eng-
lish. Thus the word 'bit' in Black English is pronounced
[bɪt] while 'bid' is pronounced [bɪːt]. At first it seems
that we have a contrastive difference in vowel length in
Black English, but a consonantal contrast in Standard Eng-
lish. However, we find that the lengthening rule for vowels
before voiced segments operates in Black English before
laterals ([bɪːl] 'bill', but [bɪt] 'bit') and before stops
in non-final position ([bɪːgə] 'bigger' but [bɪkə] 'bicker').
This would suggest that the proper phonemic analysis would
be to allow both /d/ and /t/ to have the allophone [t] in
word-final position, with vowel lengthening before the [t]
of /d/ but not before the [t] of /t/. Such an analysis runs
afoul of the classical problem of phonemic overlapping.[21]
Another possible solution would be to posit phonemic vowel
length, but this would not allow the expression of the
generality about the lengthening of vowels before non-final
voiced consonants. This solution, of course, would render
the conventional spelling bid of 'bid' incorrect by the pho-
nemic spelling principle. If phonemic analysis is abandoned,
there is no problem. The underlying form of these words
clearly has the voiced stop, and there are two ordered rules
in the phonology of Black English such that the first leng-
thens vowels before voiced segments and the second devoices
a word-final stop consonant. The first rule is shared with
Standard English, but the second is peculiar to Black Eng-
lish. Again, the result is that the conventional spelling
is correct for Black English.

A third example of the relationship of phonological

rules to conventional orthography is found in connection with
the Black English pronunciation of words which end in a clus-
ter of [s] plus a voiceless stop in Standard English.[22] In
Black English, there is no trace of the stop member of such
clusters. Thus, 'desk' is pronounced [dɛs], 'risk' is pro-
nounced [rɪs] and 'test' is pronounced [tɛs]. The question
which needs to be answered is whether or not the final stop
is present in the underlying representation. The answer will
automatically solve the concomitant problem concerning whether
the spellings desk, risk and test are correct for Black Eng-
lish.

Examination of the plurals of these words indicates that
the stop member of the clusters is not present in the under-
lying representations. The plurals of these forms are typi-
cally pronounced [dɛsɪz], [rɪsɪz], and [tɛsɪz], respectively.
As is well known, there are three forms of the English plural,
depending on the preceding segment. If this segment is voiced,
the plural form is [z], as in 'dogs' [dɔgz]. If it is voice-
less, the plural is [s], as in 'cats' [kæts]. If the final
segment is a sibilant, the plural is [ɪz], as in 'horses'
[hɔrsɪz]. The use of [ɪz] as the plural marker for words like
'desk', 'risk' and 'test' indicates that there is no final
stop consonant present in their underlying representations in
Black English. If it were otherwise, the expected plurals
would be [dɛss], [rɪss] and [tɛss], respectively.[23] These
plurals would arise by application of the following operations:

Underlying representation:	desk + z
Voicing assimilation:	desk + s
Final cluster simplification:	des + s
Boundary deletion:	dess

However, if the underlying representation does not contain a
final stop consonant, the derivation is as follows:

Underlying representation:	des + z
Vowel epenthesis:	des + ɪz
Boundary deletion:	desɪz

But another set of facts complicates the picture. If a
suffix beginning with a vowel is added to these forms, the
final stop consonant is articulated by the majority of Black
English speakers. Thus we get the pronunciations [tɛstɨn]
and [rɪskiy] for 'testing' and 'risky'. The conclusion sug-
gested by these forms would seem to be that the underlying
representation must contain the final stop consonant, which
seems to contradict the conclusion suggested by the plural
forms. But both the plural forms and the vowel-suffix forms
can be explained if the underlying representations include
the final consonant and the rules are properly ordered.
Something like the following three rules are needed:

1. Consonant-cluster simplification:

   $sC_{st} \Rightarrow s$ in env. _____ $(+X)\#$, where X does not begin
   with a vowel

2. Epenthesis:

   $Z + Z \Rightarrow Z + ɨZ$ in env. _____ $\#$

3. Boundary deletion:

   boundary $\Rightarrow \emptyset$

Rule 1 states that of two consonants at the end of a
word (# symbolizes word boundary) such that the second is a
stop (symbolized by C_{st}) and the first is)s(, the stop is
deleted, unless followed by a suffix which begins with a
vowel. The epenthesis rule (Rule 2) states that the vowel
[ɨ] is inserted before a suffix which consists only of a
sibilant (symbolized by Z) if the stem ends in a sibilant.
Rule 3 deletes boundaries and is an ad hoc summary of what
is a general process in the grammars of natural languages.
Given these rules, the derivation of 'test', 'tests', and
'testing' in Black English is as follows:

Rule	test	tests	testing
underlying form	#test#	#test+z#	#test+ɨn#
1	#tes#	#tes+z#	(not applicable)
2	(not applicable)	#tes+ɨz#	(not applicable)
3	[tɛs]	[tɛsɨz]	[tɛstɨn]

The crucial factor in the application of the above rules
is the ordering of Rules 1 and 2. A vowel-initial suffix
must be present when the consonant-cluster deletion rule
takes effect in 'testing', but not in the derivation of
'tests'. This result is achieved by allowing epenthesis to
apply after cluster deletion. However, all the facts are
accounted for only if the underlying form is recognized as
including the stop member of the cluster. Again we see that
the conventional spelling is the correct one for Black Eng-
lish.[24]

But there are a number of Black English speakers for
whom the above rules are not appropriate. Some speakers pro-
nounce the above three forms as [tɛs], [tɛsɨz] and [tɛsn̩],
respectively. For these speakers, there is no reason to set
up underlying forms which contain a final stop. That is, the
underlying form for 'test' is)tes(. As a result, the cor-
rect spelling would be tes, and the conventional spelling
test is anomalous.[24]

The problem for the educator then is to identify which
speakers fail to have the standard underlying form for these
words. It is very easy to determine this by means of a short
diagnostic test.

With a few marginal exceptions, there is no reason to
develop a special orthography just for Black English speakers.
Because of the possible lack of certain crucial lexical items
in the vocabularies of children in general, it may prove
advisable to use some sort of modified orthography in teach-
ing all young children to read. But in the main, conventional
English orthography is as adequate for Black English speakers
as it is for Standard English speakers.[25]

We suggest that reading be taught to Black English speak-
ers in three stages. At the first stage, reading passages
would be contolled so as to include only words whose abstract

and surface representations and conventional spellings are
largely the same. This would mean that most of the words
would be monosyllabic words without radically different
morphemic alternants. At this stage, the reader learns the
principles of sound-symbol association. At the next stage,
correct and conventional spellings which do not match the
phonetics of the words as pronounced would be introduced.
These words should be chosen so as to be only words for which
the children are likely to know the relevant morphemic alter-
nants. They would be introduced without apology for their
failure to conform to surface pronunciation. Theoretically,
this stage should be completely unobtrusive to the pupil,
but this remains to be seen. The final stage would involve
the introduction of words whose conventional spellings are
not correct, but only after the basic reading and spelling
principles have been firmly established.

Although our view of spelling correctness and the nature
of the reading process in its beginning stages leads us to
the conclusion that there should be no special difficulties
for Black English speakers in reading caused by the way words
are spelled, this definitely does not mean that there is no
problem and that there is no necessity for teachers to make
special adjustments in teaching reading to Black English
speakers. The adjustments must come in teacher-training and
teacher behavior in the classroom. Teachers must be brought
to the realization of two important facts. First, the teach-
ing of reading and the teaching of spoken Standard English
are two completely different jobs. Second, the correct way
to pronounce certain spellings in Black English is not the
same as the correct way to pronounce them in Standard Eng-
lish. A good example is the word 'test', which we have just
discussed. Even for those Black speakers for whom the cor-
rect spelling is test, the correct pronunciation is [tɛs].

A child who reads <u>test</u> is [tɛs] should be praised for his
complete mastery of the reading process, not condemned for
"leaving out the <u>t</u>". The practice of condemning Black Eng-
lish speaking children when they correctly read words in
their dialect can do considerable harm.

An illustration of the effect of this kind of teaching
from the point of view of a speaker of Standard English
might be instructive. The word 'basically' is spelled <u>basi-</u>
<u>cally</u> but pronounced [beysɨkliy]. There is a phonological
rule in English to delete the underlying)æl(in this en-
vironment. Therefore the Standard English speaking child
who knows how to read, reads the spelling <u>basically</u> correctly
as [beysɨkliy]. Since his teacher speaks the same dialect
as he does, he is not likely to be contradicted in this pro-
nunciation. But suppose he were to be told that he has made
a mistake in reading this word because he left out the letters
<u>al</u> and that he should have read [beysɨkæliy]. In addition,
he is made to feel foolish because he has failed to react to
two letters which are clearly present on the printed page.
Yet, he knows full well that [beysɨkæliy] is not the correct
pronunciation, because it does not conform to his knowledge
of English, nor do people around him pronounce the word in
this way. As a result, he doubts an important principle of
reading, which he is beginning to learn, namely, that words
can be identified by spelling which reflects their under-
lying representation and should be pronounced according to
the ordinary rules of English phonology.

If the child were consistently corrected in this way,
he might learn a different principle of reading. This new
principle would be that words are indeed identified by their
spellings which reflect underlying forms, but that oral
reading is unlike speaking in that one suspends certain rules
in English phonology so as to make surface pronunciation of

words more closely approximate their underlying forms. The
introduction of this complication would be pointless, but if
the child were to be consistently corrected in this way, he
could still learn to read.

The problem for the Black English speaking child is that
the corrections he receives are not consistent. When he reads
basically as [beysɨkliy], his reading is acceptable, reinforc-
ing the correct principle of reading. But when he is told
that [tɛst] rather than [tɛs] is the correct way to read
test, the above spurious principle of oral reading is rein-
forced. Not being a speaker of Standard English, he has no
way of knowing why some words are to be read according to one
principle and others according to another. As a result, the
child is likely to conclude that there is actually no prin-
ciple at all. Since there is no way to determine the rela-
tionship between written symbols and their pronunciation,
wild guessing is the only way to seek the teacher's approval.
Since wild guessing so rarely produces the desired approval,
complete despair may well be the next step.

This difficulty can be overcome by training teachers in
Black English pronunciations so that they will consistently
accept words that are correctly read according to the rules
of Black English phonology. This means that [wɪf] is a cor-
rect reading for with, [bɪ:t] is the right way to read bid
and that test is properly read as [tɛs].[26]

An accurate understanding of orthography is obviously
not the whole answer to the problem of teaching reading to
inner-city Negro children. The problems of education in the
inner-city are too intricately involved with issues of social
injustice and deprivation to yield to a single solution.
Nevertheless, an understanding of the relationship of spelling
to speaking is crucial in our attempts to improve reading
instruction for inner-city children.

NOTES

1. For examples of these arguments, see Noam A. Chomsky,
    Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, (The Hague: Mouton,
    1964), and Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle, "Some Contro-
    versial Questions in Phonological Theory", Journal of
    Linguistics 1 (1965) p. 97-138.

2. Even this is not quite right, since the first t repre-
    sents a segment which need only be partially specified.

3. Richard Stanley, "Redundancy Rules in Phonology", Language
    43 (1967) p. 393-436. Stanley's proposal is adopted by
    Chomsky and Halle as an "interim solution"; see Noam
    Chomsky and Morris Halle, The Sound Pattern of English
    (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 385-389. Objection
    to the phonemic spelling principle is not limited to
    generative phonologists, however. See, for example,
    Martin Joos, Review of Axel Wijk, Regularized English in
    Language 36 (1960) p. 250-262, and Henry Lee Smith, Jr.,
    "The Concept of the Morphophone", Language 43 (1967)
    p. 318-322.

4. This suggestion will have to be refined somewhat. One
    such refinement seems to be that the application of cer-
    tain low-level optional phonological rules will have to
    be reflected in the orthography. Thus we find contraction
    indicated in the spelling He's (here), I've (got it) and
    doesn't. In places where Black English has such optional
    rules which are missing in Standard English, this may mean
    that the apostrophe should be used in Black English where
    it is not used in Standard English. Certain manifestations
    of the '-ed' suffix may be deleted by an optional low-level
    rule in Black English. This may mean that the Black Eng-
    lish sentence [yɛstɨdey hiy kʌs ælbɨt awt] should be writ-
    ten Yesterday, he cuss' Albert out.

5. These arguments appear in Chomsky and Halle, op. cit.,
    passim, but see especially p. 3-55.

6. Words like 'put' and 'cushion' are true exceptions to this
    generalization. That is, each such lexical entry must be
    marked as exempt from the rules which govern the comple-
    mentary distribution.

7. See Chomsky and Halle, op. cit., p. 203-205, for the
    details of this argument.

8.   <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 46-47.

9.   <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 49.

10. Those who teach reading by the "whole word" method expect
     the reader to associate the printed word with the spoken
     word by the general configuration of the written word
     rather than by relating letters to phonological segments.
     The implicit assumption of this method is that English is
     written like Chinese and that the writing system has
     morphological and not phonological reference. As a matter
     of fact, English is <u>not</u> written in this way, but that in
     itself is no reason to assume that people cannot success-
     fully learn to read as if it were.

11. Carl Lefevre, <u>Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading</u>
     (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) p. 73.

12. We assume that reading with this interpretation will be
     easier for the straightforward reason that English writing
     clearly <u>does</u> refer to the phonological structure of words.

13. As Chomsky and Halle point out, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 50.

14. I had the experience of working in a ghetto tutoring pro-
     gram in which a well-meaning teacher often greeted the
     utterance of a distinctively Black English sentence by
     the children with the remark, "Now say it in English".
     The remark was invariably met with bewildered silence.
     The point is that the youngsters did not know the "Eng-
     lish" she was referring to and she assumed they did.

15. <u>Op. cit.</u>, p. 54.

16. William A. Stewart, "Sociolinguistic Factors in the His-
     tory of American Negro Dialects", <u>Florida FL Reporter</u>
     Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 1967).

17. William A. Stewart, "Foreign Language Teaching Methods
     in Quasi-Foreign Language Situations", in William A.
     Stewart (ed.) <u>Non-Standard Speech and the Teaching of
     English</u> (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics,
     1964), p. 1-14.

18. Walter A. Wolfram, <u>A Sociolinguistic Description of
     Detroit Negro Speech</u> (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied
     Linguistics, to appear).

19. William Labov, "Contraction, Deletion and Inherent Variability of the English Copula" (New York: mimeographed, 1968).

20. There may be a small minority of Black English speakers who do not have the systematic variation between [θ] and [f]. But even these speakers have the variation between [f] and [t]. For these speakers, the conventional spelling th in with is correct, although it may not be for tooth.

    We have said nothing about [ð] and [v]. Many of the arguments which apply to [f] and [θ] also apply to their voiced counterparts, although the situation is a little less clear.

21. For discussion of this point, see Wolfram, op. cit.

22. This is a special case of a more general matter involving final clusters of continuant plus stop in which the voicing of both members is the same.

23. It turns out that these actually are the plural forms of these words for many English speakers of both races and of all social classes.

24. This argument is essentially that given in William Labov, "A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City, Volume I: Phonological and Grammatical Analysis", Final Report, Cooperative Research Project No. 3288 (New York: Columbia University [1968]), p. 131-133; cf. also Labov's addition to the text of his article "Some Sources of Reading Problems for Negro Speakers of Nonstandard English" as reprinted in this volume, especially pages 49-50.

25. These examples might lead the reader to the conclusion that we are deriving Black English forms from their Standard English counterparts. However, this is not the case. The Black English pronunciations are being derived from Black English underlying phonological forms which happen to resemble Standard English pronunciations. But the evidence for positing the Black English underlying forms comes entirely from within the dialect itself.

26. This procedure has been suggested in Kenneth S. Goodman's article "Dialect Barriers to Reading Comprehension", reprinted in this volume (see pages 14-28).

TEACHING READING IN AN URBAN NEGRO SCHOOL SYSTEM

by Joan C. Baratz

The inner-city Negro child is failing in our schools. His
inability to read is a major challenge to contemporary edu-
cators because of its relationship to the child's self-esteem
and his ultimate social effectiveness.

Failure to acquire functionally adequate reading skills
not only contributes to alienation from the school as a social
institution (and therefore encourages dropping out), but it
goes on to insure failure in mainstream job success. There
is certainly a relationship between reading success or failure
on the one hand, and receptivity to or alienation from the
society in which those reading skills are highly valued
(Labov and Robins, 1967). It is almost impossible to under-
estimate the chain of reactions which can be touched off by
early and continued educational failure which so many dis-
advantaged Negro children experience in even the most well-
intentioned schools. Because the educational system has been
ineffective in coping with teaching inner-city children to
read, it treats reading failure (in terms of grading, ranking,
etc.) as if this failure were due to intellectual deficits of
the child rather than to methodological inadequacies in teach-
ing procedures. Thus the system is unable to teach the child
to read, but very quickly teaches him to regard himself as
intellectually inadequate, and therefore, of low self-worth
and low social value.

Despite the enormous expenditure of energy in remedial

reading programs, children in the ghetto are still not learn-
ing to read (National Advisory Council on Education of the
Disadvantaged, 1966). Although the difficulties of teaching
reading to a portion of the population is a unique problem
for the United States, the problem itself is not unique.
The parallels are quite clear between the difficulty we are
experiencing in teaching reading to the disadvantaged Negro
child with those of emergent countries which are attempting
to make a multi-cultured population literate in a single
national tongue.

In his recent report on the Washington, D.C. School
System, Passow (1967) indicated that the central question that
must be answered is: "What are the educationally relevant dif-
ferences which the District's pupils bring into the classroom
and what kinds of varied educational experiences must be pro-
vided by the schools to accommodate these differences?" One
major educationally relevant difference for Washington, D.C.,
as for ghettos across the nation, is that of language. The
Negro ghetto child is speaking a significantly different lan-
guage from that of his middle-class teachers. Most of his
middle-class teachers have wrongly viewed his language as
pathological, disordered, "lazy speech". This failure to
recognize the interference from the child's different lin-
guistic system, and consequent negative teacher attitudes
towards the child and his language, lead directly to reading
difficulties and subsequent school failure. Understanding
that the inner-city child speaks a language that is well-
ordered, but different in many respects from standard English,
is crucial to understanding how to educate him. Unfortunately,
there is a tendency for the educator to think of the black
child with his non-standard speech as a "verbal cripple" whose
restricted language leads to, or is caused by, cognitive defi-
cits.

If we look briefly at the research and research assumptions concerning the language of Negro children, we can see how this erroneous notion of verbal inadequacy evolved.

When reviewing the literature, one finds three major professions concerned with describing the language and cognitive abilities of black children: educators, psychologists (mainly child development specialists), and linguists. The educators were the first to contribute a statement about the language difficulties of these children -- a statement that amounted to the assertion that these children were virtually verbally destitute, i.e. they couldn't talk, and if they did, it was deviant speech, filled with "errors". The next group to get into the foray -- the psychologists -- reconfirmed initially that the children didn't talk, and then added the sophisticated wrinkle that if they did talk, their speech was such that it was a deterrent to cognitive growth. The last group to come into the picture were the linguists, who, though thoroughly impressed with the sophisticated research of the psychologist, were astonished at the naïveté of his pronouncements concerning language. The linguist began to examine the language of black children and brought us to our current conceptions of the language abilities of these children, namely, that they speak a well-ordered, highly structured, highly developed language system which in many aspects is different from standard English.

We have a fascinating situation here where three professions are assessing the same behavior -- the child's oral language production and comprehension -- but with varying assumptions, so that they see different things. However, it is not merely another example of the parable of the six blind men describing the elephant and asserting that an elephant equaled that portion of the elephant that the blind man happened to be touching -- for in the parable all men were

partially correct, and an elephant could be adequately des-
cribed in the sum total of their "observations". But when we
look at the assumptions of the educator, the psychologist,
and the linguist, we find that there are actually some prem-
ises held by one profession, e.g. the psychologists' view
that a language system could be underdeveloped, that another
profession sees as completely untenable, e.g. linguists, who
consider such a view of language so absurd as to make them
feel that nobody could possibly believe it and therefore to
refute it would be a great waste of time. The educator
worked under the assumption that there is a single correct
way of speaking and that everyone who does not speak in this
"grammar book" fashion is in error. (Indeed, although the
psychologist may not recognize it, he tacitly adheres to this
principle when he defines language development in terms of
"correct" standard English usage.) This assumption is also
untenable to the linguist, who is interested in the structure
and function of an utterance. To him the discussion of a
hierarchial system that says that a double negative, e.g.
they don' have none, is inferior to a single negative, e.g.
they haven't any, is meaningless. The linguist simply wishes
to describe the rules of the system that allow a speaker of
that system to generate a negative utterance -- or any other
complex structure -- that is considered grammatical and is
understood as intended, by the speakers of the system.

The linguist takes it as basic that all humans develop
language -- after all, there is no reason to assume that black
African bush children develop a language and black inner-city
Harlem children do not! Subsumed under this is that the lan-
guage is a well-ordered system with a predictable sound pat-
tern, grammatical structure and vocabulary (in this sense,
there are no "primitive" languages). The linguist assumes
that any verbal system used by a community that fulfills the

above requirements is a language and that no language is
structurally better than any other language, i.e. French is
not better than German, Yiddish is not better than Gaelic,
Oxford English is not better than standard English, etc.
The second assumption of the linguist is that children learn
language in the context of their environment -- that is to
say, a French child learns French not because his father is
in the home or his mother reads him books, but because that
is the language that he hears continually from whatever source
and that is the language that individuals in his environment
respond to. The third assumption that the linguist works
with is that by the time a child is five he has developed
language -- he has learned the rules of his linguistic en-
vironment.

What are those rules and how have they been determined?
By using ghetto informants, linguists such as Stewart (1964,
1965, 1967, 1968), Dillard (1966, 1967), Bailey (1965, 1968),
Labov (1967), Loman (1967) and Shuy, Wolfram and Riley (1968)
have described some of the linguistic parameters of Negro
non-standard English. Differences between standard English
and Negro non-standard occur to varying degrees in regard to
the sound system, grammar and vocabulary.

Although Negro non-standard has many phonemes similar
to those of standard English, the distribution of these pho-
nemes varies from standard English. For example, /i/ and
/e/ may not be distinguished before nasals, so that a "pin"
in Negro non-standard may be either an instrument for writing
a letter or something one uses to fasten a baby's diaper.
Sounds such as 'r' and 'l' are distributed so that 'cat' may
mean that orange vegetable that one puts in salads -- standard
English carrot -- as well as the four-legged fuzzy animal, or
a "big black dude". The reduction of /l/ and /r/ in many
positions may create such homonyms as "toe" meaning a digit

on the foot, or the church bell sound -- standard English
<u>toll</u>. Final clusters are reduced in Negro non-standard so
that "bowl" is used to describe either a vessel for cereal
or a very brave soldier -- standard English <u>bold</u>.

These are but a few of the many instances where Negro
non-standard sound usage differs from standard English. It
is no wonder then, that Cynthia Deutsch (1964) should find
in her assessment of auditory discrimination that disadvan-
taged black children did not "discriminate" as well as white
children from middle-class linguistic environments. She ad-
ministered a discrimination task that equated "correct res-
ponses" with judgments of equivalences and differences in
standard English sound usage. Many of her stimuli, though
different for the standard English speaker, e.g. <u>pin</u>-<u>pen</u>,
are similar for the Negro non-standard speaker. She attribu-
ted the difference in performance of disadvantaged children
to such things as the constant blare of the television in
their homes and there being so much "noise" in their en-
vironment that the children tended to "tune out". However,
black children make responses based on the kind of language
they consider appropriate. In the same way that <u>cot</u> (for
sleeping), <u>caught</u> (for ensnared); or <u>marry</u> (to wed), <u>Mary</u>
(the girl), and <u>merry</u> (to be happy) are not distinguished in
the speech of many white people (so that they would say on
an auditory discrimination test that <u>cot</u> and <u>caught</u> were the
same), <u>pin</u> and <u>pen</u> are the same in the language of ghetto
blacks. The responses that the black child makes are on the
basis of the sound usage that he has learned in his social
and geographical milieu, and do not reflect some difficulty
in discriminating.

The syntax of low-income Negro children also differs
from standard English in many ways (unfortunately the psy-
chologist, not knowing the rules of Negro non-standard has

interpreted these differences not as the result of well-
learned rules, but as evidence of "linguistic underdevelop-
ment").   Some examples of the differences are provided below:

1. When you have a numerical quantifier such as 2, 7,
    50, etc., you don't have to add the obligatory mor-
    phemes for the plural, e.g. <u>50 cent</u>; <u>2 foot</u>.

2. The use of the possessive marker is different. For
    example, the standard English speaker says "John's
    cousin"; the non-standard Negro speaker says <u>John</u>
    <u>cousin</u>. The possessive is marked here by the con-
    tiguous relationship of <u>John</u> and <u>cousin</u>.

