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Recently the relevance of dialectological study to reading instruction has become apparent. The teacher speaks one language while the child, often disadvantaged, speaks another. The ability to identify utterances is attributed to human tolerance called the phoneme concept, a generalization of a potentially infinite number of sounds into a small number of speech sound concepts or classes. When a group agrees on a body of phonemes, it shares a particular phonemic inventory. In learning a second language, the individual usually substitutes those sounds not existing in his own tongue with similar ones present in his own native inventory. A similar situation exists between standard English and its dialects. If a phoneme-grapheme correspondence is to be taught, the phonemes used as reference patterns must be determined. The usual tests to determine auditory discrimination are based on inadequate phonetic knowledge. Teacher training should include dialectology, speech sound analysis, and the concept of phonemes. A good reading teacher must either learn the child's dialect or teach him the standard dialect as a second language. (WL)

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DIALECTAL VARIANCE INTERFERES WITH READING INSTRUCTION

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Perhaps the most venerable aspect of sophisticated linguistic study is dialectology. In spite of its venerability, it is only very recently that the relevance of dialectological study to instruction in reading has come to the attention of teachers of reading. For instance, reading teachers are coming to realize that much of the general difficulty in teaching the so-called "disadvantaged child" could well stem from a fact that may be stated without reservation. . . and that is that the teacher speaks one language and the child essentially another. In a word, the teacher is trying to teach the child to read a language which the child does not speak. And more specifically to the point, the language spoken by the teacher in these attempts differs decidedly from the language understood by the child, and the language spoken by the child is often incomprehensible to or misunderstood by the teacher. This is no over-simplification whatsoever, for though both teacher and student ostensibly "speak English", the fact of the matter is that teacher and pupil dialects are often so different from each other, little or no communication takes place. The major goal of the teacher of reading is clear enough--to teach the child to read, but in the accomplishment of this goal, the concern of the teacher is with language as well as with reading. This concern with language entails providing the child

with a command of a brand of language that will not meet with social objection. However, due to teaching procedures commonly employed, the burden of language accomplishment presently falls almost entirely on the child. Initial progress can be made at an accelerated rate where the teacher is familiar with the details of the dialect-to-be-replaced and where the teacher's attitude toward that dialect is wholesome--and thus useful--rather than scornful--and thus injurious. It is hoped that the information offered in this paper will justify and inspire changes in teacher-learning, teacher-procedure, and teacher-attitude and thus bring about new efficiency of instruction and guarantee greater extension of accomplishment.

In any discussion of this sort, misunderstanding is introduced between author and audience as an immediate result of differing values attached to terminology shared in name only by said author and audience. Permit an attempt to specify these remarks as follows: by "dialectal variance" is intended the variation in syntax, meaning, and pronunciation which characterizes one group of speakers and often serves to distinguish that group from some other--or all other--groups; by "dialectology" is intended the study of these variations and variants by linguistic scientists competent in the areas of phonology, semantics, morphology, grammar, and lexicography; and by "phonology" is intended the body of phonetic and phonemic information implicit with phonic considerations but rarely demonstrated by exponents of phonics per se. For convenience of presentation, this paper is limited to phonological considerations, which is not meant to imply that dialectal variance of the sort under scrutiny is not at once operative on other linguistic planes.

It is clearly not common knowledge that perhaps the most consistent and reliable and valid of the subdisciplines of linguistics is dialectology. The American Dialect Society is our oldest and most consistent linguistics association. Our Linguistic Atlas projects are our most objective linguistic studies. Our awareness of "regionalism" as a specific aspect of "dialectalism" is well-established. It would be well to review or examine or perhaps introduce some of the particulars explicit with dialect study and with the really very complex science of phonetics.