3. The third person singular has no obligatory morpho-
    logical ending in non-standard, so that "she works
    here" is expressed as <u>she work here</u> in Negro non-
    standard.

4. Verb agreement differs, so that one says <u>she have a</u>
    <u>bike</u>, <u>they was going</u>.

5. The use of the copula is not obligatory -- <u>I going</u>;
    <u>he a bad boy</u>.

6. The rules for negation are different. The double
    negative is used: standard English "I don't have
    any" becomes <u>I don' got none</u> in Negro non-standard.

7. The use of "ain't" in expression of the past --
    Negro non-standard present tense is <u>he don't go</u>,
    past tense is <u>he ain't go</u>.

8. The use of "be" to express habitual action -- <u>he</u>
    <u>working right now</u> as contrasted with <u>he be working</u>
    <u>every day</u>.

These are just a few of the rules that the non-standard speaker
employs to produce utterances that are grammatical for other
speakers in his environment.

Baratz and Povich (1967) assessed the language develop-
ment of a group of five-year-old black Head Start children.

They analyzed speech responses to photographs and to CAT
cards, using Lee's (1967) developmental sentence types model.
A comparison of their data and Menyuk's (1964) restricted and
transformational types of white middle-class children was per-
formed. Results indicated that the Negro Head Start child is
not delayed in language acquisition -- the majority of his
utterances are on the kernel and transformational levels of
Lee's developmental model. His transformational utterances
are similar to those appearing above -- he has learned the
many complicated structures of Negro non-standard English.

But how did the psychologist manage to come to the
erroneous conclusion that the black child has an insufficient
or underdeveloped linguistic system? The psychologist's
basic problem was that his measures of "language development"
were measures based on standard English (Bereiter, 1965;
Thomas, 1964; Deutsch, 1964; Klaus and Gray, 1968). From
these he concluded that since black children do not speak
standard English, they must be deficient in language develop-
ment.

Despite the misconceptions of the educator and psychol-
ogist concerning language and linguistic competence, the
linguists for their part have described the differences be-
tween Negro non-standard and standard English in some detail.
The following is a list of some of the syntactic differences
between the two systems:

Variable	Standard English	Negro Non-Standard
Linking verb	He is going.	He __ goin'.
Possessive marker	John's cousin.	John_ cousin.
Plural marker	I have five cents.	I got five cent_.
Subject expression	John_lives in New York.	John he live in New York.
Verb form	I drank the milk.	I drunk the milk.
Past marker	Yesterday he walked home.	Yesterday he walk_ home.

Verb agreement	He runs home.	He run_ home.
	She has a bicycle.	She have a bicycle.
Future form	I will go home.	I'ma go home.
"If" construction	I asked if he did it.	I ask did he do it.
Negation	I don't have any.	I don't got none.
	He didn't go.	He ain't go.
Indefinite article	I want an apple.	I want a apple.
Pronoun form	We have to do it.	Us got to do it.
	His book.	He book.
Preposition	He is over at his friend's house.	He over to his friend house.
	He teaches at Francis Pool.	He teach _ Francis Pool.
Be	Statement: He is here all the time.	Statement: He be here.
Do	Contradiction: No, he isn't.	Contradiction: No, he don't.

But what of these differences? All the linguists studying
Negro non-standard English agree that these differences are
systematized structured rules within the vernacular; they
agree that these differences can interfere with the learning
of standard English, but they do not always agree as to the
precise nature of these different rules. This leads to
varied disagreements as to why a particular feature exists
(i.e. phoneme deletion vs. creolization), but it does not
dispute the fact that the linguistic feature is present.
No one would fail to agree that standard English has a gram-
matical structure and uniqueness, and many descriptions of
that structure have been written. Yet it is probably true
that no two linguists would agree in all details on how to
write the grammar. This equally explains the current contro-
versy among linguists as to how one writes the grammar of
Negro non-standard English.

This language _difference_, not deficiency, must be con-
sidered in the educational process of the black ghetto child.
In 1953, the UNESCO report regarding the role of language in
education stated that: "It is axiomatic that the best medium
for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically,
it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works
automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologi-
cally, it is a means of identification among the members of
the community to which he belongs. Educationally he learns
more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar medium."

Since 1953, studies implementing the recommendations of
the UNESCO report have clearly illustrated the importance of
considering the vernacular in teaching reading in the national
language (Modiano, 1965). It seems clear that a structural
knowledge of non-standard vernacular and the ways it can
interfere with learning to speak and read standard English
are indispensable to teaching ghetto Negro children. Goodman
(1965) and Bailey (1965), along with Stewart, have all dis-
cussed the possibility of interference from the dialect on
acquiring the ability to read. Labov (1967) has also stressed
that the "ignorance of standard English rules on the part of
the speakers of standard English" and the "ignorance of non-
standard English rules on the part of teachers and text
writers" may well be the cause for the reading failures that
occur in the schools. In addition, Wiener and Cromer (1967)
in their article on reading and reading difficulty discussed
the need to determine the relationship between language dif-
ferences and reading problems, because a failure to be ex-
plicit about the relationship between reading and previously
acquired auditory language often leads to ambiguities as to
whether a particular difficulty is a reading problem, language
problem, or both.

But does the black non-standard speaker have to contend

with interference from his own dialect on his performance in standard English? The following experiment clearly suggests that he does.

The subjects in this experiment were third and fifth graders from two schools in the Washington, D.C. area. One was an inner-city, impact-aid school; all the children in this school were Negroes. The other was a school in Maryland, located in an integrated low-middle-income community; all the children from that school were white.

	Negro	White	Total
Third Grade	15	15	30
Fifth Grade	15	15	30
	30	30	60

A sentence repetition test was constructed that contained 30 sentences, 15 in standard English and 15 in Negro nonstandard. The sentences were presented on tape to each 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:

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 any more.

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 buy 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 Connecticut 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 Connecticut Avenue.

Each subject was asked to repeat exactly what he heard as
best he 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 Eng-
lish. After each of these stimuli, the subject was asked to
identify who was speaking from among a group of pictures con-
taining Negro and white men, women, boys and girls, and an
Oriental girl.

The data were analyzed to ascertain what happened to the
following constructions:

Standard Constructions	Non-standard Constructions
Third person singular	Non-addition of third person -s
Presence of copula	Zero copula
Negation	Double negation; and "ain't"
If + subject + verb	Zero "if" + verb + subject
Past markers	Zero past morpheme
Possessive marker	Zero possessive morpheme
Plural	Use of "be"

1. Analysis of variance on repetition of standard construc-
   tions.

The data concerning repetition of the seven standard
constructions were subjected to a Winer (1962) multifactor
repeated measures analysis of variance (Table 1). The fac-
tors under study were: A, race -- Negro vs. white perform-
ance; B, age -- third graders vs. fifth graders; and C,
grammatical feature -- the seven standard constructions
listed above. The analysis of variance indicated that race,
grammatical feature and the interaction of race and gram-
matical feature were significant beyond the .001 level. The
interaction of age and grammatical feature was significant
at the .05 level.

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
A x B	1.00	1	1.00	2.22
Subjects within groups	25.22	56	.45	
Within subjects				
C	69.98	6	11.66	31.61*
A x C	39.49	6	6.58	21.23*
B x C	4.46	6	.74	2.39**
A x B x C	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

White subjects were significantly better than Negro sub-
jects in repeating standard English sentences. A Scheffé
test (Edwards, 1962) 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" construction. In addition, the plural
feature was significantly more accurate than the third person

singular and the possessive. The significant A x C inter-
action, race and grammatical feature, was most readily ex-
plained by the significant difference between Negro and white
performance on the following grammatical categories: third
person singular, copula, "if" construction, and negation.
The B x C interaction, age and grammatical feature, was
mostly due to the significant difference in performance at
grade three and grade five of the "if" 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 fea-
ture, and the interaction of race and grammatical feature
were all significant beyond the .001 level.

Negro subjects did significantly better than white sub-
jects in repeating Negro non-standard sentences. A Scheffé
test for multiple comparisons of factor C, grammatical fea-
tures, indicated that most of the significant variance could
be ascribed to the differential performance of subjects on
the "if" construction. 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 "if" and the double negative constructions (Table 4).

3. Identification of race of the speaker.

Of the third graders, 73.3% identified the standard
sentence as being spoken by a white man, and 73.3 identified

Table 2

Scheffé Results of Standard English Sentences Analysis

Factor C

Third person	"To be"	"If"	Past Marker	Possessive	Plural	Negation
143.40	155.67	76.65	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" construction is significantly different from all other constructions at the .05 level.

Factor A x C

	Third person	"To be"	"If"	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", and negation constructions at the .05 level.

Factor B x C

	Third person	"To be"	"If"	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 and fifth graders on the "if" construction was significantly different from their performance on the plural and the possessive

Table 3

Analysis of Variance of Negro Non-Standard Sentences

	ss	df	ms	f
Between subjects				
A	73.20	1	73.20	66.55*
B	.53	1	.53	.48
A x B	.01	1	.01	.009
Subjects within groups	61.63	56	1.10	
Within subjects				
C	44.34	6	7.39	13.19*
A x C	39.49	6	6.58	11.75*
B x C	.82	6	.14	.25
A x B x C	3.42	6	.57	1.02
C x subjects within groups	188.83	336	.56	
Total	412.27	419		

* Significant beyond the .001 level

Table 4

Scheffé Results of Negro Non-Standard English Sentences Analysis

Factor C

Third person	Be	Zero Copula	"If"	Past Marker	Double Negative	Possessive
	54.48	106.61	109.30	80.93	109.57	73.06
86.79						

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

Factor A x C

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

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

the non-standard sentence as being spoken by a Negro. Of the
fifth graders, 83.3% judged the standard sentence as being
spoken by a white man, while 93.3% judged the non-standard
sentence as being spoken by a Negro. Eighty percent of the
white children and 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.

In responding to standard English sentences, white
speakers did significantly better than black speakers. How-
ever, in examining the black child's "errors", it became evi-
dent that he didn't fail utterly to complete the sentence;
he didn't jumble his response, nor did he use a "word salad".
His "error" responses were consistent, e.g. in response to
the stimulus: "I asked Tom <u>if he wanted</u> to go to the picture
that was playing at the Howard", 97% of the children res-
ponded with: "I aks Tom <u>did he wanna</u> go to the picture at the
Howard". In response to: "<u>Does</u> Deborah like to play with the
girl that <u>sits</u> next to her in school", 60% of the Negro chil-
dren responded: "<u>Do</u> Deborah like to play wif the girl what
<u>sit</u> next to her in school".

This same behavior was evident in the white subjects
when asked to repeat Negro non-standard sentences. Black
children were superior to white children in repeating these
stimuli. Here again the "error" responses followed a definite
pattern, e.g. in response to the stimulus: "I aks Tom do he
wanna go to the picture that be playin' at the Howard", 78%
of the white children said: "I asked Tom if he wanted to go
to the picture that was playing at the Howard". Similar
"translations" to standard English occurred on the other
Negro non-standard constructions.

The fact that the standard and non-standard speakers
exhibited similar "translation" behaviors when confronted

with sentences that were outside of their primary code indi-
cates quite clearly that the "language deficiency" that has
so often 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" the two groups made (e.g. white
subjects adding the third person -s to non-standard stimuli
and Negroes deleting the third person -s on standard stimuli)
represent an intrusion of one language code (the dominant
system) upon the structure of the other code (the newly-
acquired system). If, indeed, non-standard were not a struc-
tured system with well-ordered rules, one would expect that
Negro children would not be able to repeat the non-standard
structures any better than did the white children, and one
would also expect that non-standard patterns would not emerge
systematically when lower-class Negroes responded to standard
sentences. Neither of these expectations was 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;
they responded significantly better to standard structures
and exhibited systematic standard patterns when responding
to non-standard stimuli.

The results of this research clearly indicate that (1)
there are two dialects involved in the education complex of
black children (especially in schools with a white middle-
class curriculum orientation); (2) black children are general-
ly not bi-dialectal; and (3) there is evidence of interference
from their dialect when black children attempt to use standard
English.

Since the disadvantaged Negro child, as the previous study

suggests, like the Indian having to learn Spanish in Mexico,
or the African having to learn French in Guinea, has to con-
tend with the interference from his vernacular in learning
to read, how does his task of learning to read differ from
that of the middle-class "mainstream American" child? When
the middle-class child starts the process of learning to
read, his is primarily a problem of decoding the graphic
representation of a language which he already speaks. The
disadvantaged black child must not only decode the written
words, he must also "translate" them into his own language.
This presents him with an almost insurmountable obstacle,
since the written words frequently do not go together in any
pattern that is familiar or meaningful to him. He is baffled
by this confrontation with (1) a new language with its new
syntax; (2) a necessity to learn the meaning of graphic sym-
bols; and (3) a vague, or not so vague, depending upon the
cultural and linguistic sophistication of the teacher, sense
that there is something terribly wrong with his language.

Although both the middle-class child and the disadvan-
taged Negro child are at the beginning faced with the task of
relating their speech to a graphic representation that appears
to be arbitrary and without a direct one-to-one correspondence
to their speech (e.g. the "silent e" in love, the "silent k"
in knife, the "k" as represented in cut and kite, and the "s"
as represented in Sue, cement, etc.), the cards are stacked
against the inner-city Negro child because his particular
phoneme patterning is not considered in the curriculum at this
early phase, so that when he reads hep for "help", men' for
"mend", boil for "ball", the teacher presumes that he cannot
read the word. Hep and help, men' and mend, and boil and ball
are homonyms in the inner-city child's vernacular.

Despite the obvious mismatching of the "teachers and text
writers" phoneme system and that of the inner-city child, the

difficulties of the disadvantaged Negro child cannot be
simplified solely to the pronunciation and phoneme differ-
ences that exist in the two systems. There is an even more
serious problem facing the inner-city child, namely, his un-
familiarity with the syntax of the classroom texts. Although
the middle-income child also must read texts that are at
times stilted in terms of his own usage, there is no question
that the language of the texts is potentially comparable to
his system. That is to say, although he does not speak in
the style of his reading text, he has the rules within his
grammar to account for the occurrence of the textbook sen-
tences. However, the textbook style is more unfamiliar to
the ghetto child than it is to his middle-class standard-
speaking age mate because much of the reading text is not a
part of his "potential" syntactic system.

Because of the mismatch between the child's system and
that of the standard English textbook, because of the psycho-
logical consequences of denying the existence and legitimacy
of the child's linguistic system, and in the light of the
success of vernacular teaching around the world, it appears
imperative that we teach the inner-city Negro child to read
using his own language as the basis for the initial readers.
In other words, first teach the child to read in the vernacu-
lar, and then teach him to read in standard English. Such a
reading program would not only require accurate vernacular
texts for the dialect speaker, but also necessitate the cre-
ation of a series of "transition readers" that would move the
child, once he had mastered reading in the vernacular, from
vernacular texts to standard English texts. Of course, suc-
cess of such a reading program would be dependent upon the
child's ultimate ability to read standard English.

The advantages of such a program would be threefold.
First, success in teaching the ghetto child to read. Second,

the powerful ego-supports of giving credence to the child's
language system and therefore to himself, and giving him the
opportunity to experience success in school. And third, with
the use of transitional readers, the child would have the
opportunity of being taught standard English (which cannot
occur by "linguistic swamping", since his school mates are
all vernacular speakers) so that he could learn where his
language system and that of standard English were similar
and where they were different. Such an opportunity might
well lead to generalized learning and the ability to use
standard English more proficiently in other school work.

The continued failure of programs of reading for ghetto
children that offer more of the same, i.e. more phonics,
more word drills, etc., have indicated the need of a new
orientation towards teaching inner-city children to read.
Any such program must take into account what is unique about
the ghetto child that is impairing his ability to learn with-
in the present system. This paper has suggested that one of
the essential differences to be dealt with in teaching inner-
city Negro children is that of language. The overwhelming
evidence of the role that language interference can play in
reading failure indicates that perhaps one of the most ef-
fective ways to deal with the literacy problems of Negro
ghetto youth is to teach them using vernacular texts that
systematically move from the syntactic structures of the
ghetto community to those of the standard English speaking
community.

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A LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND FOR DEVELOPING BEGINNING
READING MATERIALS FOR BLACK CHILDREN

by Roger W. Shuy

Morton Wiener and Ward Cromer, in their article "Reading and
Reading Difficulty: A Conceptual Analysis", describe four
different assumptions which are used to explain what is meant
by the term "reading difficulty".[1] Each assumption implies a
kind of built-in model of remediation. Some researchers, for
example, assume that reading difficulty involves a kind of
malfunction, usually of the sensory-physiological type. Other
investigators feel that reading difficulty involves a defic-
iency of some sort which must be corrected before adequate
reading can take place. Still others attribute reading dif-
ficulty to certain things (bad method, anxiety, etc.) which
are present but interfering, and which must be removed before
good reading can take place. A fourth approach to reading
difficulty is one in which the researchers assume that the
child would read adequately if the material and method were
consistent with his linguistic behavior patterns. Investi-
gators who work under this assumption believe that in order
to make the child read, either the material or the behavior
patterns must be changed.

. . . .

Let us pause to examine the urban Negro child's "reading
difficulty" in the light of the Wiener-Cromer taxonomy of re-
search assumptions. We would be hard-pressed to demonstrate
that the urban Negro child generally has sensory of physio-
logical defects, or that he lacks some function necessary to
the reading process. Nor can we casually observe that the
entire population of urban Negro children is made up of indi-
viduals who have intrapsychic conflicts. The reading diffi-
culty seems, rather, to stem from a cultural difference
characterized, among other things, by a different view of
life's problems, a different style of self-presentation, and
a different orientation to the printed page. It is almost
as though the child "speaks another language", and in the
case of the urban Negro child, this is very close to true.

The linguistic system of the ghetto Negro is different
in a number of identifiable features from that of Standard
English. If this non-standard dialect is interfering with
the acquisition of Standard English reading skills, we can
take at least two courses. One is to adjust the child to
suit the materials. The other is to adjust the materials to
suit the child. If the end result is successful it is a
matter of indifference which system is used. Those who advo-
cate that we teach the child Standard English before he learns
to read assume that since it is a good thing to learn Standard
English, he might as well learn it before he learns to read.
Most linguists, on the other hand, realize that the complexity
of language learning is such that this sort of engineering is
too slow-moving to be effective. That is, the social value
of learning Standard English is not worth the long delay it
would cause in his learning to read. The simple truth is that
speaking Standard English, however desirable it may be, is not
as important as learning to read.

In any case, the idea of changing the child to suit the

materials seems educationally naïve when one stops to give it
careful consideration. The usual practice among educators
has been to suit the materials to the child. But even assum-
ing that it were desirable to first teach children Standard
English, we have no research to show that children have any
great conscious awareness of the fine distinctions of the
social dimension of language. Of course they are quite able
to use grammatical, phonological and lexical forms in keeping
with their own value systems, but these value systems are
those of the unsophisticated child, who just may value the
speech of a juvenile delinquent, a dope peddler or an athlete
who lisps more than the speech of a teacher, an announcer or
a judge. Furthermore, pre-adolescent children are relatively
unable to articulate what they are doing when they adopt
someone's linguistic norms.[2] This is not surprising, since it
is also difficult for adults, even language arts teachers, to
identify these things. In her doctoral dissertation, Anne E.
Hughes asked a random group of urban teachers of disadvantaged
pre-school children to identify the language problems of their
students.[3] The teachers were first asked to talk about the
characteristic linguistic problems. Then they were asked to
listen to a tape recording of some of these children and iden-
tify the linguistic problems on that tape. The results showed
a very low correlation of response to reality.

Eighty percent of the teachers observed that their stu-
dents have a limited vocabulary. One teacher offered the
following reason for this "handicap":

...the children came with a very meager vocabulary...I think
it's because of the background of the home and the lack of
books at home, the lack of communication with the family,
especially, if there are only one or two children in the
family. Perhaps if there are more children in the family
communication might be a bit better. They might have a few
more words in their vocabulary.

Another teacher observed:

"In the inner-city, the child's vocabulary is very limited.
His experiences are very limited."

These comments are typical. Neither teacher gave any
indication that the home environment might produce a _differ-
ent_ vocabulary. Both felt, on the contrary, that a lack of
school vocabulary was equivalent to a lack of overall vocabu-
lary. This reflects a widely-held but erroneous concept, in
which the disadvantaged child is sometimes called non-verbal.
Nothing in the current research on Washington, D.C., or De-
troit Negroes supports this idea. The notion that children
in disadvantaged homes are the products of language depri-
vation seems to mean only that the investigators proved to
be such a cultural barrier to the interviewee that informants
were too frightened and awed to talk freely, or that the in-
vestigators simply asked the wrong questions.

If the teachers' comments about vocabulary were unsophis-
ticated, their descriptions of their childrens' pronunciation
and grammar were even worse. Thirteen percent of the teachers
observed that some students can not talk at all when they come
to school; many felt that these children could not hear cer-
tain sounds, apparently on the assumption that because a child
does not relate his sound system to printed symbols, he cannot
hear these sounds. One-third of the teachers characterized
their childrens' greatest grammatical failure as their in-
ability to speak in sentences or complete thoughts.

This research showed clearly that one of the most impor-
tant aspects of language development among disadvantaged chil-
dren centers on imprecise descriptions of the problem, large-
scale ignorance of how to make an adequate description, and
the interference of pedagogical folklore which passes as
knowledge about a conspicuously neglected and underprivileged
group of human beings.

The position of a Negro child in an urban ghetto is,
then, that he has a functioning language system which does
not necessarily match the language system of the school.
Recent research on this problem, using sentence repetition
experiments, clearly indicates that middle-class white chil-
dren have as much difficulty repeating syntactical construc-
tions commonly used by Washington, D.C., Negro children as
the Negro children have in repeating the white middle-class
syntactical forms.[4] The implications of this research point
to a cultural mismatch between student and teaching materials.

The first major task for linguists is to describe and
analyze this language system of the urban ghetto. In many
ways it is similar to that of Standard English but in several
very important ways it is quite different. It differs basi-
cally in two ways: (1) the presence of some feature not found
in Standard English, or the absence of some feature found in
Standard English; and (2) a frequency distribution of a fea-
ture which is significantly different from that of Standard
English.

A quite romantic picture of the differences between Stan-
dard English and Black English would be to say that their
grammars and phonological systems are entirely different.
Current research in New York, Detroit and Washington, D.C.,
has shown that this would be a gross overstatement. If it
were true, there would be little mutual understanding between
speakers of the different dialects. There are, however, sig-
nificant contrasts that are particularly evident when the verb
systems of lower-class and working-class Negroes are compared
with those of middle-class Negroes and with whites of all
classes. The copula and auxiliary have been the most fruitful
areas of study so far, particularly with regard to a feature
which is present in one social group while absent in another.[5]
There are many examples of frequency distribution differences

between racial and/or social groups.[6] The most notable of these
include recent studies of multiple negation, pronominal appo-
sition, r-deletion, l-deletion, consonant-cluster reduction,
devoicing of word-final stop consonants, among others.

The significance of this sort of research for beginning
reading instruction is of two kinds, depending on whether the
feature is phonological or grammatical.

Phonological features

A careful description of the phonology of Black English
speakers will be of more use to teachers than to writers of
classroom materials. The arbitrariness of the symbolization
process makes it rather unnecessary to recast primers into
graphemic series which delete the r in car (cah), the l in
help (hep), which substitute voiceless stops for voiced ones
in words like red (ret), and which show consonant-cluster
reductions in words like just (jus) and send (sen). Urban
disadvantaged Negroes should not find it difficult to dis-
cover that /jəs/ is realized in print as just. Their graph-
eme rule would be ⟨st⟩ → /s/ in final position. This is
certainly no more unreasonable than other double grapheme
relations as single sounds, such as ⟨th⟩ → /θ/ in thin or
⟨mb⟩ → /m/ in thumb. That is, the decoding process of read-
ing is already imbued with such rules. One might also ask,
however, how different the problem is for urban poor Negroes
than for, say, middle-class whites. There is considerable
evidence to show that in some oral styles, middle-class whites
also reduce these consonant clusters, although not always as
frequently as do Negroes.

In addition to cases in which the reduction of consonant
clusters occurs similarly for urban poor Negroes and Standard
English speakers, there are cases in which the non-standard
Negro cluster reductions are different, depending on the sur-
rounding sounds, from Standard English. For example, in

Standard English if a word ends in /st/ and the following word begins with /s/, the /st/ cluster is frequently reduced to /s/, as in /wesayd/ (west side). However, in non-standard the cluster may be reduced whether or not the following word begins with /s/, as in /wesindiyz/ (West Indies).

Also for other phonological features linguists can make good cases for the systematic nature of the disadvantaged Negro's decoding process. In Detroit, for example, whereas a middle-class white or Negro might decode ⟨time⟩ as /taym/, the ghetto Negro might realize it as a front vowel, with a different glide segment, /tæhm/. If the glide vowel is entirely absent, as it often is, the main vowel is usually lengthened, thus producing /tæ:m/. The rules[7] for these various realizations may be formulated as follows:

Standard	Non-Standard
Rule S 1 ⟨t⟩ → /t/	Rule NS 1 ⟨t⟩ → /t/
S 2 ⟨i...e⟩ → /ay/	NS 2 ⟨i...e⟩ → /æ:/ ∼ /æh/

Thus rules S 1 and NS 1 are identical. Rules S 2 and NS 2 have different correspondent features but the same number of correspondences. That is, ⟨i⟩ followed by a non-contiguous ⟨e⟩ marker yields a glide /ay/ in Standard English of the North, whereas here it yields either a different glide, /æh/, or /æ/ plus a vowel duration /:/ which may be said to replace or compensate for the loss of the glide vowel.

All of this is meant to indicate that there is nothing irregular about the phoneme-grapheme relationship of speakers of non-standard. The correspondences are quite similar in quantity but different in certain shapes. In terms of entire linguistic structures these differences are actually very slight. They gain in importance only as social groups assign values to them.

It is of utmost importance, however, that teachers be made aware of these systematic decoding processes. A child

who decodes ⟨time⟩ as /tæːm/ is not deficient in his ability
to pronounce the glide vowel most frequently heard in Stan-
dard English. Nor is he misreading the word. Ironically,
he is doing what any good reader ought to be doing -- taking
printed symbols and translating them into his own meaningful
oral symbols. It might be said, in fact, that learning to
read has little or nothing to do with a child's ability to
handle Standard English phonology. But it is tremendously
important for the teacher to understand the child's phono-
logical system in order to distinguish between reading diffi-
culties and systematic features of the child's dialect. It
is also important for the teacher to understand the child's
phonological system in order to organize teaching materials
into consistent groupings. For example, I once observed a
teacher in a ghetto school tell beginning readers that the
vowels of _fog_, _dog_, _hog_, and _log_ were all the same. She then
had the students repeat the words after her, thus: /fag/,
/dɔg/, /hag/, /lɔg/. The students heard the difference.
This teacher never did. Learning the -_og_ matrix is meaning-
ful pedagogy if there is consistency in the production of
that matrix, /ɔ/ _or_ /a/. Either pattern is useful to the
beginning reader who is being taught on the basis of pattern.

Grammatical Features

If phonological considerations appear to be of no great
consequence to the development of such materials, one might
legitimately ask what importance to attach to grammatical
considerations. In order to do this, we might do well to
suggest some principles upon which such considerations can
be based. Such principles can be expected to be broadly
relevant for judging the effectiveness of such materials but
they should also serve as judgment categories in reading
generally, whether it be for non-standard readers, Standard
readers, speed readers, literature readers, or readers of any

other sort. Three such principles suggest themselves:

1. The grammatical choices should not provide extraneous
   data. In the case of beginning reading materials for
   non-standard speakers, the text should help the child
   by avoiding grammatical forms which are not realized by
   him in his spoken language (third singular verb inflec-
   tions, for example).

2. The grammatical choices should provide adequate data.
   In the case of beginning reading materials for non-
   standard speakers, grammatical forms which occur in non-
   standard but not in Standard should be inserted where
   they appear natural (the be in "All the time he be
   happy", and the to in "Make him to do it", for example).

3. The grammatical choices should provide sequentially
   relevant data. In the case of beginning reading mater-
   ials for non-standard speakers, syntactic constructions
   such as adverbial phrases should be reduced to their
   derivative nominalized forms where it is natural to do
   so in the dialect (the as a janitor in the sentence,
   "Samuel's brother is working as a janitor", for example,
   reduced to "Samuel brother, he a janitor".).

   A basic difficulty at this point is that the reading
theorists have not adequately defined just exactly what
reading is and, consequently, what reading problems really
are. This puts the linguist at a disadvantage. But even if
we can't define reading, we can at least talk about some of
its characteristics and perhaps discover how the interference
of one grammatical system on another may contribute some
problems therein.

   If we are willing to say that some of the characteristics
of reading include the reader's decoding certain graphic sym-
bols for meaning with the aid of some unexplained help from
his knowledge of semantic, phonological, and grammatical

probabilities, and non-linguistic context, then we can pre-
cede along the following lines. It seems likely that these
characteristics of the reading process may operate (here
considerably oversimplified) according to the chart as shown
in Fig. 1.

A - Visual Discrimination
B - Sound-Symbol Relationship
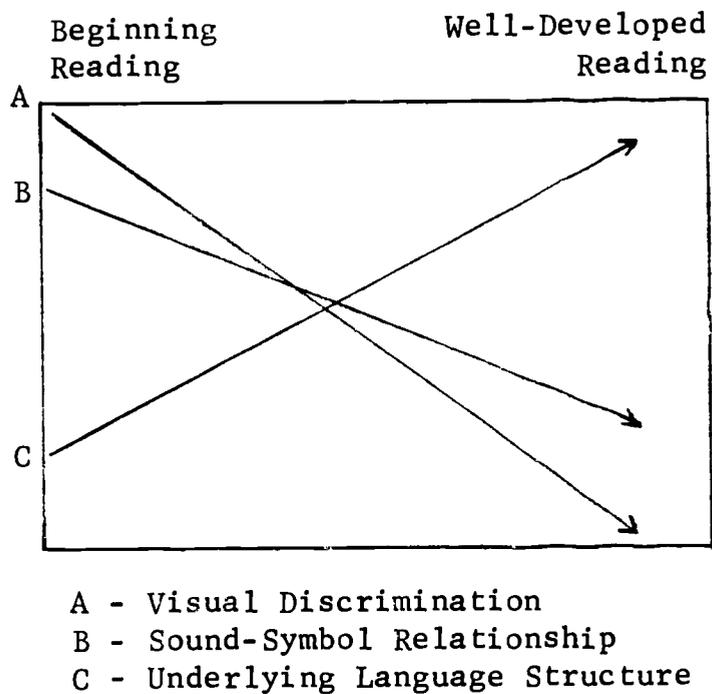C - Underlying Language Structure

Fig. 1.   Schematic Chart of the Child's Dependence
          on Some Characteristics of the Reading
          Process

If this schematization in any way reflects reality, it
is obvious that the characteristics necessary for the begin-
ning reader may be called upon in progressively different
degrees as this child moves toward more mature reading abil-
ities. That is, he must call on visual discrimination (A)
and sound-symbol relationship (B) quite heavily at the begin-
ning stages, and he must learn to rely on them less and less
if he wants to read faster and better. His underlying lan-
guage structure (C), however, though called upon throughout
the reading process, is used increasingly as (A) and (B)
diminish.

The importance of underlying language structure in the

reading process cannot be overestimated and very little has
been said about it in the literature of reading. By under-
lying language structure is meant that ability which even
beginning readers have which enables them to avoid misreading
via any manner other than by the phonological and grammatical
rules of their native language. Thus they do not render cat
as cta (an impossible phonological realization in English)
although they quite possibly could realize it as cet or cep
or any other sequence of sounds allowable in English. Such
ability also prevents grammatical misreadings of sentences
like The man chased the cat as The man the chase cated or
Man the the chased cat. If the reader is going to err, he
will err within the framework of possible variants in pho-
nology and grammar -- although not necessarily within the
framework of Standard English (e.g. The man done chased the
cat). Some linguists maintain that a child has some innate
capacity for language learning which accelerates such appar-
ently learned characteristics; or, that underlying language
structure characterizes all types of linguistic performance
and that, in reading, a person perceives in relationship to
such an underlying system. The blind can learn to read
despite absent visual discrimination (A) and the deaf can
become literate despite an absent sound-symbol relationship
(B). The fact that many children learn to read in spite of
the inadequacies of reading theory and teaching today may be
a silent tribute to the magnificence of the human brain and
the marvels of underlying language structure.

Certain kinds of supposed reading errors, then, can be
said to result from differing performance realizations of
similar underlying language structures. A child who reads
He is John's friend as He John friend may be evidencing
exactly the same linguistic sense of the writer, with only
performance differences.

These realizations, and others like them, give rise to
certain questions:

1. What kind of, and how much, interference is caused by
   the absence of non-standard grammatical features in
   Standard English texts?

2. What kind of, and how much, interference is caused by
   the presence in the text of Standard English grammatical
   features which are not used by non-standard speakers?

3. What kind of, and how much, interference is caused by
   syntactic variations between non-standard and Standard
   English features?

All of the above questions have to do with grammatical
matters in which the underlying structures of Standard Eng-
lish and non-standard are equivalent but in which the surface
realizations vary. It goes without saying that where both
performance and the underlying structure fail to match or,
worse yet, where performance is identical and where the
underlying structures are not equivalent, there are bound to
be reading problems.

It may turn out that there is no more to worry about in
terms of potential cross-dialectal interference for many
grammatical matters than there is to concern us with cross-
dialectal interference in phonological features. In an ef-
fort to determine potential reading interference caused by
the conflict between non-standard speech and Standard written
text, let us list some of the outstanding characteristics of
non-standard as they appear in most American Negro ghettos.

Written Expression	Linguistic Feature	Oral Expression
1. John's house	possession	John house
2. John runs	3rd sing. pres.	John run
3. ten cents	plurality	ten cent
4. He jumped	past	He jump
5. She is a cook	copula	She a cook

6. He doesn't have any toys	negation	He ain't got no toys
		He don't have no toys
		He don't got no toys
7. He asked if I came	past conditional question	He asked did I come
8. Every day when I come he isn't here	negative + be	Every day when I come he don't be here

In the first five items, sound-symbol relationships and visual discrimination have little if any effect on the non-standard reader's realization of the written Standard text. These realization rules may be stated as follows:

Linguistic Feature	Standard	Non-Standard
1. possession	→ -'s	→ ∅
2. 3rd singular verb	→ -s	→ ∅
3. plurality	→ -s	→ ∅
4. past tense	→ -ed	→ ∅
5. copula	→ is	→ ∅

If the non-standard reader has no reason to supply an oral sound for the Standard written representation of posses-sion, 3rd singular, plurality, past tense and the copula, we can safely say that the sound-symbol relationship plays little or no part in his reading ability in these instances. He is perfectly able to produce non-inflectional word-final sounds which are identical to those above (e.g. miss, his, buzz, bet, etc.), discounting the possibility that he has a speech production problem. As he reads, he must be influenced by his grammatical system, which, as indeed is the case, con-tains an unmarked possession, 3rd singular verb, plurality, past tense and copula. He must become wary of certain mor-phemes, just as he must become wary of such graphemes as the l in could and the s in island. Most likely the sound-symbol

relationship (B) has been submerged by reading skills pro-
vided by his underlying language structure (C) which, in
turn, leads him to produce language performance consonant
with his dialect even though the visual symbols might argue
otherwise.

Sentences 6 through 8 provide somewhat different kinds
of problems:

6. Negation

   Standard: do + neg + have + any

   Non-Standard: $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{have}\\\text{do}\end{array}\right\} + \text{neg} + \left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{have}\\\text{got}\end{array}\right\} + \text{no}$

7. Past conditional question

   Standard: if + S + V (past)

   Non-Standard: do (past) + S + V

8. Negative + be

   Standard: be + neg

   Non-Standard: do + neg + be

In each of the above cases there are sufficiently dif-
ferent sound-symbol relationships between the written Stan-
dard and the oral non-standard to suggest that this aspect
of the reading act is called upon scarcely at all in these
instances. Instead, the non-standard speaker who converts
the Standard text into non-standard grammatical patterns
seems to be more influenced by what seems "natural" to him
than by what is found on the printed page.

Research into reading errors produced by speakers of
non-standard is still in its infancy but already several
things have become clear. Children in the intermediate
grades have fewer reading problems of the sort noted in sen-
tences 6 through 8 and produce more "errors" of the sort
found in sentences 1 through 5. This seems to indicate that
the greater the difference between Standard and non-standard
grammatical items, the more likely the intermediate child is

to have developed an ability to read it successfully aloud.
Conversely, the less basic the difference, the less impor-
tance it appears to have for the child. This seems to sup-
port the notion that sound-symbol relationships are ulti-
mately less basic than grammatical features, since the read-
ers appear to work harder at grosser differences and ignore
smaller ones.

These conclusions, like all conclusions derived from
the study of reading errors, are drawn from the oral reading
experiences of children who develop sufficient reading skills
to read aloud. What is unfortunate about such conclusions,
of course, is that children who can't read well enough to
risk exposing their ignorance cannot be studied in this way
and their performance cannot be measured. It is just pos-
sible that one aspect of their reading failure can be attribu-
ted to their inability to cope with the grosser differences
of the sort noted in sentences 6 through 8, where currently
available reading pedagogy, with its emphasis on phonics and
word method, only confuses the matter. William A. Stewart
has referred to the grammatical plight of the non-standard
ghetto resident as that of a quasi-foreign language situa-
tion,[8] which, if true, would indicate that we have a far
more complicated situation to deal with than normally faces
the reading teacher. The situation is further complicated
by the fact that the many similarities between the Standard
and non-standard grammatical patterns obscure the few but
crucial differences.

If the processes of learning to read and learning to
speak Standard English are entirely separate entities (as
many linguists believe), and if the suggested model of read-
ing acquisition skills noted earlier is accurate, we can
reasonably say that the beginning reader, with his heavy
leaning on sound-symbol clues to reading, ought to be

protected as much as possible from the mismatch between his
social dialect and the written text, in the following ways:

1. Include in the beginning reading materials the grammati-
    cal forms which occur in non-standard, even though they
    may be absent in Standard English (cf. sentences 6 through
    8).

2. Exclude from the beginning reading materials the grammat-
    ical forms which occur in Standard but do not occur in
    non-standard (cf. sentences 1 through 5).

3. Write beginning reading materials in such a way that the
    syntactic structures of the written text reflect the syn-
    tactic structures of the reader's oral language experience
    in a way that is consistent with the task at hand --
    learning to read (cf. sentences 6 and 7).

It is point number 3 which requires explanation at this
time, for we have said very little about syntactic presenta-
tion of any magnitude. A major consideration ought to be that
sentences in beginning reading materials be so organized as
to show the clearest possible relationships between constitu-
ent elements. For beginning readers, less concern needs to
be shown for problems of monotony than for obscurity or ambi-
guity. Such obscurity can be seen in the following passage:
"Larry went to the movies. 'At the movies, we had fun',
said Larry". Beginning readers from all social classes are
apt to stumble on the prepositional phrase beginning the sec-
ond sentence. The experience of our research shows that
children tie it to the first sentence, probably because such
prepositional phrases seldom are found in sentence initial
position in their oral language. Perhaps writers of begin-
ning reading materials should take certain clues from trans-
lators of materials for the new literate or for the only
slightly educated reader. William Wonderly suggest tech-
niques like the following:[9]

1. Avoid complex or derived constructions and stick to
    simple or kernel constructions. Use verbal rather than
    nominal constructions and active rather than passive
    verbs.

    Although it is important for children to eventually
    develop an ability to vary sentence structure by using
    derived constructions (such as nomalizations) and pas-
    sive voice verbs, there is practically no need for such
    variation in beginning reading materials. To illustrate
    his contention that complex derived sentences provide
    excessive embedding for the beginning reader, Wonderly
    uses the sentences; <u>John told George to tell Mary to
    bring her sister</u>, which has at least four base sentences:

            John told George [something]

            George told Mary [something]

            Mary had a sister

            Mary brought the sister[10]

    Several psycholinguists have suggested that such com-
    plex sentences tend to be stored in the human memory in
    the form of their underived, "kernel" constructions
    (along with their rules for embedding).[11] If this is true,
    then the reading of embedded sentences might be considered
    to be a kind of pre-storage disembedding process. It also
    suggests that beginning readers (of any social class)
    should be provided materials in kernel or near-kernel form,
    even at the price of monotony (a less decisive factor for
    those who have not become over-familiar with the printed
    page).

2. Avoid structural ambiguity. This is, of course, good
    advice for beginning reading materials for any class or
    dialect speaking group. Some of the more humorous say-
    ings of small children stem from unrealized ambiguities
    such as:

Mother: Sally, go see how old Mrs. Jones is today.

Sally: Mrs. Jones, how old are you today?

Such unintentional ambiguities pose unnecessary additional burdens on the beginning reader. The dangers of potential ambiguities for beginning ghetto children are painfully apparent in the following sentences:

	Standard	Potential "Reading" by Non-Standard Speaker
1.	She arose early today.	She _is_ a rose early today.
2.	We jump into the water.	We jump_ed_ into the water.
3.	He sat _on_ the bank. [river]	He sat _on_ the bank. [building]
4.	Flying planes can be dangerous.	_The_ flying planes... or, Flying _the_ planes...
5.	They took the bus to Akron.	They "rode" the bus... or, They "brought" the bus...

Sentences 1 and 2 are ambiguous as a result of the differing grammatical systems between the child's oral language and that of the printed page. Sentence 3 stems from a cultural contrast between reading primer authors and the ghetto child's experience. Sentence 4 is ambiguous because of its underlying (logical) constituent structure and is an example of a type of ambiguity which faces all readers at all levels. Sentence 5 contains an ambiguous lexical form, _took_, which is equally ambiguous for all classes of readers.

The basic problem for beginning readers is similar for Standard and non-standard speakers, but it is by no means identical. As sentences 1 through 3 illustrate, the culture and language of the ghetto must be considered for potential ambiguity for beginning readers who are there.

3. Use redundancy. The nature of underlying language structure, as we are using the term here, insures a certain

amount of redundance. The sentence, <u>LeRoy eats the
carrots</u> contains a number of semi-redundant features.
If school makes any sense to him at all, the beginning
reader's innate knowledge of English keeps him from
reading it <u>LeRoy carrots the eats</u> or <u>LeRoy of house ands</u>.

For beginning readers, this principle means that the
writer should be very careful to load the text with pre-
dictable materials and to delay metaphor, simile and
other non-predictable matters until the reader is far
enough along in his learning to be able to tolerate them.
If we are serious about using redundancy which parallels
the ghetto child's oral language practice, we may decide
to include such so-called redundant features as multiple
negatives and pronominal apposition in the beginning
reading materials, e.g.:

He don't have no baseball bat.

My brother John, he struck out.

If redundancy is reinforcing for the language learner
(in this case, the aspiring literate), one must use the
inventory of available redundancies.

If beginning reading materials for ghetto children are
to relate to the oral language of the learners, these con-
siderations must be reflected in the primers. The matter of
the reader's underlying language structure must be given con-
siderable emphasis in these primers, particularly where there
is mismatch between standard and non-standard grammatical
phenomena. There is considerable room for improvement in the
construction of beginning reading material for children of
all social classes and races, but there is drastic need for
adjustment of such materials for the Negro non-standard
speaker, whose grammatical system is sufficiently different
from Standard English to hinder his learning to relate his

oral language to the grammatical forms of the primer.

The problems of producing overcomplex or derived con-
structions, ambiguous readings and under-redundant material
for Standard English speaking readers has by no means been
solved, but it is even multiplied for non-standard speaking
children, whose derivations, systematic ambiguities and re-
dundancies have only begun to be observed, much less utilized
in reading materials.

NOTES

1. Morton Wiener and Ward Cromer, "Reading and Reading
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2. Occasionally, however, they can cite lexical matters
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3. Anne E. Hughes, An Investigation of Certain Sociu-
    linguistic Phenomena in the Vocabulary, Pronunciation
    and Grammar of Disadvantaged Pre-School Children, Their
    Parents and Their Teachers in the Detroit Public Schools
    (unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Michigan State University,
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    Wolfram and William K. Riley, Linguistic Correlates of
    Social Stratification in Detroit Speech, Final Report,
    Cooperative Research Project 6-1347, U.S. Office of
    Education, Part IV, pp. 1-10.

4. Joan Baratz, "Teaching Reading in an Urban Negro School";
    in the present volume, pages 92-116.

5. See Marvin Loflin, On the Structure of the Verb in a
    Dialect of American Negro English, Office of Naval
    Research Group Psychology Branch, Technical Report No. 26
    (Center for Research in Social Behavior, University of
    Missouri), and Ralph W. Fasold, "Tense and the Form Be
    in Black English", in Roger W. Shuy and Ralph W. Fasold
    (eds.), Current Viewpoints Toward Non-Standard "Be"
    (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, forth-
    coming).

6. See, for example, William Labov, The Social Stratification

of English in New York City (Washington, D.C.: Center for
Applied Linguistics, 1966), and Shuy, Wolfram and Riley,
op. cit.

7. The term "rule" is not used here in the current sense in
    which it is found in theoretical linguistics. That is,
    we are not referring to derivational history. From the
    linguist's viewpoint, a more accurate term might be
    "correspondence".

8. William A. Stewart, "Foreign Language Teaching Methods
    In Quasi-Foreign Language Situations", in Stewart (ed.),
    Non-Standard Speech and the Teaching of English (Washing-
    ton, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1964), pp. 1-15.

9. William Wonderly, Bible Translations for Popular Use (New
    York: American Bible Society, 1968).

10. Ibid., pp. 150-151.

11. See, for example, G.A. Miller, "Some Psychological Studies
    of Grammar", American Psychologist, XVII (1962), pp. 748-
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TOWARD READING MATERIALS FOR SPEAKERS OF

BLACK ENGLISH: THREE LINGUISTICALLY

APPROPRIATE PASSAGES

by Walter A. Wolfram and Ralph W. Fasold

Within the last half century the populations of many urban
areas in the United States have been drastically restructured.
Extensive in-migration by Southern Negroes has resulted in
the growth of many large isolated Negro ghettos. The segre-
gated rural populations of the South have thus become the
isolated Negro communities of our metropolitan areas. Al-
though sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists have
pointed out the cultural gap that exists between the so-
called ghetto culture and the culture of mainstream middle-
class American society, it has been only recently that the
linguistic consequences of this cultural difference have been
examined. Previously, the speech behavior of many lower
socio-economic class Negroes was simply considered comparable
to that of lower socio-economic white citizens who spoke a
variety of nonstandard English. Even some dialectologists
simply assumed that the speech of the uneducated Negro was no
different from that of the uneducated Southern white. Recent
descriptive and sociolinguistic studies of the variety of
English spoken by urban ghetto dwellers (i.e. Black English[1]),
however, have indicated that there are important systematic
differences between Black English and Standard English.

At this point, one may ask why the speech behavior found
in these isolated Negro communities should differ significantly
from the nonstandard variety of English spoken by the lower
socio-economic class white. In Northern urban areas, one

source of difference can be found in the influence that South-
ern dialects have on these speech communities. But even in
the rural South, Black English is characteristically different
from the speech of the lower socio-economic class white, and
one must ask why. For an explanation, one need only look at
the distinct history of the Negro in American life, both in
terms of his original immigration and his subsequent segre-
gation. Recently, creole specialists have been particularly
occupied with pointing out the historical derivation of Black
English, tracing its origin to a rather widespread creole
spoken in the Caribbean area. For example, William A. Stewart
notes:

Of those Africans who fell victim of the Atlantic slave trade
and were brought to the New World, many found it necessary to
learn some kind of English. With very few exceptions the
form of English they acquired was a pidginized one, and this
kind of English became so well-established as the principal
medium of communication between Negro slaves in the British
colonies that it was passed on as a creole language to suc-
ceeding generations of the New World Negroes, for whom it
was their native tongue.[2]

Present-day Negro dialect, according to Stewart, has resulted
from a process which he labels "de-creolization". That is,
some of the original features characterizing the creole vari-
ety of English spoken by the early Negro slaves were lost
through a gradual merging of the creole with the British-
derived dialects with which they came in contact. The lexi-
cal inventory of this language variety became, for all prac-
tical purposes, identical with English (a process called
"relexification" by Stewart). Due to the persistance of
segregation, however, the process of decreolization was
neither instantaneous nor complete. Thus, the nonstandard
speech of present day Negroes still exhibits structural
traces of a creole predecessor.

Present research by linguists has focused on Black
English both as a system in itself and as a variety of English

which systematically differs from Standard English. Some of
the differences between Standard English and Black English,
though seemingly small, have important consequences for the
communication of a message. Furthermore, many of the syste-
matic differences between Standard English and Black English
have been overlooked by psychologists, sociologists, and edu-
cators, who simply dismiss Black English as an inaccurate and
unworthy approximation of Standard English. To illustrate,
we may briefly cite the Black English use of the form be as
a finite verb, in a sentence such as He be at work. This
characteristic use of be in Black English has been dismissed
as simply an inaccurate attempt by the lower socio-economic
class Negro to approximate the Standard English speech norm.
But such is clearly not the case. A study of the grammatical
and semantic function of this construction employing the des-
criptive technique of modern linguistic theory reveals that
one function of "finite be" has an "habitual" or "iterative"
meaning for the Black English speaker. There is no equivalent
category in Standard English and such a meaning can only be
conveyed by a circumlocution (e.g. He is at work all the time).
Thus, we see a clear-cut difference between the two grammati-
cal systems. As will be seen in the annotated passages
at the end of this article, there are a number of consequen-
tial systematic differences between Black English and Stan-
dard English.