For at least a hundred years, phoneticians have observed--and instrumental phonetics has corroborated, variously through this period--that no two speakers produce physically identical speech-sounds, in any sense. On the same purest phonetic plane,

a given speaker never reproduces any utterance identically. This is an unassailable phonetic axiom. The fact that we are able to identify a given utterance and to agree that two utterances have pronunciation attributes in common is due to a human tolerance which linguists of this century have come to treat as the phoneme concept. It is on the basis of this concept that we somehow manage to communicate on the oral-aural plane. We manage, for a given language, by generalizing an essentially infinite number of sound manifestations into a relatively small number of significant speech-sound concepts or classes. These classes--or classifications--are what the linguist intends with the term phonemes. He does not intend sounds, since phonemes are not sounds but concepts of sounds. If they were sounds, there would be no need for the term phoneme, since "phone" or "speech-sound" could then be specific and would suffice. Phonemes are--as stated--concepts or criterional sets on the basis of which particular phoneme classes are established. The referral of a so-called "speech-sound" to one of these classes is, in other terms, its identification with the relevant phoneme. A given utterance is no more a "string of phonemes" than a given sequence of letters is a "string of sounds". Letters are one order of symbols; sounds are another order of symbols; and phonemes are still another order of symbols. Letters are written symbols; sounds are oral-aural symbols; and phonemes are conceptual or classificational symbols. For a case in point, suppose we decide to "listen for" what we may loosely term "all the instances of [o]-sound" in the speech around us. Limiting the focus of our attention, first of all, to the speech of a single speaker, we find that we actually hear a great number of physically different... and thus phonetically different... sound constructs, every instance of which we identify as "an [o]-sound", since we refer each of these instances to one particular sound concept, in this case, our /o/-phoneme. To demonstrate, each member of the string of utterances [o], [o], [o], [o], [o], [o], [o] is physically and thus phonetically different, yet each is referred by both speaker and listener alike to a specific reference image or concept. If speaker and listener agree, they share that particular phoneme concept, and it is convenient to say all the utterances were "the same". Such relationship is as valid for the speech of a linguistically homogeneous community as for the speech of a single speaker, since such a conceptual framework is the result of extensive oral-aural experience on the part of each speaker--or listener--involved. It is in this manner that a particular inventory of concepts or phonemes is specified for a given group or community or even individual, and when a group of

individuals can agree on a body of concepts or classes, they share a particular phoneme inventory. Clearly, such inventories will vary--often considerably--from language to language. In fact, it is futile to attempt to relate the phoneme inventory of one language to that of another. However, when language transfer becomes operational for an individual--that is, when he is faced with expressing himself verbally in a second language, the most normal phonological procedure for him is to identify the external language in terms of the central or first language. For instance, Spanish and other Romance speakers have no concept which corresponds with that phoneme to which English speakers refer the phonetically differing vowel sounds of 'it', 'hit', 'sit', 'bid', 'did', 'rid', 'in', 'fin', 'thin', and the like. Consequently, the Spanish speaker identifies such vowel sounds with his nearest vowel phoneme concept and his manifestations of that phoneme appear to be the vowel sounds, for the English speaker, of 'he', 'be', 'we', 'me', and the like. In fact, the Spanish speaker can do nothing else, without a certain level of sophistication in English, since he hears [ɪ]-sounds and [i]-sounds indiscriminantly, a factor the non-linguist finds difficult to comprehend. Thus, the speaker of Spanish seems to be making these two English categories of sound the same, and the result is the phenomenon of "thees ees eet" instead of "this is it", and so forth. The area of generalization seems--to the English ear--to include two reference points, while for the Spanish ear, there is but a single area. Such a phenomenon relates in a very complex way to such a question as "one phoneme or two?", and must be treated very delicately. For the teacher at first hand, however, the significance lies with the fact that there is resultant confusion, for the Spanish speaker attempting English, in such pairs as "seat/sit", "feel/fill", "team/Tim", and the like.

When the confusion situation is not so clearly defined as between traditionally distinct languages, however, the very real differences are subtle and even surreptitious, but none the less valid. Such a situation, of course, is the primary focus of this discussion. And it is readily apparent, upon inspection, that there is more of this sort of mismatching than has met the eye--or ear--in considerations of the so-called underprivileged.