Now let us consider the implications of the above on the
preparation of reading materials in the school system. We
observe clear-cut differences between Black English and Stan-
dard English on several different levels (i.e. phonological,
grammatical, semantic) of language organization. The normal
processes which account for dialect differences have been
augmented by a creole substratum. We obviously have a dia-
lect situation which is unique vis-à-vis other dialect

varieties of American English. Some educators have assumed
that one set of reading materials, perhaps "simplified"
(however that may be defined) to avoid structural conflict
between Standard English and Black English, is adequate for
the general school population. Certainly some lower socio-
economic class speakers read extant materials and with some
apparent understanding. We would not argue that the Black
English speaker is going to understand as little Standard
English as a monolingual German speaker reading English, but
we do suggest that there will be an inevitable information
loss. This leads to the question of what type of reading
materials are needed in the inner-city classroom.

Recently, publishers have introduced reading materials
that attempt to relate to the culture of the ghetto. They
have begun to include stories about Negro families in a
ghetto setting, but despite the change in context, the dia-
logue in these texts is a variety of Standard English which
does not very closely approximate the actual language usage
of black ghetto youth. Somehow, in the cultural adaptation
publishers have largely ignored the linguistic consequences
of cultural differences. Educators are thus faced with an
anomaly which may be greater than the original mismatch of
white middle-class-oriented narratives for black ghetto
youth. One can imagine what the response would be if the
white suburban youth were characterized by Black English
dialogue. Yet, it is precisely this type of anomaly which
is perpetuated by reading material which attempts to estab-
lish a cultural context indigenous to the ghetto but retains
the language of white middle-class suburbia. What appears
to be needed, then, is a linguistic adaptation or translation
of reading materials to a language system which more closely
approximates the child's oral language behavior.

Although adaptation or translation of materials is

linguistically justifiable, there remain a number of factors
which must be taken into account. One has to do with ortho-
graphy. We have opted for standard orthography and conven-
tional spelling. Conceivably this could lead to difficulties
if Black English pronunciations prove different enough from
Standard English, so that there is a serious mismatch between
conventional orthography and the phonology of the dialect.
However, research on Black English phonology has indicated
that conventional orthography is as adequate for Black Eng-
lish as it is for Standard English.[3]

Another factor in the use of the proposed adaptations
is that of applicability. There are many black ghetto resi-
dents who have learned Standard English. For these people,
the Black English materials would scarcely be more applicable
than they would be to any other speaker of Standard English.
Because of this, the use of the proposed materials cannot be
indiscriminate, even within ghetto schools. These materials
should be used only with those children who actually use
Black English.

A third factor has to do with the acceptability of the
materials to black people themselves. The degree to which
the adaptations would be acceptable, even to bona fide Black
English speakers, is an unanswered question. Sociolinguistic
research has shown that speakers who use socially stigmatized
speech forms sometimes have the same low opinion of such forms
as do speakers who do not use them. As a result, even though
the Black English materials might be clearer and more natural
to some, they may not be acceptable because of the presence
of these stigmatized forms. One consideration which may tend
to neutralize rejection, however, is the new feeling of racial
pride among black Americans. This pride leads Negroes to seek
those parts of their background, both in Africa and America,
which are distinctive to them. There is an emphasis on black

history, "African bush" hair styles, and neo-African clothing
styles. So far this emphasis has not been extended to lan-
guage. If a realization develops that this dialect, an im-
portant part of black culture, is as distinctively Afro-
American as anything in the culture, the result may well be
a new respect for Black English within the community.

The fourth factor has to do with the acceptability of
the materials by educators. One possible objection would be
the apparent discrepancy between the use of such materials
and widely-advocated plans to teach disadvantaged children
spoken Standard English. If a child is given books to read
in his socially stigmatized dialect at the same time as he
is being taught to replace his Black English with a dialect
of Standard English, the two efforts would appear to be at
cross-purposes. There are a number of reasons why this
difficulty is more apparent than real. First, learning to
read another language or dialect and learning to speak it
are two different tasks. When the child who speaks Black
English is required to learn to read using Standard English
materials, he is given two tasks at once: learning to read
and learning a new dialect. The Standard English speaking
child, by contrast, is only required to learn to read. The
success in learning to read is greater when the skill is
taught in the mother tongue of the child.[4] In the second
place, because of the social dynamics involved, there is
some question about the degree to which Standard English can
be taught to the ghetto child in the classroom at all. The
most successful language learning has, as a component, mean-
ingful interaction between the learner and speakers of the
language he is trying to learn. Most Negro children, seg-
regated by race and poverty, will have little opportunity to
develop close acquaintanceships with Standard English speakers.
There seems to be no reason why we should withhold from

inner-city children materials which may help them learn to
read simply because the use of these materials might inter-
fere with teaching them spoken Standard English, especially
when it may not be possible to teach spoken Standard English
in the classroom in the first place. In any event, it seems
that some of the usual reasons for teaching spoken Standard
English, e.g. to enhance employment opportunities, are not
very relevant to elementary school children at the age at
which reading is taught. Furthermore, there is some evidence
that a young person is well into adolescence before he be-
comes aware of the social dimensions of language,[5] a fact
which would seem to indicate that formal efforts to teach
Standard English would be most effective if delayed until
junior high school or later--well after reading skills should
have been established.

The best proposals for teaching Standard English to
speakers of nonstandard dialects have as their goal adding a
new dialect to the pupil's linguistic ability, rather than
trying to eradicate his "bad" speech. In programs of this
type, the students are assured that there is nothing wrong
with their speech if it is used in appropriate contexts.
If these assurances are sincere, a good way to demonstrate
this would be to use the dialect in the educational process,
specifically in reading materials.

As an example of how this could be done, we present in
what follows three linguistically appropriate passages.
First, we have taken an original Black English passage, which
is a dramatized enactment of a situation occurring in the
ghetto. In this passage we have simply transcribed and edited
a section from a phonograph record[6] and arranged it as a
quasi-drama. The record contains the reasonably spontaneous
speech of six pre-adolescent Harlem boys. We have made no
grammatical changes in the text so that at places it may

appear that certain forms are importations from Standard English. The second passage is a dialect translation of reading material which was designed for use in inner-city schools.[7] In the third passage we have taken an established piece of literature, the Bible, and translated a passage into idiomatic Black English. In this passage we have not attempted to change the Biblical cultural setting, which is very different from both mainstream middle-class society and the black ghetto. We have approached this translation with the same rigor expected of any serious translation task. That is, we have attempted to be faithful to the form and content of the original manuscript (which, of course, is Greek and not English). Our translation of the Bible passage must therefore be distinguished from attempts to paraphrase the Bible into contemporary cultural parallels of the original message. We have included a Standard English translation of the passage for contrast with the Black English translation. Our annotations indicate those places where there exist clear-cut contrasts between the grammatical systems of Standard English and Black English.[8] Phonological differences are not annotated except where they affect grammatical form. Differences in the semantic content of lexical items have not generally been noted.

DUMB BOY

[Scene I]

Calvin: One day I was walking. Then I met Lennie. Lennie say,[1,2] "Calvin, what happened[3] to your lip?" I said, "Nothing." And then Lenn came over to me and he say,[1,2] "What[4] you mean by nothing?" Like he always say[2] because he's always interested in me and me and him[5] is[6] good friends. So I told him what happened.[3] "This guy named[3] Pierre, he[7] about fifteen..."

Lennie: Yeah?

Calvin: He came over to me...

Lennie: Uh huh.

Calvin: And he hit me in my[8] lip because...

Lennie: Yeah?

Calvin: I...

Lennie: Done[9] what?

Calvin: Had done copied[9] off his paper in school.

[Scene II]

Pierre: Uhh, I told you don't do that no more.[10,11]

Calvin: Come on, please leave me alone, please, please.

Pierre: Next time I catch you copying off somebody in there,
         you know what I'll do? I'll strangle you to death! Don't
         do that no more,[10] hear?

Calvin: I'm sorry.

[Scene III]

Lennie: What's that guy[12] name?

Calvin: Pierre.

Lennie: Where[4] he live at?

Calvin: Around our block.

Lennie: How old is he?

Calvin: Fifteen.

Lennie: How big is he?

Calvin: About the size of the other guy named[3] Pierre around
         our block.

Lennie: Well, tonight it's[13] gonna be a party at 118th Street
         where I live at. You bring him around there, hear?

Calvin: I surely will.

Lennie: O.K.

[Scene IV]

Calvin: So when I walked in there, everything was silent.

Lennie: Is that the guy over there?

Calvin: Yeah.

Lennie: Hey you, what[4] you hit my little brother for?

Pierre: Did he tell you what happened,[3] man?

Lennie: Yeah, he told me what happened.[3]

Pierre: But you...but you should tell your people to teach
him to go to school, man. I know I didn't have a right
to hit him. But he was copying off me and the teacher
said...I forgot to tell the teacher.

Lennie: What[4] you mean you forgot to tell the teacher?
What[4] you mean tell my parents to make him go to school
to learn? What[4] you mean by that? What[4] you mean?

Pierre: Just like I said, man, he can't be dumb, man. I
don't be[14] with him all his life.

Lennie: You basing or you sounding?[15]

Pierre: I ain't doing neither[10] one.

Lennie: That's more like it. But we[7] gonna deal tonight.

Pierre: If you can't face it, don't waste[16] it. If you
can't face it, don't waste[16] it.

                    SEE A GIRL*
        [Standard English Version]

"Look down here," said Suzy.
"I can see a girl in here.
That girl looks like me.
Come here and look, David.
Can you see that girl?"

_____

*The setting of this story involves a little girl who looks
 at her reflection in a puddle. Wiggles is a dog.

"Here I come," said David.
"I want to see the girl."
David said, "I do not see a girl.
A girl is not in here, Suzy.
I see me and my ball."

Suzy said, "Look in here, Mother.
David can not see a girl.
And I can.
Can you see a girl in here?"

"Look down, Suzy," said Mother.
"Look down here, David.
That little girl is my Suzy.
And here is David."

"Mother! Mother!" said Suzy.
"We can see David and me.
We can see Wiggles and a big girl.
That big girl is you."

                    SEE A GIRL
              [Black English Version]

Susan[17] say[1,2] "Hey you-all[18] look down here.

I can see a girl in here.

The girl, she[19] look[2] like me.

Come here and look, David.

Could[20] you see the girl?"

David, he[19] say[1,2] "Here I come.

Let me see the girl."

David say[1,2] "I don't see no girl[10]

Ain't no girl[21] in there.

I see me and my ball."

Susan, she[19] say[1,2] "Momma[22] look in here.

David don't[1] see no girl[10] and I do.

You see a girl in there?"

Momma[22] say[1,2] "Look down there, David.

That little girl[7] Susan.

And there go[23] David."

Susan[17] say[1,2] "Momma![22] Momma![22]

We can see David and me.

We can see Wiggles and a big girl.

You[7] that big girl."

JOHN 3:1-17   [Revised Standard Version]

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler
of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him,
"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no
one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."
Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one
is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus
said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he
enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is
born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of
God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which
is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said
to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it
wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence
it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is
born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?"
Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you
do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak
of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you
do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly
things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell
you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he
who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses
lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of
man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eter-
nal life." For God so loved the world that he gave his only
Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have
eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to
condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through
him.

JOHN 3:1-17   [Black English Version]

It[13] was a man named[3] Nicodemus. He was a leader of the Jews.
This man, he[19] come[1,2] to Jesus in the night and say,[1,2] "Rabbi,
we know you[7] a teacher that come[2] from God, cause can't nobody[24]
do the things you be[14] doing 'cept he got God with him."

Jesus, he[19] tell[2] him say[2,25] "This ain't[10] no jive,[26]
if a man ain't born over again, ain't no way[21] he[7] gonna get
to know God."

Then Nicodemus, he[19] ask him, "How[4,7] a man gonna be
born when he[7] already old? Can't nobody[24] go back inside
his mother and get[27] born."

So Jesus tell him, say[2,25] "This ain't[10] no jive,[26]
this[7] the truth. The onliest way a man[7] gonna get to know
God,[7] he got to get born regular and he got to get[27] born from
the Holy Spirit. The body can only make a body get[27] born,
but the Spirit, he[19] make[2] a man so he can know God. Don't
be suprised[3] just cause I tell you that you got to get born
over again. The wind blow[2] where it want[2] to blow and you
can't hardly[10] tell where it's[28] coming from and where it's[28]
going to. That's[28] how it go[2] when somebody get[2,27] born
over again by the Spirit."

So Nicodemus say[1,2] "How[4] you know that?"

Jesus say, "You call yourself[29] a teacher that teach
Israel and you don't know these kind of things? I'm gonna
tell you, we[7] talking about something we know about cause we
already seen it. We[7] telling it like it is[30] and you-all[18]
think we[7] jiving. If I tell you about things you can see and
you-all think we[7] jiving[26] and don't believe me, what's[28]
gonna happen when I tell about things you can't see? Ain't
nobody[21] gone up to Heaven 'cept Jesus, who come[1,2] down from
Heaven. Just like Moses done[9] hung up the snake in the
wilderness, Jesus got to be hung up. So that the peoples[31]

that believe in him, he can give them[19] real life that ain't never[10] gonna end. God really did love everybody in the world. In fact, he loved[3] the people so much that he done[9] gave up the onliest Son he had. Any man that believe[2] in him, he[7] gonna have a life that ain't never[10] gonna end. He ain't never[10] gonna die. God, he[19] didn't send his Son to the world to act like a judge, but he sent him to rescue the peoples[31] in the world."

NOTES

1. "Black English" is appropriate as a label for the dialect of lower socio-economic class Negroes for at least three reasons. First, there is a precedent for designating dialects with color names (Black Bobo, Red Tai, White Russian). In the second place, the current use of the term "black" in throwing off pejorative stereotypes of Negro life matches our efforts to overcome the stereotype that this dialect is simply bad English. Finally, the name "Black English" avoids the negative connotations of terms which include words like "dialect", "substandard" and even "nonstandard".

2. William A. Stewart, "Sociolinguistic Factors in the History of American Negro Dialects", The Florida FL Reporter, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1967) p. 22.

3. Ralph W. Fasold, "Orthography in Reading Materials for Black English Speaking Children" [in the present volume, pp. 68-91].

4. Evelyn Bauer mentions several experiments involving North American Indians in which superior results were obtained when Indian children were taught to read in their own language before attempting to read the national language. (Evelyn Bauer, "Teaching English to North American Indians in BIA Schools", The Linguistic Reporter, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1968) p. 2.)

5. William Labov, The Social Stratification of English in New York City (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966), p. 421.

6. Street and Gangland Rhythms (Folkways 5589 [1959]).

7. Writers' Committee of the Great Cities School Improve-
    ment Program of the Detroit Public Schools, Gertrude
    Whipple, Chairman, Four Seasons with Suzy (Chicago:
    Follett Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 48-50. Used by per-
    mission. [In preparing reading materials for the ghetto
    we certainly do not recommend working from a Standard
    English text to a Black English version, but in this
    case we have done so in order to point out some contrasts
    between the two versions of the story.]

8. It will be apparent that some of the features discussed
    here are shared both by Black English and other non-
    standard dialects of English.

ANNOTATIONS

[1] Some verbs, like "come" and "say", are not marked for past
    tense in Black English narratives, even when the context
    is past time.

[2] Black English lacks the -s suffix which marks the present
    tense with third person singular subjects in Standard
    English.

[3] When the suffix -ed is realized by a stop following a base
    form which ends in a consonant, the stop is not pronounced
    (thus, the pronunciation /neym/, for Standard English
    /neymd/). This reflects a Black English phonological pat-
    tern in which syllable final consonant clusters in Standard
    English correspond to simple consonants in Black English
    (see note 16). The pattern illustrates how phonological
    constraints in Black English affect the presence of certain
    grammatical categories.

[4] Sentences which would have a pre-posed verbal auxiliary in
    Standard English due to the formation of a content question
    generally have no auxiliary at all in the corresponding
    Black English sentence. For example, the "do" which would
    appear in the Standard English equivalent of questions like
    "what you mean by nothing?" is absent for this reason.

[5] In coordinate noun phrases, the distinction between objec-
    tive and subjective forms of the pronoun is often neutral-
    ized, so that the "objective" form may function as a gram-
    matical subject.

[6] Occasionally (and particularly with coordinate construc-
tions), the singular conjugated forms of "be" ("is", "was")
occur with the plural subject in Black English.

[7] The present tense form of the copula frequently is not
realized in a number of different syntactic environments
in Black English. Generally, where the contracted form
of the copula may occur in Standard English the stative
condition is indicated simply by word order in Black Eng-
lish.

[8] In Standard English, sentences like "kiss her on the cheek"
and "punch Jack in the stomach" involving a verb of physi-
cal contact, a personal nominal reference and a body part,
the definite article "the" is used with the body part al-
though it belongs to the same person referred to by the
personal noun or pronoun. In Black English, the possessive
pronoun is used in these constructions instead of the
article.

[9] The use of "done" plus the past tense of a verb is a con-
struction indicating completed action. Some speakers
occasionally include a form of "have" as in "had done
copied..."

[10] In Black English, negation is typically marked not only in
the main verb phrase, but also in each indefinite deter-
miner or indefinite pronoun in the sentence, as well as in
certain adverbs like "hardly" and "never".

[11] An embedded imperative may be retained in its original
quoted form instead of being realized in an infinitive
construction (e.g. "I told you don't do that no more"
instead of "I told you not to do that no more").

[12] Black English lacks possessive -s so that possession is
indicated only by the order of items.

[13] "It", in Black English, can be used as an "expletive" or
"presentative" in addition to its function as a pronoun
referring to a specific object or participant. In this
usage it is equivalent to Standard English "there".

[14] The form "be" can be used in Black English as a verb in
the same constructions in which "is, am, are, was, were"
are used in Standard English, but with a different meaning.
The use of "be" as a main verb denotes iteration or habit-
uation.

[15] The expressions "basing" and "sounding" refer to types of
aggressive verbal behavior. "Basing" is a kind of back-
talk and "sounding" refers to a special type of ritual
insult.

[16] The items "face" and "waste" have rhyming endings in Black
English because the final stop member of a syllable final
consonant cluster is frequently absent.

[17] The use of nicknames like "Jim" for "James" or "Dick" for
"Richard" is rare in ghetto communities. Therefore,
"Susan" is more natural in Black English reading materials
than "Suzy".

[18] Unlike most Standard English dialects, Black English dis-
tinguishes the singular and plural of the second person
pronoun ("you" versus "you-all", pronounced /yɔl/).

[19] A pronoun is often used following the noun subject of a
sentence in Black English. "Pronominal apposition" func-
tions to focus on the "topic" of the sentence and to indi-
cate the re-entry of a participant in a discourse.

[20] In a number of contexts, Black English speakers use "could"
where Standard English has "can".

[21] This construction is a very common stylistic variation of
"it ain't no girl in here" or "it ain't nobody who has
gone up to Heaven" (cf. note 13).

[22] Black children generally call their mothers "Momma".
"Mother" is likely to be taken as an abbreviation for a
taboo term.

[23] The idomatic expression "there go" is equivalent to the
Standard English construction "there is" when it refers
to the existential location of something. Generally, this
construction is limited to the speech of adolescents and
pre-adolescents.

[24] There are two types of emphatic negative sentences in
Black English involving the pre-position of a negativized
auxiliary. Black English, unlike most white nonstandard
dialects, permits both an indefinite subject and the main
verb to carry negative markers. Thus, "...nobody can't
do the things you be doing..." is a grammatical sentence
in the dialect, meaning that nobody can do these things.
To emphasize such a negative statement Black English
speakers may prepose the negativized verbal auxiliary to

the front of the sentence, much as the ordinary English
yes-no question formation. Two kinds of stress pattern
are associated with this structure. If the stress pat-
tern is "càn't nóbody (do something)", it expresses
general emphasis. If the stress pattern is "cán't nobòdy
(do something)", it carries the overtone of disbelief.

25 Quotations can be introduced by the form "say" in addition
to any other quotative words such as "tell" and "ask".

26 The concept "jive" in the Negro ghetto refers to a particu-
lar form of language behavior in which the speaker assumes
a guise in order to persuade someone of a particular fact.
It is often used to refer to the deception of someone with
flattery or false promises.

27 "Get" (or "got") often functions as a passive marker in
Black English.

28 When a pronoun ending in /t/ like "it" or "that" precedes
the contracted form of "is", the contraction /s/ is pro-
nounced and the /t/ is not (cf. note 7).

29 The expression "you call yourself X" or "you call yourself
doing X" implies mild doubt that the hearer really is X or
is doing X.

30 The expression "telling it like it is" refers to making an
accurate and trustworthy assessment of a situation, with-
out any attempt to exaggerate.

31 -s plural can be suffixed to forms which in Standard Eng-
lish form their plural in some irregular way (suppletive
forms, internal change, etc.).

ON THE USE OF NEGRO DIALECT IN THE TEACHING OF READING

by William A. Stewart

By the time he reaches the age of five or six, (i.e. school
age, in many societies), every normally developed human be-
ing has already mastered the fundamentals of at least one
language, and has done so quite accurately without any need
for formal instruction from others.[1] Indeed, so intrinsic
is the normal child's interest in the language used around
him and so apparently spontaneous his acquisition of it,
that it is reasonable to suppose a propensity for language
to be part of the genetic endowment of the human species --
with only the structural details of each language left to
invention, cultural transmission, and historical change.[2]
But if it is in man's nature to acquire a language through
mere exposure to it at the right time in life, that nature
also seems to require (whether for neurological, psycho-
logical, or other reasons) that the language behavior en-
countered be presented in certain ways and take certain
overt forms before it can be "picked up" and internalized
by the child. For one thing, in the early stages of lan-
guage acquisition, at least, the language behavior encoun-
tered by the child must be socially relevant (by emanating
directly from other human beings) and in context (so that
the meaning of it can be established). For another (and
this may or may not be a further ramification of the social-
relevance requirement), the language behavior encountered
must be encoded into systematic and perceivable manifestations
of human behavior -- usually vocal noises.[3]

Unfortunately, written language does not fulfill any of these requirements. When encountered by a language-acquiring child, written text is not likely to be in the process of emanating from another individual, nor is its meaning likely to be apparent from the immediate situation at the time of encounter. In addition, human beings simply do not seem to be "programmed" to acquire writing systems automatically -- even if these are based on a known or frequently heard spoken language. Consequently, reading and writing skills have to be taught formally in most cases, and subsequent to first-language acquisition. This explains why there are so many people in the world who do not know how to read or write a language, while there is hardly anyone who does not know how to speak a language. In addition, there is the fact that writing is a quite recent phenomenon in contrast to speaking, and therefore still a functionally marginal one in many societies.

This problem exists even when the written language is little more than a graphic rendition of the spoken language of the population, as is more-or-less true for some segments of modern European and American societies. In many parts of the world, however, learning to read (even with substantial amounts of formal instruction) may be rendered infinitely more difficult by a tradition of writing primarily or exclusively in some language other than the one (or ones) which the population normally learns to speak. In the West African countries, for example, practically all writing (and certainly all important writing) is done in English or French, in spite of the fact that scarcely any West African learns English or French as his first language. In those countries, the teaching of reading is nothing less than the teaching of reading of English or French, so that the reading process itself must either follow or run concurrently with the teaching of English

or French as a foreign language.[4] Even in countries in which
the national language is indeed that of the majority of the
population, a situation similar to the West African one may
hold for members of foreign-language-speaking minority groups,
since many of these are expected to function as literates in
the larger society.

For multilingual situations of the West African type,
one of the most promising innovations in the direction of a
viable literacy program is the pedagogical separation of
beginning reading from the encumberment of concurrent foreign
language teaching. This separation is accomplished by the
simple strategy of teaching individuals to read first in
their own native language, and then transferring the reading
skills thus acquired to the task of reading in whatever
foreign language is the ultimate goal of the literacy pro-
gram. In some cases, it may be necessary for the literacy
specialist to devise an orthography for the native language
of the learners, if this is an unwritten one, while in other
cases an existing orthography may or may not need modification
to facilitate transfer to the ultimate target language. Tra-
ditionally-oriented educators and administrators who do not
understand the rationale for the separation of learning tasks
involved in this approach, and who accordingly see the teach-
ing of initial reading in some normally unwritten or nationally
unimportant language as an utter waste of time, may be sur-
prised to find groups which have been taught literacy by the
native-to-foreign language technique catching up with and even
surpassing groups which have begun reading in conjunction with
the learning of the national (though, for them, foreign) lan-
guage.[5] But whether innovative or traditional methods are em-
ployed, the general multilingualism of areas like Africa,
Asia, and parts of Europe and Latin America makes those in-
volved acutely aware that pedagogical problems related to

literacy can be, and often are, predicated on language-
learning problems.

In the United States, that portion of the national popu-
lation for which reading in English constitutes reading in a
completely foreign language is relatively small when compared
with the truly multilingual nations just discussed. At pres-
ent, Spanish-speaking Americans and speakers of American
Indian languages seem to constitute the most well-defined
cases of this. For these groups, such specialized literacy
materials as there are do tend to take the matter of language
differences into account; and even relatively unsophisticated
reading teachers can be expected to realize that retardation
in the reading of English texts by Mexican-American or Navajo
children probably has something to do with the fact that many
of these children do not speak English natively -- even if
the teacher doesn't know exactly what to do about the situ-
ation.

Even though aware of a possible relationship between
language differences and serious reading problems in American
school children from foreign-language backgrounds, most read-
ing specialists would not be inclined to consider a similar
cause for reading retardation in children from an English-
speaking background. To be sure, it is recognized that even
these children may experience initial difficulties in re-
lating writing to speech, but this is understood to be little
more than the effect of minimal differences between written
and spoken varieties of the same language -- in this case,
English.[6] At the same time, the apparent overall similarity
between the spoken language which English-speaking children
bring to school and the written language which they encounter
in books is seen to preclude language differences as a pri-
mary cause of any failure on the part of such children to
attain normal reading proficiency. When such failure occurs,

there is accordingly a strong tendency to attribute it to
extra-linguistic factors, such as abnormalities or malfunc-
tions either in the child or in his surroundings. These
real or imagined causes of reading retardation include or-
ganic (i.e. neurological or physiological) disorders, and
such functional disorders as emotional disturbance in the
child, or his lack of exposure to written language, education,
a stimulating environment, etc. And -- with tragic conse-
quences, as will be seen -- extra-linguistic causes have been
appealed to almost exclusively in recent attempts to explain
why it is that reading retardation is more pronounced among
Negro English-speaking children than among white English-
speaking children in many American schools.

One theory which has been advanced to explain this does
involve an organic principle, though not actually an organic
disorder. It is that racially correlated differences in
reading achievement (as well as achievement in other school
subjects) are simply a manifestation of racial differences
in mean intellectual capacity. This theory is based in large
part on apparent evidence that Negroes tend to score signifi-
cantly lower than whites on standardized intelligence tests.
The evidence is striking enough to indicate some variable at
work, even though it turns out that few of the relevant
experiments have been well enough designed or controlled to
be entirely reliable, or to show what the different scores
indicate. Furthermore, it has been possible to arrange
experiments which offer some counter-evidence to the theory.[7]
Debate on the issue has been strongly polarized, and often
more socio-political than scientific. On the one hand are
the hereditarians, who maintain that race-related differences
in performance on intelligence tests have a genetic basis.
Aligned against them are the environmentalists, who insist
that these differences, even if real, are but the product of

ecological and experiential factors. Of the two, the heredi-
tarians' argumentation seems especially weak. They claim
that there is a lower intelligence mean for Negroes than for
whites, and either state or imply that this relates directly
to biological differences between the two races. Yet, they
base these claims on studies in which distinctions between
"Negro" and "white" have had more of a social than a bio-
logical basis (the real meaning of "Negro" in the United
States). Furthermore, the hereditarians simply have not
given due consideration to nonhereditary variables. As the
environmentalists are quick to point out, the relatively
poorer performance by lower-class Negroes than by middle-
class Negroes shows quite clearly that, whatever the causes
of performance differences may be, they are not racially
distributed to any degree which would indicate a genetic
basis.

From the environmentalist side, a number of reasons have
been suggested why Negroes may seem to do relatively more
poorly than whites on intelligence tests, and in such school
subjects as reading. One possibility sometimes suggested is
that there may be a higher incidence of intellectually debili-
tating organic disorders among Negroes than among whites. But
the origin of these disorders would not be genetic; rather,
they would be induced in individuals by such features of lower-
class living as poor pre- and postnatal care, substandard
nutrition, physical abuse, etc. Their apparent racial cor-
relation would only be a function of the disproportionately
high percentage of Negroes in the American lower-class popu-
lation. In a similar vein, a higher rate of debilitating
functional disorders (such as emotional disturbance) is some-
times claimed for Negroes, and this is also attributed to the
rigors of lower-class life.

Although it is perfectly true that both organic and

functional disorders can affect intelligence scores and read-
ing ability (sometimes drastically), the real question is
whether such pathologies are induced regularly enough by the
lower-class condition to account for the regularity with
which the supposed intellectual deficit occurs in the Negro
population. Considering the performance differences between
Negroes and whites, the incidence of pathology in the lower-
class Negro environment would have to be considerable. And
this leads to another pertinent question concerning the
validity of such explanations: Is there any evidence that
the lower-class Negro environment is sufficiently worse than
the lower-class white environment to account satisfactorily
for the intellectual performance differences between lower-
class Negroes and even lower-class whites? In at least some
areas in which lower-class Negroes and lower-class whites
score differently (in Appalachia, for example), their material
condition is remarkably similar. A different explanation --
one which would at least account for a higher incidence of
emotional disturbance among Negroes (if this should prove to
be the case) -- is race prejudice, pure and simple. But then
why do middle-class Negroes score better than lower-class
Negroes, when the former are apparently in more of a position
to feel the brunt of prejudice directly?

Of the many theories which have been advanced by environ-
mentalists to explain differences in intellectual performance
between Negroes and whites, certainly the most popular have
been those positing as a basic cause some sort of cognitive
or communicative deficit. According to such theories, there
is something about the lower-class (usually Negro) environment,
both social and physical, which inhibits the normal develop-
ment of abstract thought and well-formed, expressive language
in the growing child. The factors which are believed to in-
hibit cognitive and linguistic development in the lower-class

Negro child are all environmental: excessive noise and dis-
order, depressing surroundings, the absence of a father,
insufficient verbal interaction with the mother, no contact
with books, limited experiences, etc. That an individual
thus burdened with a "cognitive deficit" and "verbal desti-
tution" would do poorly on any kind of intellectual task
seems almost beyond question, and the impression that this
is so has undoubtedly contributed to the widespread accep-
tance of environmentalist deficit theories.

Yet, the questions which should really be asked about
these theories are: Do they describe the lower-class Negro
environment accurately? and, Do they demonstrate a causal
relationship between any of the characteristics of such
environments on the one hand and basic cognitive and lin-
guistic development on the other? When furnished, the
answers to these questions may be quite disconcerting to the
deficit theories. For example, there is no real evidence
that lower-class environments are significantly more noisy
or less structured than middle-class ones, nor is it clear
just how noise levels, say, of an inner-city magnitude would
stultify cognitive or linguistic development. And, in view
of the importance of the peer-group as a source of language
models for the growing child, it seems quite risky to assume
that parental involvement is an absolute necessity in even
first-language acquisition. This would especially be true
in lower-class Negro families, where there are usually several
siblings and many, many playmates.

At present, theories that the special educational prob-
lems of lower-class Negro children stem from cognitive, cul-
tural, and/or linguistic deficiencies in these children or
their environments seem to be subscribed to whole-heartedly
by most educational psychologists. And, given the prestige
which psychological formulations of learning problems currently

enjoy in educational circles, it is not surprising that defi-
cit theories have been widely accepted by teachers, curriculum
designers, and school administrators as the "scientific" reason
why lower-class Negro children do so poorly in the classroom.
Of course, the acceptance by educators of deficit theories is
facilitated by the fact that, just like their psychological
gurus, few educators are familiar enough with lower-class
Negro life to know how badly such theories represent it, and
by the fact that any conceptual inadequacies in psychological
research designs for measuring lower-class Negro performance
on standardized tests are likely to be effectively obscured
by impressive test specifications (masking the inappropriate-
ness of the tests), by elaborate statistical analyses (masking
the irrelevance of the variables), and by complicated charts
and graphs of the misleading or prevaricating results.[8]

As one would expect, hereditarian explanations of Negro
and white differences in intellectual achievement and school
performance have appealed most strongly to racists, while
environmentalist explanations have found eager acceptance
among egalitarians. Of course, there are many social scien-
tists, social activists, and educators who make it a point
never to discuss such differences, or even acknowledge their
existence. This conspiracy of silence seems to be a mani-
festation either (depending upon one's point of view) of the
assumption that such differences, while probably debilitating,
are nevertheless innate and unchangeable, and therefore that
nothing would be gained by talking about them, or that the
measurements which show them represent deliberate misrepre-
sentation or some minor procedural mistake in the testing
methodology, so that if one only ignores them they will
eventually waft away by themselves. For those who do believe
in facing up to the data, however, some sort of explanation
of these differences must be sought, if for no reason other

than that American education might come to understand why
what is happening to it is happening. I suspect that the
popularity among egalitarians of the environmentalist deficit
theories as explanations of ethnically-correlated performance
differences derives not only from ethnocentrism, but also
from the conviction that they represent the only honest al-
ternative to hereditarianism short of an egalitarian act of
faith which, far from bringing about an understanding of the
problem, would only serve to obscure its causes all the more.[9]

The fact that debate on the issue of Negro intelligence
has been carried on largely in terms of genetics and ecology
might well come as a surprise to social scientists or edu-
cators who are not familiar with American social rhetoric.
For, were a difference in intellectual performance to be
found between two populations in almost any other part of the
world, it would be considered a matter of course to explore
first the possibility that the apparent intellectual dis-
parity might merely reflect cultural differences between the
two groups through a bias in the measurement techniques to-
ward one or the other culture.[10] In the United States, on the
other hand, only the scantiest consideration has been given
to the same possibility -- that being "white" and "Negro"
might involve correlations with more-or-less different Ameri-
can subcultures, and that cultural differences might there-
fore be responsible for the intellectual performance dis-
parity between the two ethnic groups. Rather, American social
scientists have generally assumed that, once such variables as
social class and regional provenience (particularly rural vs.
urban) are accounted for, Negroes and whites would turn out
to be culturally identical.[11] That this assumption should
remain unchallenged (and, indeed, that it should have been
made in the first place) in the face of such obvious and
omnipresent indications of cultural differences between whites

and Negroes as are evident in musical styles, patterns of
worship, dress, expressive behavior (such as the forms and
uses of laughter), and a host of other cultural domains in
which intra-ethnic variation according to social class and
region never quite obscures the inter-ethnic differences, is
probably due to its compatibility with the American "melting
pot" myth. For it is a basic tenet of that myth that all
foreign immigrant groups are automatically and completely
assimilated to the Anglo-Saxon national culture within one
or two generations, so that cultural differences between
groups of different ethnic or national origin are not to be
expected to last for long. In fact, the Negro is often
singled out by propagators of the myth as a prime example of
just how thorough the assimilation process can be in America --
the implication being that, since American Negroes no longer
exhibit identifiably African behaviors, they must have assimi-
lated completely to the cultural patterns of American whites.

Although this impression of the cultural relationship of
American Negroes to American whites is inaccurate in many
important ways, it is not difficult to see how it evolved.
For, when Africans and Europeans came together in North Amer-
ica, people tended (as they still do) to regard behavioral
differences as legitimate cultural differences only when they
could be associated with some national or tribal source.
Consequently, observable deviations in the behavior of Negroes
from the norms of whites were considered to be culturally con-
ditioned only so long as the Negroes retained enough identi-
fiably African behaviors to insure their being considered
Africans. However, once the visible trappings of African
tribal cultures were given up by American Negroes (or at
least became subtle enough to escape identification), con-
tinued deviations from white behavioral norms were considered
gaffes and gaucheries at best, and more often as evidence of

intellectual immaturity in the Negro and therefore justifi-
cation for his enslavement. Unfortunately, and in spite of
Emancipation, this blindness to the cultural nature of Negro
and white behavioral differences has persisted down to the
present day, with the white liberal and black revolutionary
alike the simultaneous perpetrators and victims of it that
Massa and Cudjo were on the Old Plantation.[12]

In at least one area -- that of language -- there has
been a growing awareness of the historical and functional
legitimacy of Negro deviations from white behavioral norms.
Long regarded by the public in general and educators in par-
ticular as the result of carelessness, laziness, ignorance,
or stupidity, the nonstandard speech patterns of American
Negroes are now coming to be recognized as perfectly normal
dialect forms which are just as much the product of syste-
matic (though formally unspecified) linguistic rules as are
the speech patterns of whites. That the Negro speech of a
given region and social class may differ from the white
speech of even the same region and a comparable social class
is now understood to be the result, not of physiological or
mental differences between Negroes and whites, but rather of
the interrelationship between language history and American
social structure.[13] For, if early written samples of North
American slave speech are at all reliable, it would seem that
the unique characteristics of present-day Negro dialects de-
rive, at least in part, from former pidgin and creole stages.
And this would also explain why the most nonstandard varieties
of Negro dialect are structurally much more deviant from stan-
dard English than are the most nonstandard dialects of native
American whites.[14]

Once this is understood, it should become apparent that
language differences, as opposed to language deficits, may
well account for most of the chronic difficulty which so many

lower-class Negro children have with standard English in the
classroom and, later, on the job. For, wherever the struc-
ture of standard English differs from that of their own non-
standard dialect, the "interference" of the familiar pattern
in the production of the unfamiliar pattern may occur. This
is, in fact, exactly what happens when a Spanish-speaking
child produces a Spanish-like English utterance. Thus, the
language-learning problems of a Negro-dialect speaker who is
trying to acquire standard English are, in many ways, more
like those of, say, a Spanish speaker who is trying to acquire
English than they are like those of a middle-class, English-
speaking child. For the first two, the task is one of learn-
ing structurally different functional equivalents of patterns
which they already know; for the third, the task is merely
one of learning additional and compatible patterns to the
ones already known. In other words, the learning of standard
English by speakers of Negro dialect is more like foreign-
language learning than it is like first-language learning.
For this reason, techniques which have been developed in
foreign-language teaching to deal with structural conflicts
between different language systems are being found to be
much more appropriate for teaching standard English patterns
to Negro-dialect speakers than are the pathology-oriented
methods of traditional speech therapy and remedial English.[15]
And even though the overall structural difference between
Negro dialect of the most nonstandard kind and standard Eng-
lish of the most formal kind is obviously not as great as
b tween any kind of English and a foreign language like
Spanish, this does not necessarily make it easier for the
Negro-dialect speaker to acquire an acceptably standard
variety of English than for the speaker of Spanish to do so.
On the contrary, the subtlety of the structural differences
between the two forms of English, masked as they are by the

many similarities, may make it almost impossible for the
speaker of Negro dialect to tell which patterns are charac-
teristic of nonstandard dialect, and which ones are not.
Indeed, this may explain why it is that many immigrant popu-
lations have been able to make a more rapid and successful
transition from their original foreign language to standard
English than migrant Negroes have from their own nonstandard
dialect to standard English.[16]

Toward the beginning of this paper, it was indicated
that the attainment of such a seemingly rudimentary skill as
literacy in the national language could actually turn out to
be an inordinately difficult task for persons who might not
happen to speak that language -- success in learning to read
being, for them, largely dependent upon success in learning
a new language. Mention was made of the recent development
of special literacy programs for such persons, involving the
teaching of beginning reading in the learner's native lan-
guage and the subsequent transfer of the basic skills thus
acquired to the reading (and even to the learning) of the
national language. That early in the paper, the possible
implications which the native-to-foreign approach to liter-
acy might have for teaching reading to "disadvantaged" Negroes
could not be explored directly, since, without the inter-
vening discussion, few reading specialists would have been
prepared to see any similarity at all between the reading
problems of linguistic minorities in foreign lands and those
of Negro children in American schools. But once it has be-
come clear that low intellectual performance of whatever kind
on the part of Negro school children could be due, not to
neurological or experiential deficits, but rather to un-
formalized yet real differences between their own cultural
orientation and school expectations, and, more specifically,

once it becomes clear that the chronic difficulties which
such children often have with oral standard English can be
traced to structural differences between nonstandard Negro
dialect (the linguistic aspect of their own culture) and
standard English (the linguistic aspect of the school cul-
ture), then the applicability of native-to-foreign literacy
techniques becomes a distinct possibility. After all, might
not learning to read in an unfamiliar dialect have associated
with it some of the problems which have been found to charac-
terize learning to read in an unfamiliar language?

Although no adequate study of the role of dialect dif-
ferences in the reading proficiency of American Negro chil-
dren has yet been undertaken, a suggestion of what is likely
to be the case is available from a somewhat comparable Euro-
pean situation. In a Swedish-dialect context, Tore Österberg
found that the teaching of basic reading skills in the non-
standard dialect of the school children in a particular dis-
trict (Piteå) increased proficiency, not only in beginning
reading in the nonstandard dialect, but also in later read-
ing of the standard language.[17] In fact, one of Österberg's
most dramatic findings was that the experimental group (which
began with nonstandard dialect materials and then changed to
standard Swedish materials) overtook the control group (which
used standard Swedish materials from the very beginning) in
reading proficiency in standard Swedish -- I repeat, standard
Swedish -- even though the additional steps of the bidialectal
approach meant that the students in the experimental group
spent less total time with the standard language.

But even before I became aware of the Österberg study,
with its obvious implications for American education, the
suitability of the bidialectal approach to the reading prob-
lems of inner-city Negro children was suggested to me by a
fortuitous experience. In the latter part of 1965, I had

decided to do a Negro-dialect translation of Clement Clarke
Moore's famous Christmas poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas"
(more widely known as "The Night Before Christmas") for
Christmas greetings from the Urban Language Study of the
Center for Applied Linguistics.[18] In order to highlight the
grammatical differences between nonstandard Negro dialect
and standard English, I decided to retain standard-English
word spellings in the nonstandard version wherever possible.
Thus, I wrote it's, the, night, before, and Christmas, even
though a child might be apt to pronounce /is/, /də/, /nay/,
/bifów/, and /kísmɨs/. One modification I made in this rule
was that, when the nonstandard pronunciation of a particular
Negro-dialect word was better represented by the spelling of
some standard-English word other than its direct functional
equivalent, that spelling was used. Thus the Negro-dialect
verb /fuw/, though equivalent to fill in standard English,
was spelled full in the poem. In addition, the form and
sequencing of the events in Moore's original version were
recast to make the nonstandard version more in keeping with
Negro discourse style and inner-city cultural reality. Some
idea of what the result of this translation process looked
like can be gotten from the first few lines, which went:

> It's the night before Christmas, and here in our house,
> It ain't nothing moving, not even no mouse.
> There go we-all stockings, hanging high up off the floor,
> So Santa Claus can full them up, if he walk in
>   through our door.

For those who are not entirely familiar with this kind of
dialect, I should probably point out that the Negro-dialect
phrase There go we-all stockings does not mean "There go our
stockings" in standard English. As often used by Negro chil-
dren, the idioms here go and there go serve to point out
something (not necessarily in motion) to the listener, and
are thus equivalent to standard English here is/are and
there is/are, or to French voici and voilà.

One evening, while I was working at home on the trans-
lation of the poem (a draft of which was in my typewriter,
with the original version at the side), two inner-city chil-
dren dropped by for a visit. While I was busy getting some
refreshments for them from the refrigerator, Lenora (then
about 12 years old) went over to play with the typewriter
and found the draft of the nonstandard version of the poem
in it. Lenora was one of the "problem readers" of the public
schools; she read school texts haltingly, with many mistakes,
and with little ability to grasp the meaning of what she read.
Yet, when she began to read the nonstandard version of the
poem, her voice was steady, her word reading accurate, and
her sentence intonation was natural (for her dialect, of
course). This unexpected success in reading so surprised
Lenora that she began to discuss the experience with her
little brother. They decided that there was something dif-
ferent about the text, but were unable to tell exactly what
it was. To compare, I then had Lenora read the standard Eng-
lish version of the poem, which was sitting beside the type-
writer. When she did, all the "problem reader" behaviors
returned.

Now, it must be remembered that both the nonstandard
and standard versions of the poem were written with the same
spellings for similar words, e.g., Christmas in both. There-
fore, it was clear that Lenora was reacting primarily to the
difference between a familiar and an unfamiliar type of gram-
mar. For, if she could read standard-English words without
difficulty when they were presented in a nonstandard gram-
matical framework, then this meant that word-reading or sound-
spelling-meaning correspondences were not the problem that
they seemed to be when she attempted to read standard English.
It struck me that this unplanned "experiment" (later dupli-
cated with other inner-city children) suggested an entirely

different dimension of possible reading problems for inner-
city Negro children than those focused on by such methods as
i.t.a. and phonics. This other dimension is that of struc-
tural interference between the grammatical patterns of the
nonstandard dialect which many Negro children speak and the
grammatical patterns of the standard English in which read-
ing materials are invariably written. And, if it has been
considered pedagogically useful to adapt beginning reading
materials to the word pronunciations of middle-class white
children (as has been done in i.t.a. and phonics), then might
it not also be useful to adapt beginning reading materials
to the sentence patterns of lower-class Negro children?

From my own point of view, which is that of a linguist
who has spent most of his life in multilingual, diglossic,
and multidialectal situations, who considers them normal,
and who feels that educational techniques ought to take them
into account, the answer is that beginning reading materials
should indeed be adapted to the patterns of nonstandard Negro
dialect -- and to those of any other nonstandard dialect which
school children in a particular area may speak, for that mat-
ter. Yet, I think I can anticipate at least four reasons
which might be given why the "correctness" of reading mater-
ials should not be tampered with and, in particular, why
Negro-dialect patterns should not be allowed to appear in
school readers.

One argument which might be advanced against the incor-
poration of nonstandard-dialect patterns into beginning read-
ing materials is that the process ought to be unnecessary;
children from whatever language or dialect background ought
to be instructed in oral standard English as part of their
pre-reading training, and reading materials ought to be writ-
ten in standard English from the very start. Neat though
this approach may seem, it is simply impossible to carry out

in most rural and inner-city schools. For the fact is that
these schools are full of functionally illiterate, nonstand-
ard-dialect-speaking children of all grades and ages -- many
of whom are simply too far along in the curriculum to be told
to stop trying to read, go back, and take remedial oral Eng-
lish with the kindergarten children and first-graders. Even
if most predominantly Negro schools were to have effective
programs for teaching oral standard English to pre-readers
(and most still do not), the migratory and working patterns
of rural children and the high geographic mobility of inner-
city children would make it difficult for such schools to
insure that the children going into beginning reading would
all have already had instruction in oral standard English.
Consequently, the recognition of nonstandard dialect in read-
ing instruction will probably be necessary for at least some
pupils at all grade levels in such schools. And this is as
it should be. Special oral-language programs for Negro-
dialect speakers and special reading instruction for Negro-
dialect speakers ought, after all, to be complementary
activities, not rival ones.

Another argument which is very likely to be advanced
against the idea of incorporating Negro-dialect grammatical
patterns into beginning reading materials is that the fea-
tures of Negro dialect which seem to interfere the most with
the effective oral reading of standard English do not seem to
be grammatical ones; rather, they seem to be phonological
ones (i.e. differences in pronunciation). This is certainly
the impression of many reading specialists, and it agrees
substantially with the view which most speech therapists and
many English teachers have of Negro dialect as more a matter
of deviant "speech" (i.e. pronunciation) than of different
"language" (i.e. grammar). What is more, those who argue
thus can point to a great deal of support for this assumption

from dialectology and linguistics. For it has long been the
view of most dialectologists that American dialects of Eng-
lish differ from each other primarily in details of pro-
nunciation and, to a lesser extent, of vocabulary. In fact,
so fully was this concept of American dialect differences
borrowed from European dialect geography that, when the field
questionnaires for work on an atlas of American dialects were
drawn up, they were designed to elicit phonological and lexi-
cal information almost exclusively. (Of course, the results
of the American Dialect Atlas fieldwork reinforced the original
view of dialect differences, since the questionnaires revealed
virtually no grammatical differences!) And, more recently,
some linguists who have studied Negro dialect from a trans-
formational viewpoint have maintained that a few phonological
processes and minor transformations account for most of the
observable structural differences between nonstandard Negro
dialect and standard English. In other words, even apparent
word-form and grammatical differences may, in this view,
represent little more than different phonological and trans-
formational treatments of otherwise similar "underlying"
structures.[19]

It is perhaps inevitable that those who take this view
will see the special reading problems of lower-class Negro
school children primarily as a difficulty in word or sentence
recognition caused by the frequent lack of correspondence
between Negro-dialect pronunciations and standard-English
spellings (which, of course, represent standard-English pro-
nunciations much more closely). That is, the Negro child is
seen as having to cope primarily with such problems as learn-
ing that there is a correspondence between the spelling and
meaning of pen and pin in written standard English, even
though the word for the thing one writes with and the word
for the thing one sticks with are both pronounced [pɪn]

(or, alternatively, [pɛn]) in Negro dialect. And the reading
teacher is seen as having to cope primarily with such problems
as deciding, when a Negro child reads aloud /ges/ for guest,
whether he has understood the meaning of the written word and
merely given it its Negro-dialect pronunciation, or whether
he has misread the word as guess[20].