Fortunately, regional differences in the United States cause little difficulty. The New Yorker usually can understand the Californian, who in turn can understand

the Texan, and there is certainly no basis for considering one regional accent more "correct" or more prestigious than another. However, this general regionalism breaks down under direct examination. For example, in dozens of our large cities, oral communication among geographical neighbors in the community may be virtually impossible, and where it exists, it is often inefficient and confusing. The cause is environmental, and in that sense, inherited, and differences result largely from social isolation, not geographical distance. Many teachers simply do not understand a word the children say, and essentially vice versa.

An audio tape of dialectal speech typical for a sector of Miami is [was] offered in illustration. Whether or not this sector is predominantly negro is readily demonstrated to be irrelevant, since social sectors are not always determinable in racial terms, especially where the criterion of language is a factor. And further, identification of this material in terms of familiar sounds and contexts is equally irrelevant, since even the confronting phoneme inventory does not match your phoneme inventory. If you are to teach phoneme-grapheme correspondences, which phonemes will you use as reference patterns? The house must be built before it can be moved into.

No simplistic solutions will overcome this kind of problem. Of the 27 USOE-sponsored first-grade studies in reading, those which dealt with the problem at all concluded generally that the mechanical, phonics-centered programs were superior. This certainly would be consistent with Chall's findings. One ventures to suggest, however, that comparison of one program, based on an inadequate knowledge of the language, with another (albeit possibly worse) program is not getting at the source of the problem. Providing "lots of phonics" isn't the whole answer, in view of the fact that the phoneme-grapheme correspondences presumably being taught don't necessarily exist for the speaker of a non-standard dialect. English spelling may appear to be highly inconsistent and ambiguous, but graphemic representations are a marvel of consistency when compared with the gaggle of speech sounds that they reputedly represent. There is little profit in drilling a child on the correspondence between the letter 'r' and the vocalic [r]-sound if no form of vocalic /r/-phoneme exists for him, or if it appears to exist only in phonological contexts radically different from those being presented.

It should be noted that (1) the usual tests used to determine so-called "auditory discrimination" ("speech-sound discrimination" would be more to the point), are based on inadequate knowledge of phonetics and of test-construction involving phonetic principles, and (2) speakers of one dialect can hardly be expected to discriminate consistently among the phones of another dialect, of which there are many more than is generally appreciated. In fact, the teacher in the mobile American society may find a variety of dialectal manifestations even in a single classroom. At Miami Jackson High School, located in a typically critical sector, we recently asked certain of those teachers whose speech was not typical of this sector to administer the Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test to students with "non-standard" speech relevantly typical for the sector. The average of correct responses was about 66%--particularly remarkable when it is considered that the administrative procedures on this test would yield a chance score of 50%. And this at the High School level! Certain suggestions do seem warranted. For instance, (1) There is no feasible, valid, reliable test of speech-sound discrimination presently available. (2) Until there is a scientifically defensible test, there is no precise way of determining the adequacy of speech-sound discrimination among the "disadvantaged", or, for that matter, anyone else. (3) It is likely that speakers of non-standard dialects discriminate quite well within their own dialects. It is no more surprising that they have difficulty discriminating among the phones of another dialect than that Americans speak French with an American accent!

On a related tack, it should be noted that a non-standard dialect cannot justifiably be called "sub-standard", and its status as non-standard in no way implies that it is linguistically inferior. The teacher, then, is not "correcting" the child's language, for in a sense his language is as efficient and effective as the teacher's. It's just different. The teacher will find the child far more amenable to learning a different way of saying something than to learning the "right" way, always pedagogically contrasted with his supposedly "wrong" way.