Now, it is undoubtedly true that sound-spelling-meaning
correspondences between spoken Negro dialect and written
standard English are less regular (or, at least, less ob-
viously regular) than between spoken standard English and
written standard English. Still, they are by no means neat
in even the latter case. For example, speakers of standard
English must learn to deal with the correlation to different
meanings of the written distinction between homophonic son
and sun, just as speakers of Negro dialect (or, indeed, of
southern varieties of standard English) must learn to deal
with what for them are homophonic pen and pin. And, of
course, spellings like of and island are not representative
of the pronunciation either of Negro dialect or standard Eng-
lish. Yet, most speakers of standard English do not seem to
be hindered very much by such sound-spelling-meaning irregu-
larities when they are learning to read -- a fact which would
suggest that absolute parallelism between phonology and
orthography is not really a prerequisite to literacy in Eng-
lish. Indeed, even relatively inexperienced readers seem to
be able to cope with a fair amount of sound-spelling irregu-
larity, provided that they are familiar with the spoken forms
of the words and are able to get sufficient cues for asso-
ciating the written and spoken forms from the lexical and
syntactic context.

Probably more serious in its consequences for reading
instruction is the way in which differences between Negro
dialect pronunciations and standard English spellings can be

misinterpreted by reading teachers when they attempt to
evaluate reading success through viva-voce performance.
Unfortunately, there seems to be no simple way of deciding
whether, in a particular instance, /ges/ represents a Negro
dialect pronunciation of guest, or a misreading of it as
guess. It would be more likely to be the former, but the
background and training of many reading teachers would in-
cline them to see it as the latter. And, although linguists
know that a verb need not be accompanied by an explicit
marker of the past tense to have past-tense meaning in Negro
dialect (or, sometimes, even in standard English -- cf. hit,
which never takes a past-tense marker), most reading teachers
would probably assume that, when a Negro child reads a sen-
tence like They guessed who he was to sound more like They
guess who he was, this is evidence that he has missed the
past-tense meaning of the verb guess. In fact, the Negro
child may merely pronounce written guessed as /ges/ for the
same reason that he pronounces guest as /ges/ -- because
final /st/ clusters turn into /s/ in his dialect. The failure
to articulate a final written -ed when reading aloud no more
indicates that a Negro child has failed to perceive the past-
tense meaning of a written verb having it than reading He hit
me yesterday aloud is an indication that the speaker of stand-
ard English has failed to perceive the past-tense meaning of
hit. Clearly, the requirements for acceptable reading aloud
must be distinguished from the requirements for effective
reading comprehension.

Even in those cases in which phonological differences be-
tween Negro dialect and standard English look like they ought
to make phonological identification of the written word more
difficult for the Negro-dialect speaker, and thus interfere
with reading comprehension, this may not always turn out to
be so. For, if the differences are regular enough, which

they often are, then the Negro-dialect speaker may be able to
set up his own sound-spelling correspondences between them --
ones which will be different from those set up by a speaker
of standard English, but which will allow effective word
identification nevertheless. For example, most varieties of
Negro dialect regularly have /f/ and /v/ where standard Eng-
lish has /θ/ and /ð/, respectively. And the standard-English
sounds are regularly represented in the written language by
th (usually standing for the voiceless /θ/, but also for the
voiced /ð/ in certain circumstances). But the fair amount
of regularity between standard English /θ/ and /ð/ and Negro
dialect /f/ and /v/ on the one hand, and standard English
/θ/ and /ð/ and the spelling th on the other allows the
Negro-dialect speaker to set up his own reading rule which
tells him, in effect, "Read /f/ (or, in certain circumstances,
/v/) for th, when not at the beginning of a word." Thus, he
will read /bref/ for breath and, with the additional knowledge
that th before final e usually stands for the voiced counter-
part, he should read /briyv/ for breathe. And, since /bref/
and /briyv/ are exactly his functional equivalents of standard
English /breθ/ and /briyð/, the correct word identification
of breath and breathe, in terms of his own spoken vocabulary,
will be made.[21] For the reading of word-initial th, other
reading rules would be set up, since the Negro-dialect re-
flexes of initial /θ/ and /ð/ in standard English are more
complicated.[22]

     If, as the foregoing observations seem to indicate, the
adverse effects of purely phonological differences between
Negro dialect and standard English on reading comprehension
are but slight, then the case for structural interference in
a Negro-dialect speaker's attempts to read standard English
will have to be made on other linguistic grounds. A sub-
stantial number of lexical differences between the two kinds

of English would serve this purpose, but one of the striking
features of the relationship between urban Negro dialect and
standard English is that it involves very little lexical
divergence. Consequently, if there really is significant
dialect interference in the reading process, it can be ex-
pected to derive from grammatical differences between Negro
dialect and standard English, and particularly from ones
which are more or less independent of non-significant (for
reading) phonological differences.

There are actually many grammatical differences between
Negro dialect and standard English which, whether caused by
different transformations or by different grammatical pro-
cesses of a "deeper" type, are nevertheless clearly inde-
pendent of regular phonological differences between the two
kinds of English.[23] Examples of transformationally-derived
grammatical differences are encountered in the use of question-
type inversion in Negro-dialect verb phrases where standard
English uses if (meaning "whether") with no inversion, e.g.
See can he go for See if he can go, uninverted verb phrases
after certain question words in Negro dialect where standard
English requires inversion, e.g. What it is? for What is it?,
and multiple negation in Negro dialect where standard English
has single negation, e.g. He ain't never bought none for
He hasn't ever bought any or He has never bought any.[24] As
with many of the regular phonological differences between
Negro dialect and standard English, the Negro-dialect speaker
is usually able to establish correspondences between gram-
matical differences of this type -- provided, of course,
that the context is clear and that such constructions do not
pile up in rapid succession. But even so, misinterpretation
is quite possible when a standard-English construction hap-
pens to resemble in form some Negro-dialect construction
other than the one to which it is functionally equivalent.

For example, a seemingly unambiguous standard-English sentence like His eye's open may be misinterpreted by a Negro-dialect speaker as meaning "His eyes are open", simply because it resembles in form the Negro dialect sentence His eyes open (with that meaning) more than it does His eye open (the Negro-dialect equivalent of the original standard-English sentence). And this, incidentally, is yet another example of a case in which viva-voce performance would be of no help to the reading teacher in deciding whether there was a misinterpretation or not, since the pupil's pronunciation of standard English His eye's open and Negro dialect His eyes open would be identical.

Intelligibility problems of a different order -- at once more subtle and more ingrained -- are posed by grammatical differences between Negro dialect and standard English which originate deeper in the respective grammars than do differences of the preceding type. Because they are not likely to involve simple one-to-one correlations, and because they may not even use the same perceptual information about the real world, these deeper grammatical differences are apt to lie beyond the scope of the intuitive methods by which speakers of one dialect normally determine structural equivalences between their own and some other dialect. It is this type of grammatical difference which underlies the dissimilar use of be in Negro dialect and standard English. In Negro dialect, be is used with adjectives and the -in' (= -ing) form of verbs to indicate an extended or repeated state or action, e.g. He be busy, He be workir'. On the other hand, the absence of this be usually indicates that the state or action is immediate or momentary, e.g. He busy, He workin'. The auxiliary or tag for be in Negro dialect is do, e.g. Do he be busy? as a question form of He be busy, while the explicit form use in the non-be construction is usually is, e.g. Is he busy?

as a question form of He busy. This means, of course, that
be and is are entirely different morphemes in Negro dialect.
But in standard English, there is no such grammatical dis-
tinction, and be and is are merely inflectional variants of
one and the same verb. Thus, for the two grammatical con-
structions of Negro dialect, standard English has but one
grammatical equivalent, e.g. He is busy, He is working, in
which the immediacy or duration of the state or action is
left entirely unspecified.

Thus far, this difference between Negro dialect and
standard English in the grammatical recognition or not of a
contrast between extended or repeated states and actions and
immediate or momentary ones may seem to have little signifi-
cance for reading comprehension, since the Negro-dialect
speaker is obviously not going to encounter his own He busy
and He be busy constructions (which mark the distinction)
in a standard-English text. In form, the closest standard-
English constructions to these will be the He is busy type,
which is functionally equivalent to both of the Negro-dialect
constructions, and the He will be busy type, which represents
a future state or action only. Now, if this were indeed the
extent of the matter, it would certainly be reasonable to
assume that the differences in form between the standard-
English and Negro-dialect constructions would alert the
average Negro-dialect speaker to a possible difference in
meaning between them. But one more bit of information is
necessary to a full understanding of just how much such a
seemingly minor grammatical difference can affect intelligi-
bility. This is that exposure to the standard-English use
of present-tense forms of the copula (i.e. am, is, are) has
made many speakers of nonstandard Negro dialect -- even very
young ones -- aware that their own He busy and He be busy
types of construction are not "proper" in form. Consequently,

they often attempt to "correct" these on their own by adding
one or another of the standard English auxiliaries to their
He busy type of construction, and by changing the be of their
He be busy type of construction into bees (on analogy with
correcting he work to he works) and, when they realize that
even this is nonstandard, into will be.[25] Now, even assuming
that those who do this will always end up with forms like
He is busy (with appropriate person accord of the auxiliary
throughout) for He busy, and He will be busy for He be busy,
it is nevertheless the case that these phonologically and
morphologically "standard" forms are still nonstandard Negro
dialect in their grammar and meaning. This means that Negro-
dialect speakers -- even ones who appear to know "correct"
grammar -- are apt to misread standard-English He is busy
constructions as necessarily implying immediacy (which they
do not), and He will be busy constructions as possibly indi-
cating repetition or long duration (which they do not) as
well as futurity.

    Taken altogether, the grammatical differences between
Negro dialect and standard English are probably extensive
enough to cause reading-comprehension problems. Even in
cases where the differences do not actually obscure the
meaning of a sentence or passage, they can be distracting to
a young Negro-dialect speaker who is trying to learn to read,
and who can find but few familiar syntactic patterns to aid
him in word identification. It is true that this child must
eventually be taught to read standard-English sentence pat-
terns, but it is open to question whether he should be made
to cope with the task of deciphering unfamiliar syntactic
structures at the very same time that he is expected to
develop effective word-reading skills. One simple way to
avoid placing a double learning load on the lower-class Negro
child who is learning to read would be to start with sentence

patterns which are familiar to him -- ones from his own dia-
lect -- and then move to unfamiliar ones from standard Eng-
lish once he has mastered the necessary word-reading skills.
In that way, reading ability could actually become an aid to
the learning of standard English.

A third objection which might well be raised to the use of
Negro dialect in beginning reading materials is that it would
reinforce the use by lower-class Negro children of their non-
standard dialect, and thereby serve as a barrier to their
eventual acquisition of standard English. But such a claim
would be predicated on two false assumptions about language
learning and language use. The first false assumption is
that the use of language patterns always constitutes rein-
forcement of those patterns in the user. Although this is a
popular belief among educators, it is obviously untrue for
native speakers of a language (or a particular variety of a
language) who are using familiar patterns of it. If a
standard-English speaker is asked to repeat (or read) a sen-
tence like Charles and Michael are out playing, he will not
know either the sentence pattern or the individual words any
better when he is through than before he started. The reason
is, of course, that he already knows these aspects of his
language as well as he could possibly learn them. If this is
so, then why is it assumed that, if a Negro-dialect speaker
is allowed to say (or asked to read) a sentence like Charles
an' Michael, dey out playin', he will thereby become more
addicted to Negro dialect? And what sort of magic is a
classroom supposed to have, anyway, that the occasional use
of nonstandard pronunciations or sentence patterns within its
confines is regarded as pregnant with potential effect, while
the almost exclusive use of those same pronunciations and
sentence patterns outside the classroom is regarded as of
little consequence? The second false assumption underlying

this particular argument is that the knowledge and use of one
language or dialect precludes the learning and use of another
language or dialect -- or, put more simply, that people's
capacity for learning and using different linguistic systems
is severely limited. This is a particularly common belief
in America, where very few educators have had any exposure
to multilingualism or bidialectalism. But Europeans would
be likely to be astonished or amused by such an assertion,
since most of them accept it as a matter of course that one
will use a nonstandard dialect in the village home and a
standardized variety of the same language (or even a dif-
ferent language) in the city office. The fact is that, in
America too, there is no linguistic reason why an individual
ought not to be able to produce sentences like Charles an'
Michael, dey out playin' in one situation, and Charles and
Michael are out playing in another. Poor language teaching,
rather than the prior knowledge of another language or dia-
lect, is the principal cause of unsuccessful bilingualism or
bidialectalism.

    Instead of being ignored or made the target of an eradi-
cation program, Negro dialect should actually be used as a
basis for teaching oral and written standard English. If
Negro dialect is used to teach initial word-reading skills
to Negro-dialect speakers, then those word-reading skills
can be made the constant in terms of which standard-English
grammatical patterns can be taught through reading and writ-
ing. One form which this type of language teaching could
take would be to make the transition from Negro dialect to
standard English in a series of stages, each of which would
concentrate on a limited set of linguistic differences. An
exciting aspect of this approach is that oral language teach-
ing could be combined with the reading program to any degree
felt useful. Take, for example, the Negro-dialect sentence

just cited, and its standard-English counterpart. The former
would become the initial stage in such a program, and the
latter would be the ultimate goal. In this illustration, I
will write the Negro-dialect sentence in standard-English
spelling in order to simplify the transition process.

STAGE 1

Charles and Michael, they out playing.

Grammatically, sentences at this stage will be pure non-
standard Negro dialect. The vocabulary, also, will be con-
trolled so that no words which are unfamiliar to a Negro-
dialect-speaking child will appear. Thus, all linguistic
aspects of text will be familiar to the beginning reader,
and his full attention can be focused on learning to read
the vocabulary. At this stage, no attempt should be made
to teach standard-English pronunciations of the words, since
the sentence in which they appear is not standard English.

STAGE 2

Charles and Michael, they are out playing.

At this stage, the most important grammatical features of
standard English are introduced. In the example, there is
one such feature -- the copula. Apart from that, the vocabu-
lary is held constant. Oral-language drills could profit-
ably be used to teach person accord of the copula (am, is,
are), and some standard-English pronunciations of the basic
vocabulary might be taught.

STAGE 3

Charles and Michael are out playing.

Grammatically, the sentences at this stage are brought into
full conformity with standard English by making the remaining
grammatical and stylistic adjustments. In the example, the

"double subject" of the nonstandard form is eliminated. Oral-language drills could be used to teach this, and additional standard-English pronunciations of the basic vocabulary could be taught.

Although the complete transition from Negro-dialect grammar to standard-English grammar was effected in three stages in the foregoing example, more stages would probably be required in a real program of this type. The actual programming of these stages would have to be carried out by competent linguists, but, once done, the resulting materials ought to be usable in regular remedial-reading classes.

The fourth objection which might be made to the use of written Negro-dialect materials in the school is that it is insulting to Negroes. In part, this view may stem from the mistaken notion that Negro dialect is nothing but "sloppy" speech -- a sort of half-language -- the use of which might be taken as evidence of low intellectual achievement in the Negro.[26] But another possible reason why written materials in Negro dialect might be regarded by many as damaging to the Negro image could be an assumption that such materials are merely a continuation of literary Negro stereotypes of the sort which have appeared over the years in stories, jokes, cartoons, etc., and which have undoubtedly served as entertainment for countless numbers of white racists. That the Negro dialect of many of these stereotypic representations of lower-class Negroes was often more accurate than many middle-class Negroes or liberal whites realize or would care to admit further complicates the matter, since structural similarities between the Negro dialect of literary stereotypes and that of pedagogical materials might be misconstrued as evidence that language of the pedagogical materials has been based on that of literary stereotypes. And, of course,

there will be the inevitable visceral reaction of many up-
wardly-mobile Negroes against any public recognition of
distinctively Negro behaviors -- particularly those which
cannot, like Negro musicality, be easily transvalued into
"soul". Often near-white culturally and linguistically,
Negroes of this type frequently attempt to pass themselves
off on the white power structure as representatives of the
culturally and linguistically non-white Negro school child,
and as natural authorities on his background and learning
problems. At the same time, many of these same Negroes are
inordinately fond of boasting to anyone who will listen
that they never spoke nonstandard dialect, as if the truth
of such a statement were indicative of anything more than
their total unfamiliarity with the very kinds of pedagogical
problems which they claim to know so much about. (Indeed,
when some middle-class Negroes do attempt to demonstrate a
knowledge of Negro dialect, it more often than not turns out
to be a combination of standard-English grammar and peda-
gogically-irrelevant ethnic slang.) Recently, some of these
culturally and linguistically near-white Negroes have even
tried to turn "instant black" through superficial conformity
to the styles and rhetoric of the Black Power movement --
their assumption apparently being that, in the eyes of the
white establishment, a bush and a dashiki are adequate sub-
stitutes for knowledge in qualifying as an authority on Negro
educational needs. And, given the fact that the white-
dominated educational establishment is more committed to the
political goal of placating middle-class Negro social griev-
ances than the professional goal of fulfilling lower-class
Negro educational needs (and is probably even unaware that
there could be a difference), they may be right. The danger
is that Negroes who are embarrassed by or hostile to Negro
dialect may attempt to abort its use in the school curriculum

by any of a number of strategies, such as reiterating the
conventional view that Negro dialect is nothing more than a
mass of unstructured speech errors, or by claiming that Negro
dialect of the type depicted by linguists is either rare or
non-existent among black school children, or, if all else
fails, by the irresponsible yet, to liberal whites, intimi-
dating charge that anyone who works on the theory that
American Negroes and whites have different configurations of
behavior is a racist.

If the more pessimistic of these expectations turns out
to be well-founded, and numbers of articulate Negroes do move
to force school administrators into bypassing or abandoning
programs using Negro dialect, the day will not be saved for
these programs by white linguists. For they, like other white
social scientists, are as easily intimidated by political
pressure from blacks as white school administrators are.
Rather, the day will be saved by other Negroes -- ones who,
often coming from a lower-class background, are aware that
cultural and linguistic differences do exist between American
whites and blacks, who accept the fact, and who want to use
it as a point of departure for increased self-awareness and
inter-ethnic understanding. Even more articulate than their
white-oriented, middle-class counterparts, Negroes with this
new awareness know that such differences are not indications
of intellectual superiority or inferiority, but are rather
exciting indications of unique and equally worthy culture
histories. They recognize that, because of these differences,
Negro and white children will often have unique performance
characteristics and curriculum needs in school, but they see
that American education has traditionally recognized and
adjusted itself only to those of the white children. As a
result, it is with some justification that many of these
Negroes regard the American school system as a singularly

colonialist institution -- one having only slightly more
relevance for lower-class American Negro children than the
British educational system had for native children in Africa
and India. Negroes who are developing this awareness -- and
their numbers are increasing every day -- are simply not
going to sit idly by while white-oriented Negroes attack the
very kind of curriculum which would set this situation right.
For their own good, school administrators, curriculum plan-
ners, textbook publishers, and program funders had better
learn to distinguish between these two types of Negroes, if
only to the extent of realizing that the opinion of a "colored"
friend, associate, or colleague on Negro-dialect materials may
not necessarily be an inside tip on the feelings of Negroes at
large.

Linguists, for their part, ought to be more concerned
about the suitability of a particular set of Negro-dialect
reading materials for a particular population of Negro chil-
dren than about the popularity of such materials among Negro
adults. The materials will be accepted by the children if
they are authentic -- that is, if the written language of the
materials represents accurately their own spoken language.
For the linguist, this authenticity will only come about
through careful attention to details of grammar, style, and
vocabulary. And the materials will be accepted by Negro
parents and other adults when they see that Negro children
learn to read standard English by means of them, where they
did not by means of traditional reading materials. For the
linguist, the ability of the materials to do this will re-
quire meticulous planning of the structural changes which are
to be dealt with in each of the successive stages from "pure"
nonstandard dialect to "pure" standard English. Finally, if
it can be argued, as it has been in this paper, that beginning
reading materials in standard English are not suitable for

children who only speak nonstandard Negro dialect, then it
should be equally apparent that beginning reading materials
in nonstandard Negro dialect will not be suitable for chil-
dren who only speak standard English. In particular, one
should guard against the danger of assuming that Negro-dialect
materials will be appropriate for all Negro school children.
Earlier, it was pointed out that most middle-class Negroes
do not (and, indeed, many cannot) speak nonstandard Negro
dialect. Although this fact cannot serve as an argument that
Negro dialect is rare or non-existent, it certainly is an
indication that not all Negroes speak Negro dialect. Even
among lower-class Negroes, some individuals (particularly
females) will be found who, either due to a special life
history or because of strong upward mobility, have acquired
and use standard English. And, of course, there will be
individuals who speak something between standard English and
the type of nonstandard dialect I have characterized as "pure"
Negro dialect. This does not make Negro-dialect materials
any the less useful for children who actually speak Negro
dialect; it merely means that any Negro-dialect reading pro-
gram will have to have an instrument for determining exactly
who does, and who doesn't, speak Negro dialect in the first
place. And if such an instrument could actually measure a
child's initial language on a Negro-dialect-to-standard-
English continuum, then it would also be useful for measuring
that child's progress in standard English as a result of the
staging process of the materials. Although still in an
en yonic state, the bidialectal oral-language proficiency
test designed by Joan C. Baratz and myself is potentially
ideal for this purpose.[27] Even children whose initial lan-
guage is shown by such a test to be somewhere in between
"pure" Negro dialect and standard English can be worked into
such a program if, as ought to be the case, the language of

its intermediate stages is made to resemble the intermediate
dialects in a Negro speech community. Thus, a particular
child might be started with, say, Stage Two materials rather
than Stage One materials.

Once the decision has been made to develop beginning
reading materials using Negro dialect for a particular school
population, then a suitable orthography must be selected for
the nonstandard sentence patterns. This is an unavoidable
problem, since any nonstandard dialect is, by its very nature,
unwritten. But it is an important problem, since the effec-
tive use of a nonstandard dialect in a bidialectal reading
program will depend to a great extent on how easy the ortho-
graphic transition between the two linguistic systems can be
made. For Negro dialect, four major types of orthography are
available to choose from. These are:

1. An autonomous phonemic orthography, in which words are
    spelled the way they are pronounced (or heard) by a
    speaker of the dialect. For example, if a Negro-dialect
    speaker normally pronounces his equivalents of standard
    English bend and bending /ben/ and /bendin/, then these
    words will be spelled so as to show these pronunciations,
    sound-by-sound, e.g. ben and bendin.

2. A systematic phonemic orthography, which attempts to have
    the spellings represent all the information necessary to
    determine changes which can occur in the pronunciation of
    words in different contexts. For example, this type of
    orthography would spell the Negro-dialect equivalent of
    standard English bend in a way which would show that a
    /d/ is pronounced in the word when a vowel follows (as it
    does with the suffix /-in/), while the same is not true
    for a word like /mown/, for standard English moan, i.e.
    /mownin/. This could be accomplished simply by spelling
    the Negro-dialect form /ben/ as bend, with a "reading

rule" that <u>d</u> after <u>n</u> is pronounced only before a vowel.

3. A literary-dialect orthography, in which the purely dia-
   lectal pronunciations of Negro-dialect words are roughly
   indicated by minor changes in the traditional spellings
   of their standard-English cognates. One important device
   used in literary dialect is the apostrophe, which is sub-
   stituted for certain letters to show that a particular
   sound usually pronounced in a standard-English form is
   not pronounced in its Negro-dialect equivalent (e.g.
   <u>ben'</u> for standard English <u>bend</u>), or to indicate sound
   substitutions (e.g. <u>bendin'</u> with final /n/ for standard
   English <u>bending</u> with final /ŋ/). The examples of Negro
   dialect which were given in the earlier discussion of
   grammatical interference were written in a literary-
   dialect orthography.

4. An unmodified standard-English orthography, with no ef-
   fort made to indicate differences in pronunciation between
   Negro dialect and standard English. For example, the
   spellings <u>bend</u> and <u>bending</u> would be used in writing both
   varieties of English. The Negro dialect in the poem
   "A Visit from St. Nicholas" was written in this way, as
   was that in the three-stage example of transitional read-
   ing materials.

The first two types of orthography are the most scientific,
since they both attempt to indicate the pronunciation of the
dialect accurately, and in its own terms. Each of these sys-
tems has its advocates and its detractors, who will be happy
to point out its strengths and weaknesses.[28] An autonomous
phonemic orthography has the advantage of being applicable to
a language or dialect as soon as certain basic facts are known
about its sound system, and long before much is understood
about contextual variations in the structure of words. It is
largely for this reason that most of the orthographies which

have been devised in connection with basic literacy programs
around the world have been autonomous phonemic ones. On the
other hand, a systematic phonemic orthography has the advan-
tage of representing the relationship between variant pro-
nunciations of words much more adequately than is possible
in an autonomous phonemic orthography, and hence tends to
relate more closely to grammatical processes in the language
or dialect. A distinct disadvantage of systematic phonemic
orthographies, however, is that they can only be as well-
formed as the state of knowledge concerning the lexicon and
morphophonemics of the particular language,or dialect will
allow. And, since the lexicon of even a "primitive" language
can be quite vast, and the morphophonemics of even a "simple"
dialect quite complex, that knowledge is seldom ever as com-
plete as it ought to be for devising a permanent orthography.
Accordingly, attempts to create such orthographies are likely
to be characterized by a certain degree of instability, en-
gendered by constant additions, corrections, and revisions.

The last two types of orthography are, from a phono-
logical point of view, at least, much less scientific than
the first two. While a literary-dialect orthography does
attempt to indicate Negro-dialect pronunciations, this is
seldom done either consistently or in the dialect's own
terms.[29] And Negro dialect which has been spelled entirely
in the standard-English fashion will offer no clues at all
as to its unique pronunciations. Rather, the effect of these
two types of orthography is to show the relationship of the
one form of English to the other. A literary-dialect ortho-
graphy, with its altered spellings and ubiquitous apostrophe,
emphasizes the dialect's phonological deviations from stand-
ard-English norms, and can create an impression of great
difference -- even without accommodating the actual dialect
syntax.[30] The writing of Negro dialect in an unmodified

standard-English orthography, on the other hand, obscures the
phonological differences between the two and, as a result,
highlights whatever syntactic differences are incorporated
into the writing of the sentences.

In evaluating the relative utility of these four types
of orthography for writing Negro dialect in a reading program
designed to phase into standard English, it is ironic that
the least satisfactory one is that which has proven most ef-
fective in basic literacy programs involving only one lan-
guage or dialect at a time: the autonomous phonemic ortho-
graphy. What renders this type of orthography unsuitable
for the task at hand is that, precisely because it would
represent the sounds of Negro dialect accurately and in the
dialect's own terms, it would produce Negro-dialect word
spellings which would be too foreign to the spellings of
standard-English cognates to permit an easy transition from
reading and writing the one to reading and writing the other.[31]

Both a systematic phonemic orthography and a literary-
dialect orthography would have essentially the same drawbacks
as an autonomous phonemic orthography, though conceivably to
a lesser degree. But the main argument against both of these
types of orthography is their complexity; the prospective
reader would probably do better to spend his time and effort
mastering the intricacies of the standard-English orthographic
system. And, given what was said earlier about the ability
of the Negro-dialect speaker to set up his own sound-spelling
correspondences between Negro-dialect pronunciations and
standard-English word spellings, the writing of Negro dialect
in an unmodified standard-English orthography ought not to
cause more problems than it avoids.[32]

Apart from the obvious necessity of using the nonstandard
ain't and common contractions like it's, don't, won't, can't,
etc., in writing Negro dialect in a standard-English type of

orthography, I would make one major compromise in the direc-
tion of a literary-dialect orthography. That would be to
indicate, by an apostrophe, those cases in Negro dialect in
which a word must take a prefix in order to become like its
standard-English equivalent, e.g. Negro dialect 'bout,
'cause, 'round, and 'posed to for standard English about,
because, around, and supposed to. In the Negro-dialect
materials, word-initial apostrophes would thereby become
graphic indicators of specific lexical points at which later
morphological expansion of the Negro-dialect forms would have
to be carried out in the transition to standard English.[33]
The usefulness of this technique lies in the fact that Negro-
dialect speakers do not always know that a prefix is "missing"
from their version of a particular word. Thus, the Negro-
dialect form 'most (cf. standard English almost), as in
'most always, 'most everybody, is either left that way when
"proper" English is attempted, or it may be "corrected" with
a suffix, -ly, rather than with a prefix. Although this
latter step creates no conflict in meaning for the Negro-
dialect speaker (since his normal equivalent of standard
English mostly is most of..., e.g. Most of it ruined and
They most of them teachers for standard English It has mostly
spoiled and They are mostly teachers), it does produce se-
quences like mostly always and mostly everybody which are
incongruous and comical when interpreted as standard English.
But even when Negro-dialect speakers do suspect that some
sort of suffix is required to make a particular word into
standard English, they may not be at all sure which standard-
English prefix is required; or they may be sure, but be mis-
taken. Negro-dialect speakers may know, for example, that
their forms 'cord, 'morial, and 'vorce all require a prefix
in "proper" usage, but then they are likely to overuse re-
(by far the most functional prefix in Negro dialect) to

produce the "corrected" forms <u>record</u>, <u>remorial</u>, and <u>revorce</u>,
with only one matching with standard English <u>record</u> (verb),
<u>memorial</u>, and <u>divorce</u> -- and that a fortuitous one. In ef-
fect, this persistent confusion which many Negro-dialect
speakers experience with standard-English pretonic syllables
(often in spite of "hearing" the appropriate forms from
middle-class speakers from time to time) suggests that it
would be of little use to write <u>almost</u>, <u>record</u>, <u>memorial</u>,
<u>divorce</u>, etc., in beginning reading materials for Negro-
dialect speakers, with the hope that they would somehow
"pick up" the right usage from the spellings. It would
seem more effective to write such words as <u>'most</u>, <u>'cord</u>,
<u>'morial</u>, <u>'vorce</u>, etc., in at least the initial stage of
such materials, so that the learner could first become famil-
iar with the reading of their "stems" in terms of his own
pronunciation patterns, and only then to teach the appro-
priate standard-English prefixes by means of supplementary
spoken drills, preparatory to introducing the standard-
English spellings into the written text.[34]

To close this paper, I have written a very short story,
which I call "Shirley and the Valentine Card", to snow what
the written Negro dialect of the initial (i.e. the most non-
standard) stage of a Negro-dialect-to-standard-English read-
ing program might look like, to serve notice on normativists
that standard English has no monopoly on expressiveness, and
to reassure the socio-politically timid that even radically
nonstandard Negro dialect will turn out to be comfortably
unobtrusive if dialectal spellings are used sparingly enough.
I have not gone so far as to structure the text of the story,
as it ought to be in a reading program, by presenting sound-
spelling-meaning correspondences in a systematic way, or by
organizing the distinctive structural features of the dialect
in a way which will facilitate their staging into standard

English. Rather, I present this story simply as a sample of
the language of the story. To that end, I immediately follow
it with a few specific comments on some of its features.

SHIRLEY AND THE VALENTINE CARD

It's a girl name Shirley Jones live in Washington.
'Most everybody on her street like her, 'cause she a nice girl.
And all the children Shirley be with in school like her, too.
Shirley treat all of them just like they was her sisters and
brothers, but most of all she like one boy name Charles.
Shirley, she be knowing Charles 'cause all two of them in the
same grade, and he in her class. But Shirley keep away from
Charles most of the time, 'cause she start to liking him so
much she be scared of him. And that make it seem to Charles
like she don't pay him no mind. So Charles, he don't hardly
say nothing to her neither. Still, that girl got to go
'round telling everybody Charles 'posed to be liking her.
She act like she his girlfriend, too.

But when Valentine Day start to come 'round, Shirley
get to worrying. She worried 'cause she know the rest of
them girls all going get Valentine cards from their boy-
friends. And she know when them girls find out she ain't
get a card from Charles, they going say she been telling a
story 'bout Charles being her boyfriend. So she keep on
thinking 'bout that and worrying all day long, even at school
when she 'posed to be learning something from the teacher and
playing with the other girls. That Shirley, she so worried,
she just don't want to be with nobody. She even walk home
by her own self, when school let out.

When Shirley get home, her mother say it's a letter for
her on the table. Right away Shirley start to wondering who
could it be from, 'cause she know don't nobody 'posed to be
sending her no kind of letter. It do have her name on the

front, though. It say, <u>Shirley Jones</u>. So Shirley, she open
the envelope up. And when she do, she can see it's a Valen-
tine card inside. Now, Shirley take out the card, and she
look at it, and she see it have Charles name wrote on the
bottom.

See, Charles really been liking her all the time, even
though he ain't never tell her nothing 'bout it. So now
everything going be all right for Shirley, 'cause what she
been telling everybody 'bout Charles being her boyfriend
ain't story after all. It done come true!

Comments on the Language of the Story

Although Negro-dialect speakers often narrate their
stories in a past-time setting, I have deliberately put
"Shirley and the Valentine Card" in the somewhat less common
(though still appropriate) simple present throughout. This
is a useful strategy to employ in the writing of initial-
stage reading materials, since it eliminates the need for
introducing nonstandard past-tense verb forms, some of which
would definitely require dialectal spellings, and allows for
the systematic introduction of standard-English past-tense
verb forms at a later time.

The language of the story is essentially a representa-
tion, in the kind of standard-English orthography I have
advocated, of a variety of nonstandard dialect which is used
by many lower-class Negro children in the District of Colum-
bia -- the scene of the story.[35] As it stands, this kind of
Negro dialect is almost identical to that of similar children
in such Eastern Seaboard cities as Baltimore, Wilmington,
Philadelphia, and New York. The language of the story is
fairly "pure" Negro dialect, with features from standard
English kept to a somewhat artificial minimum (since, after
all, the idea would be to introduce these systematically in

the course of the reading program of which such a story
would be part). On the other hand, because this story is
arbitrarily directed to the 10-to-15-year-old range, a number
of even more deviant features of the speech of younger chil-
dren have been omitted, such as possessive pronouns which
(except for the first person singular) are undifferentiated
in form from the corresponding subject pronouns, e.g. he
girlfriend, she boyfriend for his girlfriend, her boy-
friend. If materials were being developed for much younger
children, or for regions in which such features occur in a
wider age range (in coastal South Carolina, Georgia, or
Florida, for example), the dialect forms could be modified
accordingly.[36]

The other regional limitations in the linguistic struc-
ture of "Shirley and the Valentine Card" are really quite
minor. A marked characteristic of the dialect used is that
verbs in the simple present do not usually take a suffix -s
for any person subject.[37] But in some other varieties of
Negro dialect, particularly those spoken in the South Central
states (Mississippi, Alabama, etc.), the simple present verb
is more often marked with -s for all persons, e.g. I lives in
Jackson. Also, although no examples of possessive noun con-
structions appear in the story, South Central Negro dialect
often uses a possessive suffix like standard English, e.g.
Shirley's boyfriend, where Eastern Seaboard Negro dialect
simply uses noun apposition, e.g. Shirley boyfriend. Final-
ly, in the Negro dialect of the District of Columbia, as in
most of the Eastern Seaboard, got (or gots) and 'posed to
take do (negative don't) as an auxiliary or tag, e.g. Do you
got a dollar?, Don't they 'posed to go with you?, while in
South Central usage the auxiliary or tag for these verbs is
usually is (negative ain't), e.g. Is you got a dollar?,
Ain't they 'posed to go with you? But the fact that, in

general, the language of "Shirley and the Valentine Card" is
as close as it is to the speech of Negroes of a comparable
age and socio-economic level in so many parts of the United
States shows rather clearly that Negro dialect from South to
North, from East to West, from farm to city, and from store-
front church to playground, is all part of a single socio-
linguistic complex, with a single historical origin, and
reveals the emptiness of the claim of some traditionalist
educators that Negro speech varies too much from place to
place for it to be a useful pedagogical tool.[38]

What I have had to say about Negro dialect in the course
of this paper should make it obvious that it is a highly com-
plex yet well-formed and systematic code -- just like any
other language. To speak it well, or to use it effectively
in pedagogical materials, requires a profound knowledge of
its many phonological and grammatical rules, of subtle lexi-
cal differences (e.g. that _bright_ means "light-skinned" in
Negro dialect, while it means "clever" in standard English),
and of countless stylistic and idiomatic details (e.g. that
sisters and brothers is the "pure" Negro-dialect form, while
brothers and sisters is an importation from standard English).
This means that attempts to use or to write Negro dialect
should not be made by unqualified persons, black or white,
any more than attempt to use or write, say, French should be.
For one thing, the inner-city slang or "hip talk" of teen-
agers and young adults should not be confused with Negro dia-
lect in the linguistic sense, no matter how ethnically-
correlated many of the slang terms may be. They are simply
deliberate vocabulary substitutions, and have nothing directly
to do with dialect grammar or phonology. Nor is the "stage
dialect" of Negro bit-players on radio, television, or the
screen necessarily close to real Negro dialect. Often, in

order to insure its being understood by a wide audience, a
stage Negro dialect may be created which is little more than
standard English with a slightly ethnicized or southernized
pronunciation, reinforced by the insertion of such general
nonstandardisms as ain't and the double negative, and per-
haps a sprinkling of southern or inner-city Negro lexical
usages like honey child or man.[39] And, although literary
renditions of plantation Negro dialect (such as appears in
Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings)
may represent an older form of Negro dialect rather accur-
ately, and thus share many structural characteristics with
present-day Negro dialect, there are still too many inter-
vening variables (nineteenth-century usage vs. twentieth-
century usage, adult speech vs. child speech, rural forms
vs. urban forms, story-telling style vs. colloquial style,
etc.) for that kind of Negro dialect to be directly useful
for the purposes I have been suggesting.[40] If used well by
educators, living Negro dialect can serve as a bridge between
the personal experiences of the Negro child and his acquisition
of mainstream language skills. If used poorly, however, it
will only add to the confusion of pupil and teacher alike.
The language of the Negro child can be made an effective
educational tool, but it must be treated with respect and
understanding.

NOTES

1. Most of the world's languages consist of more than one
    variety, with different varieties (called dialects by
    linguists) having developed in different regions, or
    among different social groups. The dialects of a lan-
    guage can differ from each other in various details of
    pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Every dialect
    is systematic and logical in its own terms, and a gram-
    mar and dictionary of it could conceivably be written.

For most languages, however, only one or so of the total
number of existing dialects ever comes to be regarded as
"correct" or "proper" usage (linguists call such a dia-
lect the standard one), with normative grammars and
dictionaries based upon it. Consequently, the structural
characteristics of other dialects which deviate from the
standard one are generally regarded as errors, rather
than as differences; and when they are deviant enough,
such dialects (called nonstandard dialects by linguists)
may be popularly deprecated as "bad" or "improper" speech,
with the implication that they have no structural or
historical justification. Now, the chances of a normal
child who reaches school age having mislearned the lan-
guage used around him are infinitely smaller than the
chances that he might have learned accurately a non-
standard dialect. Therefore, educators should be much
less prone than they have been to infer that school-
child speech which deviates from the pedagogical norm
necessarily implies poor language learning.

2. For a discussion of current theory on this aspect of
    human language competence, see Eric H. Lenneberg, The
    Biological Foundations of Language (New York: John Wiley,
    1967).

3. For obvious reasons, the congenitally deaf do not acquire
    spoken language in this way. However, those having early
    contact with persons who use a manual sign analogue of
    oral language (such as deaf parents or deaf playmates)
    may acquire this sign language in a way and at a rate
    which is strikingly similar to the hearing child's
    acquisition of spoken language. In this sense, even the
    congenitally deaf turn out to be linguistically normal.

4. In pointing this out, I am not suggesting that the adop-
    tion of a single language, either imported or indigenous,
    as a national language by a multilingual nation is neces-
    sarily an unwise step. There are often many advantages
    in such a policy. At the same time, it means that lit-
    eracy strategies in such a situation cannot be identical
    to those which would be appropriate for a monolingual
    country, or for a multilingual country in which most of
    the languages are written and officially recognized.

5. See William A. Bull, "The Use of Vernacular Languages in
    Fundamental Education", International Journal of American
    Linguistics, 21:288-294 (1955), reprinted in Dell Hymes,
    ed., Language in Culture and Society (New York: Harper &
    Row, 1964); and Nancy Modiano, "National or Mother Language

in Beginning Reading: A Comparative Study", <u>Research in the Teaching of English</u>, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1968), pp. 32-43.

6. The i.t.a., phonics, and other "linguistic" methods of teaching beginning reading deal primarily with such minimal written vs. spoken code differences.

7. For a thoughtful critique of the recent literature on this issue, see Ralph Mason Dreger and Kent S. Miller, "Comparative Psychological Studies of Negroes and Whites in the United States: 1959-1965", <u>Psychological Bulletin</u>, Vol. 70, No. 3, Part 2 (September 1968).

8. A classic example of this kind of psychological formulation of deficit theory, with its superficial sophistication and hidden defects, is the much-cited and influential article by Vera P. John, "The Intellectual Development of Slum Children: Some Preliminary Findings", <u>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</u>, Vol. 33, No. 5 (October 1963). In her study, John measured what she thought to be differences in verbal and classificatory skills in three socio-economic groups of Negro children (lower-lower, upper-lower, and middle-class) through their performance on a series of standardized verbal and non-verbal tests, including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test. Differences in the performance of the three groups led John to conclude that, among other things, "The acquisition of more abstract and integrative language seems to be hampered by the living conditions in the homes of the lower-class children." Quite apart from John's unsubstantiated statement that the problem-source was "the living conditions in the homes", she seems to have failed to grasp the true relationship of her tests to her subjects, and therefore the real meaning of her results. She showed no awareness that the Peabody test contains only standard-English linguistic forms, and that therefore it is a test of verbal ability only when applied to standard-English speaking subjects. And she showed no awareness that the Lorge-Thorndike test is based on middle-class heuristic styles, and that therefore it is a test of non-verbal intelligence only for members of the middle class. Thus, John failed to realize that her results might well indicate little more than differences in language forms and heuristic styles in her three groups (which she quite wrongly characterized as all belonging to "the same subculture"). I mention John's article specifically because it has been responsible for a great deal of

mischief in intervention programs since its publication,
and because its recent reprinting in Gladys Natchez, ed.,
Children with Reading Problems (New York: Basic Books,
1968) is likely to give it the chance to do further mis-
chief in the field of reading. The editor has countered
the effect of John's article somewhat by reprinting with
it the opposing view of Kenneth B. Clark, "The Cult of
Cultural Deprivation: A Complex Social Phenomenon". The
only question is, Will reading specialists perceive the
fundamental philosophical difference between these two
articles, and be able to judge which is closest to fact?

9. Judging from the current educational and social-activist
rhetoric, it is widely assumed that a gut-level commit-
ment to the principle of human equality constitutes the
only special preparation necessary for teaching lower-
class Negro children. This was the assumption under which
the Port Royal experiment in freedman education was insti-
gated in the first years of the Civil War; it was the
assumption under which Negro education was carried out in
the segregated school systems after Emancipation; and it
has been the assumption under which most of the teaching
of the "disadvantaged" has been carried out since deseg-
regation. That these attempts at Negro education have
failed with dismal regularity to match white education in
quality and effect can certainly be explained, but the
point is that the failure has occurred despite the long
and heavy involvement of individuals having a genuine
commitment to the egalitarian philosophy.

10. Throughout this paper, the term culture is used in the
modern anthropological sense of a network of customs,
values, beliefs, and lifeways associated with a particu-
lar social group or society. Culture may thus include
such phenomena as material artifacts (e.g. dwellings,
tools, clothing, ornaments), social institutions (e.g.
family structure and kinship systems, political organi-
zations, the church), values and belief systems (e.g.
religion, codes of morality and etiquette, the world-
view), and expressive behaviors (e.g. art, music, lan-
guage, interaction styles). Cultural norms may be
consciously specified and transmitted (as in the case of
laws, rituals, and traditions), or their acquisition and
use may be unconscious (as with particular ways of walk-
ing, holding one's body, laughing, and expressing em-
barrassment). The forms of one's language, too, are a
part of one's culture, even though linguists prefer for
practical reasons to describe language patterns separately
from other kinds of cultural phenomena. And, as is true

with language, other basic aspects of one's culture can
be learned quite independently of any formal instruction.
In growing up in his society, a child may "pick up" many
of the cultural patterns used around him quite early --
so early, in fact, that in later life he may not be able
to recall ever having not known them. Indeed, when the
cultural patterns thus acquired are used unconsciously,
as in the way one walks or laughs, there may be no aware-
ness that there is anything socially learned about them.
Rather, the individual concerned is likely to have the
impression that it is simply the "natural" way to walk,
laugh, etc. Again as with language, any national cul-
ture may be divided into a number of sub-varieties,
often correlated with geographical location or social
sub-group membership within the nation. And, carrying
the similarity still further, it is also usual that the
norms of only one or so of these sub-cultures may come
to be accepted by the larger society as the "right" way
to behave. But the point is that many kinds of "wrong"
behavior may derive from cultural differences, not cul-
tural deficit. Thus, in spite of its current popularity
among educators and social activists, the idea that the
members of any population are "culturally deprived" is
an anthropological absurdity.

11. Psychologists have, of course, been aware for some time
that cultural differences could affect performance on
standardized intelligence tests. Indeed, it was this
awareness which touched off well-meant but largely un-
successful attempts to develop useful "culture-fair" or
"culture-free" intelligence tests during the 1940's and
1950's. The social-group classifications which psy-
chologists recognized as having a potentially high
correlation with cultural differences were social class
(i.e. socio-economic status) and ethnicity (which they
usually defined as membership in a social group of
"foreign origin"). See, for example, Kenneth Eels,
et al., Intelligence and Cultural Differences (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1951). The problem was
that psychologists found it difficult to place the
American Negro accurately in this classification. Since
he was obviously not a member of a social group of
"foreign origin" in anything like the sense that Mexican-
Americans, Pennsylvania Germans, or Ashkenazic Jews were,
it seemed logical to consider his intellectual performance
differences to be social-class derived. At the same time,
psychologists were not quite ready to claim that Negroes
performed just like whites of a comparable socio-economic
level (which should have been the case, if the differences

were entirely due to social class), even though they
rejected genetics as a factor in performance differ-
ences. The only alternative seemed to be the concept
of cultural "differences" in the Negro as the product
of cultural deficit. That is, "disadvantaged" Negroes
were assumed to differ from whites, not in the kind of
cultures they possessed, but rather in the amount of a
presumably similar culture they possessed. And this
position is still held by most psychologists today.
For example, in the book of readings edited by A. Harry
Passow, et al., Education of the Disadvantaged (New York:
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), discussions of the
Negro fairly drip with social pathology. One recent
psychological study which has recognized American Negroes
as a distinct ethnic group with cultural characteristics
of its own, irrespective of social class, is that re-
ported in Susan S. Stodolsky and Gerald S. Lesser,
"Learning Patterns in the Disadvantaged", Harvard Edu-
cational Review, Vol. 37, No. 4, Fall 1967. Virtually
all of the findings of this study have important impli-
cations for American education, but a particularly
relevant one for the teaching of "disadvantaged" Negroes
is that American Negroes of all socio-economic classes
show a relatively high level of verbal ability. (Of the
ethnicities studied by Stodolsky and Lesser, only Jews
showed a higher level in this ability.) The implication
that language skills enjoy an important place in American
Negro social life will come as no surprise to the few
social scientists and educators who know Negro life
firsthand, but it certainly ought to startle the many
who have theorized that the lower-class Negro child
comes from a non-verbal background. On the other hand,
one needn't take too seriously the opposition implied in
Stodolsky and Lesser between "supportive" and "compen-
satory" education for different ethnic groups, since
there is no reason why an adequate curriculum shouldn't
contain elements of both. Indeed, the type of reading
program which will be outlined in the course of the
present article is at once supportive, in that it focus-
ses on the relatively high verbal ability of Negroes,
and compensatory, in that it develops reading skills
which are not engendered by the ethnic subculture.

12. For the reader who is interested in pursuing further the
     matter of African acculturation in the New World, an
     important perspective is that found in Melville J.
     Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York:
     Harper & Brothers, 1941).

13. See Lorenzo Dow Turner, <u>Africanisms in the Gullah Dia-</u>
    <u>lect</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), and
    Beryl Loftman Bailey, "Toward a New Perspective in Negro
    English Dialectology", <u>American Speech</u>, Vol. 40, No. 3
    (October 1965).

14. For a pedagogically-oriented survey of the origin and
    development of nonstandard Negro dialects, see William A.
    Stewart, "Sociolinguistic Factors in the History of
    American Negro Dialects" and "Continuity and Change in
    American Negro Dialects", first published in <u>The Florida</u>
    <u>FL Reporter</u>, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 1967) and Vol. 6,
    No. 1 (Spring 1968). Both are being reprinted in
    Harold B. Allen and Gary N. Underwood, eds., <u>Readings in</u>
    <u>American Dialectology</u> (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts
    [in press]) and, under the cover title "Toward a History
    of American Negro Dialects", in Frederick Williams, ed.,
    <u>Language and Poverty: Perspectives on a Theme</u> (Chicago:
    Markham Publishing Co. [in press]).

15. See William A. Stewart, "Foreign Language Teaching Meth-
    ods in Quasi-Foreign Language Situations" in W.A. Stewart,
    ed., <u>Non-Standard Speech and the Teaching of English</u>
    (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1964);
    William A. Stewart, "Urban Negro Speech: Sociolinguistic
    Factors Affecting English Teaching" in R.W. Shuy, ed.,
    <u>Social Dialects and Language Learning</u> (Champaign, Ill.:
    National Council of Teachers of English, 1965); William A.
    Stewart, "Nonstandard Speech Patterns", <u>Baltimore Bulletin</u>
    <u>of Education</u>, Vol. 43, Nos. 2-4 (1966-1967); J.L. Dillard,
    "The English Teacher and the Language of the Newly Inte-
    grated Student", <u>The Record -- Teachers College</u>, Vol. 69,
    No. 2 (November 1967); Marvin D. Loflin, "A Teaching
    Problem in Nonstandard Negro English", <u>English Journal</u>
    (December 1967).