To the problem of remedying an admittedly bad communication dilemma, two possible general solutions present themselves. First, the teacher may learn the particular child's idiom and teach him to read on the basis of that idiom. Or, second, the teacher may help the child to learn a more standard English dialect as a second

language, then teach him to read in that language. Using the child's own idiom is feasible, but may not help to solve the sociological problems which obtain for the situation. Teaching a more standard English as a second language is currently in favor but is perhaps even more difficult. In order to accomplish either or some combination of these, the teacher must be oriented in the direction of language analysis and language evaluation, for a strange situation presently exists in most teacher-training programs, in that teachers are presumably prepared in the methodology of teaching the reading of the English language, but they are provided little or no understanding of the language itself or how it operates. How one could expect to deal with a problem as complex as the one presented above without a basic knowledge of the phonological functioning of his own language is clearly a mystery. How can dialectal differences be dealt with, or even perceived with any effectiveness, by the teacher unacquainted with the technical aspects and details of either his own or the child's dialect, and who has no real notion of what specifics to look for or how to proceed to look? A seemingly obvious course of conduct is to provide a program of intensive training in phonetics, particularly acoustic phonetics, for teachers of reading. These needs will not be fulfilled by the gross generalizations (and specific misinterpretations) to be derived from books on "phonics" nor from books focused exclusively on traditional articulatory or physiological phonetics. A thorough knowledge of speech-sound analysis and of concept phonemics is expressly to the point. The professional educator is invariably impressed at the body of knowledge defining the phonetic sciences and at the list of exponents of that knowledge and of the need for training in that area. In fact, any educator once disposed to examine the phonetic details of his language is irretractably converted from prescriptivist to descriptivist, and many of our leading universities have long since essentially guaranteed the effectiveness of their language teacher products by providing extensive orientation in phonetic principles. The need for such training has long been recognized in England, for example, as in a dozen other European countries, where teachers qualifying as instructors of any aspect of language, such as reading, spelling, composition, pronunciation, and so forth, are required for their certification to be prepared in the basic phonetic sciences, a requirement involving the equivalent in our system of no less than three semesters of study. Specific departments of phonetics have been a part of leading European university faculties for at least a

century. It is little wonder that we, as our technical literature in this area, are considered so naive by European standards.

This paper is, obviously, it is hoped, a plea for an awakening in the field of language study. And the primary language target is our own language. Reputable educators of differing cultural background do not pronounce our language the same, they do not fashion their phrasing the same, they do not harbor the same notions about specific word-definitions, and they do not attach the same importance to words, expressions, or pronunciation details. The dozen or more leading dictionaries do not evaluate the details of our language the same. A form such as r-u-n appears in a leading dictionary as 172 entries, 97 of which have no auxiliary; are you prepared to say that this represents "97 different words", or what do you pretend with the attitude that "it's the same word with 97 different meanings"? When a native of Boston looks at a dictionary pronunciation key for words in -o-r, do you expect him to have the same pronunciation for that key-word as would his contemporary from Dallas or from Salt Lake City or from New Orleans? Something over half the teachers of reading in the Miami area are representative of Metropolitan New York City or New Jersey or Pennsylvania dialects; can anyone imagine that their evaluations of native Floridian corresponds with local attributes? Are you aware that "short vowels" are acoustically longer before voiced consonants than "long vowels" are before voiceless consonants? Or that all vowels are nasalized before nasal consonants? Have you considered that such so-called "training alphabets" as the much-touted ITA are literally fraught with basic phonetic errors? That there have been over 500 such training alphabets proposed for our education system in the past 25 years alone? That the ITA itself is as guilty of misconception, misapplication, and misdesign as are many of its competitors for the school market? Had you thought that contrary to journalistic and other pedestrian opinion, "radio, the movies, and television" have not "essentially eliminated" dialectalism in the United States? Actually, something of the reverse is true and that is that more people are now being heard from than ever before in history. Consequently, the countrywide population has been exposed through the media of "radio, the movies, and television" to a wider variety of cultural and linguistic variance than was ever before possible As a result, they have unwittingly broadened their tolerance or toleration for this variance! The implications of such an observation are

immediately apparent to the experienced teacher.

To be brusque, there is a wealth of knowledge about language that the student is quite capable of assimilating; are you as the teacher prepared to make that knowledge available? To be humble, please join us in promoting the availability of that knowledge. Let's not wait for something to happen...let's make it happen!

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