16. In any language-teaching situation, it is important for
    educators to be acquainted with the extent to which more
    than one linguistic system is involved, as well as the
    extent to which the general population (represented by
    the students) is aware of whatever the case may be. Any
    two coterminously-used linguistic systems can range,
    insofar as the tendency of naïve speakers to equate one
    with the other is concerned, from a completely foreign-
    language relationship (in which the two are impression-
    istically dissimilar in all structural aspects), through
    a diglossic relationship (in which the two are struc-
    turally similar enough in some ways to be considered

varieties of the same language, though different enough
in others to create serious interference problems), to
a relationship of observable yet structurally trivial
dialect variation. In the United States, the relation-
ship of the more nonstandard varieties of Negro dialect
to standard English is in many ways closer to diglossia
than to normal dialect variation of the type which
usually holds for white dialects. For this reason, I
have occasionally lumped such situations together under
the term "quasi-foreign language situations" (see the
first item in note 15 above). For a discussion of the
structural and functional aspects of true diglossia as
it occurs in several parts of the world, see Charles A.
Ferguson, "Diglossia", Word, Vol. 15, No. 2 (August
1959), and William A. Stewart, "The Functional Distri-
bution of Creole and French in Haiti", Thirteenth Annual
Round Table on Languages and Linguistics (= Monograph
Series on Languages and Linguistics, No. 15, Georgetown
University, 1962).

17.   See Tore Österberg, Bilingualism and the First School
      Language -- An Educational Problem Illustrated by Results
      from a Swedish Dialect Area (Umeå, Sweden: Västerbottens
      Tryckeri AB, 1961). Although only standard Swedish has
      traditionally been used in Swedish schools, many of the
      children who are educated in those schools come from
      districts in which the vernacular is a nonstandard
      Swedish dialect -- sometimes structurally quite differ-
      ent from the standard language. These children are
      expected to adjust to the language difference on their
      own, although the structural intricacies of standard
      Swedish often make the task almost impossible. The
      similarity of the plight of such children to that of
      Negro-dialect speakers in the United States will be
      apparent to anyone who reads the second chapter of
      Österberg's study.

18.   The Urban Language Study, then under the direction of
      J.L. Dillard, was a study of the linguistic structure
      of the nonstandard dialect of Negro school children in
      the District of Columbia. I took the idea for a Negro-
      dialect translation of Moore's poem from the example of
      Emery Nemethy's "Kanaka Christmas" -- a delightful
      Hawaiian Pidgin English version which has been available
      on Christmas cards in my island homeland for many seasons.

19.   As far as I have been able to ascertain, the first appli-
      cation of this linguistic view of dialect differences to
      reading theory was made in Peter S. Rosenbaum,

"Prerequisites for Linguistic Studies on the Effects of
Dialect Differences on Learning to Read", Project Literacy
Reports, No. 2 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University,
1964). To illustrate his thesis that all dialects of
English (including Negro dialect) differ from each other
only in low-level transformations, Rosenbaum gave a few
trivial and contrived examples of equivalent sentences
from unspecified but presumably different dialect sources.
At the same time, he ignored (and was probably unaware of)
grammatical differences between dialects which could not
easily be accounted for by low-level transformations
(such as the he has broke it vs. he done broke it dis-
tinction of many rural white dialects). The one time
Rosenbaum did specifically mention Negro dialect, it was
to suggest that the difference between the Negro-dialect
and standard-English use of the overt copula (e.g. is)
was the result of "an extremely low-level transformational
rule which deletes the copula [in Negro dialect] when it
occurs in active non-negative present tense sentences."
In order to make a statement like that, Rosenbaum had to
be totally unaware of such contrasts as He sick vs. He be
sick (the first meaning "He is temporarily ill" and the
second "He is chronically ill") in Negro dialect -- a
distinction which is simply not made in the standard-
English equivalent for both of them: He is sick. Rosen-
baum's observation was quite plausible as far as it went,
but it only accounted for a part of the difference be-
tween the use of copula in Negro dialect and standard
English. And, although I pointed out the existence of
this grammatical difference between the two kinds of
English in "Social Dialect", Research Planning Conference
on Language Development in Disadvantaged Children (New
York: Yeshiva University, 1966), Labov and Cohen still
seemed to be uncertain about the function of be and the
copula in Negro dialect and standard English in "Syste-
matic Relations of Standard and Non-Standard Rules in
the Grammars of Negro Speakers", Project Literacy Reports,
No. 8 (1967).

20. This view of the reading problems of lower-class Negro
     children has been articulated most explicitly by William
     Labov in "Some Sources of Reading Problems for Negro
     Speakers of Non-Standard English" which originally
     appeared in Alexander Frazier, ed., New Directions in
     Elementary English (Champaign, Illinois: National Council
     of Teachers of English, 1967) [reprinted with additions
     and corrections in the present volume, pages 29-67].
     So strong is Labov's adherence to the principle of
     phonological determinism in accounting for structural

differences between Negro dialect and standard English
that at times the viability of his statements about the
former seems to suffer. For example, after having
theorized that differences in form between Negro-dialect
possessive pronouns and their standard-English equiva-
lents are due to a weakening or disappearance of final
/r/ in Negro dialect (e.g. you book, they book for your
book, their book), Labov makes the claim that "No one
says I book, he book, she book or we book, for there is
no phonological process which would bring the possessives
into near-identity with the personal pronouns." Actually,
possessive pronoun forms such as me, he, she, we (or
we-all), y'all and dem occur frequently in Negro dialect
in the Deep South (as anyone from that region knows),
and most of the same forms occur sporadically in Negro
dialect throughout the rest of the United States (as
many teachers can testify). These forms, which are
strikingly similar to those of the Caribbean Creole
English which Labov asserts (in a footnote to the fore-
going quote) that American Negro dialect is so unlike,
demonstrate quite clearly that more than just phono-
logical rules are involved in the difference between the
total set of Negro-dialect and standard-English posses-
sives.

21. Of course, inter-dialectal sound-spelling correspondences
of this type are not going to give rise to successful
word identifications when cognate word forms do not exist
in the two kinds of English. For example, a Negro-dialect
speaker who is able to read bath "correctly" (in terms of
his own phonology) as /bæf/ may puzzle over bathe, which
he ought to read "correctly" as /beyv/ if he can read
breathe as /briyv/. But the problem is likely to be that
the Negro-dialect speaker receives no confirmation of
such a reading from his own vocabulary -- many varieties
of Negro dialect having only verb phrases with /bæf/,
e.g. take a bath, give a bath, as functional equivalents
of the standard English transitive and intransitive verb
bathe.

22. The usual Negro-dialect reflexes of /θ/ and /ð/ have been
discussed in more detail in my "Foreign Language Teaching
Methods in Quasi-Foreign Language Situations" (see note
15 above) and in Ralph Fasold, "Orthography in Reading
Materials for Black English Speaking Children" [in the
present volume, pages 68-91]. At one point, Fasold
questions my description of a Negro dialect without /θ/
and /ð/ phonemes. Since Fasold makes no reference to a
footnote (to the very paragraph that he takes issue with)

in which I point out that many Negro-dialect speakers
do indeed have at least initial /θ/ and /ð/, it can
only be that he thinks I am wrong in maintaining that
any variety of Negro dialect lacks /θ/ and /ð/ phonemes.
If so, then he must be unaware, not only of the usage of
some younger children in the District of Columbia (the
one I chose to describe, since it poses obvious peda-
gogical problems), but also of that of many adult Negro-
dialect speakers along the South Carolina, Georgia, and
Florida seaboard.

23. Starting with Rosenbaum (see note 19 above), a number of
linguists have preoccupied themselves with the problem
of whether the differences between Negro dialect and
standard English are all in the "surface structure" (i.e.
the phonology and, let us say for simplicity's sake, the
transformations as well) or not -- as if the settling of
this highly theoretical issue one way or the other would
have profound implications for language teaching and for
Negro self-respect. One of their assumptions seems to
be that, if the differences between two grammars can be
shown to be limited to the surface structure, then peda-
gogical concern over these differences would be unfounded.
But although surface-structure differences are undoubtedly
easier for one to cope with, this does not necessarily
mean that the absence of differences from the "deep struc-
ture" (i.e. the grammatical categories and phrase-structure
rules) of the grammars of two languages or dialects will in
itself insure either mutual intelligibility or effortless
language learning between them. Among other factors, the
actual number of surface-structure differences between two
languages or dialects can have an important effect on
intelligibility and the ease of acquisition. For example,
although there may be scarcely any deep-structure differ-
ences between Anglo-Saxon and modern English, the surface-
structure differences between the two are extensive enough
to render texts in the former virtually unintelligible to
speakers of the latter without some very difficult lan-
guage learning. But, then, it is possible that the lin-
guistic terminology in which this issue is couched may be
little more than a scientific veneer covering an essen-
tially social concern. For, although the linguistic
alternatives are never evaluated in political terms, pub-
lic assertions that only surface-structure differences
exist between Negro dialect and standard English are
often made (and accepted) with all the conviction and
prior commitment of public assertions of the Negro's
rights in American society. Might there perchance be a
subtle analogy working in the minds of these linguists

(and their audiences) between surface structure and deep
structure on the one hand, and skin color and the "inner
man" on the other? If so, then asserting publicly that
American Negroes have the same linguistic deep structure
as American whites may merely be a way of declaring one's
acceptance of the Negro as an equal. But what if, in
fact, Negro dialect does exhibit certain deep-structure
differences from standard English, and even from white
nonstandard speech? Does this mean that Negroes are
intellectually, socially, and politically unequal to
whites? Does it mean that linguists should ignore such
differences, or attempt to explain them away? The tril-
oring of linguistic statements about dialect differences
to fit current humanistic social rhetoric may indeed
have the desired effect of gratifying middle-class Negro
adults, but I doubt if it will ever contribute much to-
ward solving the school language-learning problems of
lower-class Negro children.

24.   As is also the case with many (but not all) of its
      phonological features, Negro dialect shares many (but
      not all) such transformationally-derived grammatical
      differences from standard English with nonstandard white
      dialects -- particularly those spoken in the South.
      In fact, the See can he go construction even extends to
      Southern colloquial standard usage. Correspondences of
      this type are sometimes cited by dialect geographers and
      English-language specialists in an attempt to prove that
      there is no such thing as "Negro dialect" -- that the
      nonstandard speech of American Negroes is structurally
      identical to that of Southern whites. (I call this,
      perhaps uncharitably, the "Ain't nobody here but us white
      folks" theory.) Since I know of no community in even the
      deepest South in which the nonstandard speech of mono-
      dialectal Negroes is identical to that of monodialectal
      whites, and, indeed, since some features of Negro speech
      are conceivably of non-European origin, it may well be
      that such an assertion is but a more primitive version
      of the surface-structure-differences-only ploy mentioned
      earlier (see note 23 above). At any rate, the term
      "Negro dialect" is a sociolinguistic one, like "American
      English", and is meant to indicate the relationship be-
      tween the social identity of a linguistic system's users
      and its structural characteristics. Nonstandard Negro
      dialect is "nonstandard" because it has structural fea-
      tures which deviate from standard usage, and it is "Negro"
      because it has particular configurations of structural
      features which are used exclusively (even though not
      universally) by Negroes. To deny the validity of the

concept merely because Negro speech turns out to share
many structural features with white speech is like
claiming that American English does not exist because
the speech of Americans shares many structural features
with that of Englishmen.

25.   In most varieties of Negro dialect, be is also used for
a future state or action, in which case it never becomes
bees, e.g. He be here all the time or He bees here all
the time, but only He be here tomorrow. In addition,
be in the future sense takes will as an auxiliary or tag,
instead of do, e.g. Will he be here tomorrow? as a ques-
tion form of He be here tomorrow. The Negro-dialect
speaker's "correction" of non-future be to will be
represents a fusion of the forms of the non-future with
the future be -- apparently based on an awareness that
the latter can pass muster as standard English, while
the former cannot.

26.   The view of Negro dialect as faulty or disordered speech
has been a common one among speech therapists and, to
only a slightly lesser degree, among English teachers.
Recently, in an interview reported in Herbert H. Denton's
article "Negro Dialect: Should the Schools Fight it?" in
The Washington Post (December 22, 1968), Dorothy L.
Vaill, the head of the Speech Department of the District
of Columbia Public Schools, objected to talking about
Negro dialect as a well-formed language, saying "[Negroes]
are American people speaking an American language." But,
if American Negroes all speak an American language (which
they do), then what is wrong with recognizing the exist-
ence of these Americans and their distinctive form of
American language? Or does Miss Vaill mean that, because
Negroes are Americans, they ought to speak an American
language (=standard English) -- even if they often don't.
Does this speech therapist think that, because Negro
dialect is different from standard English, it is un-
American? What about Navajo Indians, who are also Amer-
icans speaking an American language! And, although this
speech therapist is white, the same view can be encoun-
tered in Negroes representing a wide spectrum of socio-
political orientations. For example, the Negro audi-
ologist Charles G. Hurst, Jr., in his Psychological
Correlates in Dialectolalia (Howard University, Communi-
cation Sciences Research Center, 1965), has characterized
Negro dialect as "defective speech...abnormal speech"
(p. 1) and as "oral aberrations" involving "phonetic
distortions, defective syntax, misarticulations, mis-
pronunciations, limited or poor vocabulary, and faulty

phonology" (p. 2). I even once remember, in a Negro-
nationalist bookstore in Harlem, being assured by a
lady in an African dress that the cause of Negro dialect
was a "lazy tongue".

27. The test is described briefly in Joan C. Baratz, "Teach-
ing Reading in an Urban Negro School System" [in the
present volume, pages 92-116], and in more detail in her
article, "A Bi-Dialectal Task for Determining Language
Proficiency in Economically Disadvantaged Negro Children",
to appear in Child Development, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Septem-
ber, 1969).

28. See, for example, Paul M. Postal, Aspects of Phonological
Theory (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

29. Although the techniques of literary-dialect orthography
have found their greatest use in the representation of
nonstandard dialects in literature, and thus have tended
to be wanting in linguistic accuracy, there is no reason
why the same techniques could not be used by a linguist
to develop a linguistically sophisticated and pedagogi-
cally useful orthography for a nonstandard dialect or
"quasi-foreign" language. In fact, I know of at least
one case where this has already been done. In his
"Writing Haitian Creole: Issues and Proposals for
Orthography" (the Appendix to the unpublished Hudson
Institute document HI-458-D, December 1, 1964), Paul C.
Berry has devised a sociolinguistically sound literary-
dialect orthography for Haitian Creole based on the
orthographic conventions of standard French, the official
and school language of Haiti.

30. Interestingly enough, some well-known literary creations
of the classic period of Negro-dialect writing (1875-
1925) turn out to be syntactically almost pure standard
English, with most of the differences being in pronunci-
ation (shown by dialect spellings) and vocabulary. This
is especially true of Paul Laurence Dunbar's early dia-
lect poetry -- a fact which is not surprising when one
realizes that he was probably not a native speaker of
the rural, lower-class Negro dialect he was attempting
to represent, and when one stops to think how difficult
it is to write good verse (which Dunbar's was) in even
a familiar dialect.

31. This, incidentally, proved to be one of the more serious
pitfalls in early literacy programs in Haiti. Rural
peasants were taught to read their native French Creole

in an autonomous phonemic orthography in which, for
example, the words for "there", "that", and "step" were
written la, sa, and pa, because they are pronounced that
way. But the inevitability of an association of Creole
with standard French, so similar in vocabulary, was
overlooked by the literacy specialists. Consequently,
when he attempted to make the transition to literacy in
French, the poor Haitian peasant was left unprepared for
the fact that the same words, with the same meanings and
pronunciations, were written là, ça, and pas respectively.
Berry's Creole orthography, mentioned earlier (see note
29, above), was designed to correct this problem by making
the Creole word spellings resemble more closely those of
their French counterparts.

32. When I first began using standard-English word spellings
for writing Negro dialect texts, I assumed that this was
an entirely new technique. However, a subsequent search
revealed that a number of other writers have hit upon the
same idea independently, and used it for a wide range of
purposes. In the early 1940's, a type of word spelling
very close to standard English was used to set down the
ex-slave narratives which had been collected by the
Federal Writers' Project; see B.A. Botkin, ed., Lay My
Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery (Chicago: Uni-
versity of Chicago Press, 1945). In the Spring of 1965,
several teacher-parents connected with the Child Develop-
ment Group of Mississippi (CDGM) wrote spontaneous and
unprogrammed beginning readers in Negro dialect, using
standard-English spellings for the words. Still more
recently, Carl F. Burke, a prison chaplain, has produced
two books of religious texts and verse in an approximation
of Negro dialect grammar (though only slightly nonstandard)
with standard-English word spellings in most places: God Is
For Real, Man (New York: Association Press, 1966) and Treat
Me Cool, Lord (New York: Association Press, 1968). Some
of the passages in Chaplain Burke's books appear to be
based on spoken or written expositions by Negroes, while
others are obviously ex post facto creations by the white
author. Unfortunately, in his attempts to produce his
own Negro-dialect passages, Burke has achieved only mixed
success. For example, he innocently uses punk in the
strictly white sense of "hoodlum" -- apparently unaware
that it means "homosexual" in Negro dialect. Probably
the most ambitious application of the standard-English
word-spelling technique to the representation of Negro
dialect has been that of a young New Yorker who has writ-
ten an entire novel in an approximation of Harlem teenage
speech. This is Shane Stevens, Go Down Dead (New York:

William Morrow & Co., 1966). Although Stevens' dialect
grammar is not always accurate (e.g. <u>dont going get</u>...,
for <u>aint going get</u>... -- perhaps a misapplication of the
perception that <u>got</u> takes the auxiliary <u>do</u> in that variety
of Negro dialect), it is still close enough to be artis-
tically effective.

33. It should be pointed out that not every unit referred to
in this discussion as a "prefix" will necessarily be a
true prefix in standard-English grammatical or lexical
terms (cf. the <u>me-</u> in <u>memorial</u>). From a historical point
of view, these units are simply word-initial pretonic
syllables which somehow became detached in the process
of language transmission. Since re-standardization of
the resultant Negro-dialect base forms requires that the
appropriate syllables be "prefixed" to them, however,
these syllables come to function morphologically like
prefixes, and the base forms like stems.

34. The spelling of the prefix <u>ex-</u> makes it the one item
which cannot be handled routinely by this technique.
The problem is caused by the letter <u>x</u> in the prefix,
which represents not only the final /k/ or /g/ of the
phonological prefix (that is, the part which may be
absent in Negro dialect), but also the /s/ (before con-
sonants) or the /z/ (before vowels) which normally re-
mains a part of the Negro dialect base form, e.g. /spek/
for <u>expect</u>, /zækli/ for <u>exactly</u>. In traditional liter-
ary Negro dialect, the remaining /s/ and /z/ of a former
<u>ex-</u> were usually indicated by <u>'s</u> and <u>'z</u>, e.g. <u>'spec'</u>,
<u>'zackly</u>. Yet, this practice is hardly a desirable one
for beginning reading texts, since it is not in keeping
with the idea of avoiding letter alternations in standard-
English spellings. For the present, I feel that the
least complicated solution to the problem created by
<u>ex-</u> is simply not to make unnecessary use of words with
it in the initial stage of the reading materials. At a
later stage, such words could be introduced in their
full forms, reinforced by oral drills. Fortunately, the
one high-frequency Negro-dialect word which it would be
difficult to avoid using in even very early texts, i.e.
/sep/ for <u>except</u>, can be handled quite easily by the
apostrophe technique, i.e. <u>'cept</u>, since the /s/ of the
<u>ex-</u> has coalesced with the initial /s/ (spelled <u>c</u>) in
the base form.

35. For a general discussion of Negro speech in the District
of Columbia, including the relationship of the nonstandard
dialect of Negro children to that of adults, see William A.

Stewart, "Urban Negro Speech: Sociolinguistic Factors
Affecting English Teaching" (cited in note 15 above).

36. In certain extremely nonstandard varieties of Negro dia-
     lect in the coastal areas mentioned, pronoun forms may
     even be undifferentiated for sex, so that sequences like
     He a nice girl (or Him a nice girl) and Here come he
     boyfriend (or Here come him boyfriend) are quite normal.

37. The -s in the coastal South Carolina, Georgia, and
     Florida variants gots and does for got and auxiliary do
     is not a functional suffix, but rather an integral part
     of the verb base.

38. In addition to regional variation in a few grammatical
     details, there is a certain amount of variation in
     Negro-dialect pronunciation. A small part of this
     variation may be caused by differences in the basic
     phonology (i.e. the inventory of phonemes, their articu-
     lation and co-occurrence rules) of regional forms of
     Negro dialect, but the greater part of this type of
     variation is caused by differences in lexico-phonology
     (i.e. the phonemic structure of specific words). For
     example, the stressed vowel in the word usually spelled
     little may be /i/ in some regions, but /iy/ in others.
     Although regional variation in Negro-dialect lexico-
     phonology should not be severe enough to require exten-
     sive modification of standard-English word spellings in
     Negro-dialect reading materials, there may be a few
     cases in which dialect pronunciations will be too deviant
     for the standard-English spelling, e.g. /čimbli/ for
     chimney and /swimp/ for shrimp. Although there will be
     a temptation to devise dialect-oriented spellings for
     such cases, e.g. chimbley and swimp, the fact that the
     standard-English spellings (and pronunciations) would
     have to be taught eventually suggests that it might be
     better to introduce them to the beginning reader in their
     standard-English spelling after the standard-English pro-
     nunciation has been taught orally. This procedure would
     eliminate a potential source of confusion for the young
     reader by avoiding the accumulation in the program of
     words with two spellings, one nonstandard and one standard.

39. In the section entitled "An Experimental Investigation of
     the Use of Dialect vs. Standard English as a Language of
     Instruction" in the recent report on United States Office
     of Economic Opportunity Project No. IED 66-1-12, Carolyn
     Stern and Evan Keislar describe their attempt to assess
     the reaction of lower-class Negro Head Start children in

the Los Angeles area to the use of standard English and
what the experimenters considered to be nonstandard Negro
dialect in a lesson context. The lesson plan consisted
of only one text, written in standard English, with in-
structions to a "professional Negro actress" to read the
lesson aloud once in standard English and once in Negro
dialect. Tape recordings of these readings were then
played to the subjects, who were grouped à la standard
experimental procedure. The posttests were also treated
in this way. When the results were assessed, the experi-
menters were surprised to find that their Negro subjects
learned significantly more about the content of the
experimental lesson when it was presented in standard
English than when it was presented in the nonstandard
version. And, although they did see that the match be-
tween the nonstandard stimulus in their experiment and
the actual Negro dialect of their subjects was undeter-
mined, they nevertheless concluded that "there seems to
be little support for an increasingly popular notion that
young Negroes would suffer less of a handicap in their
early school years if they were initially taught in a
dialect with which they are familiar. Instead, evidence
has been presented to show that instruction employing
standard English produced superior learning under some
circumstances." On request, Stern was kind enough to
furnish me with the tapes used in that experiment, and
they reveal that the experimenters' concern about the
match between the nonstandard stimulus and the language
of the subjects was more than justified. For, the non-
standard stimulus turned out to be little more than the
kind of Negro stage dialect I have already described --
a kind of language which is grammatically much closer
to standard English than to the nonstandard dialect
which I have heard lower-class Negro children speak in
Los Angeles. Now, this should not be taken as a criti-
cism of the Negro actress; she merely did the job she
was trained, and hired, to do. Indeed, if anyone thinks
that it is even possible to read a standard-English
text aloud as authentic Negro dialect, just let them
try to read "Shirley and the Valentine Card" aloud as
grammatical standard English -- bearing in mind all the
while that, since standard-English speech patterns are
the more formally-defined ones, they ought to be the
easiest to produce in this way. My point is that, when
the experimental subjects responded to this Negro stage
dialect as if it were merely an odd type of standard
English (which it was), their reaction was taken as
clear-cut evidence that they found standard English more
meaningful than their own dialect. And, such is the

aversion of liberal educators to the possibility that
distinctive and viable Negro cultural patterns might
exist, and of traditionalist educators to the possi-
bility that new pedagogical techniques and skills might
be in order, that this conclusion has been enthusiasti-
cally received in many quarters as proof positive that
Negro dialect has no place in education, and may not
even exist at all.

40. I understand that, in some experimental classes for
     lower-class Negro children, attempts have been made to
     relate the content of the curriculum to the language of
     these children by giving them the Uncle Remus stories
     to read. As long as this sort of nonsense continues,
     it will be safest to ascribe any reported failure in the
     use of Negro dialect in the classroom to the professional
     incompetence of the would-be experimenters, rather than
     to the linguistic incompetence of the subjects.