DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 436 48 AL 001 838

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Michigan Univ., Ann Arbor. Center for Research on Language and Language Behavior.
Spons Agency-Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
Bureau No-BR-6-1784
Pub Date 1 Feb 69
Contract-OEC-3-6-061784-0508
Note-14p.; Report included in Studies in Language and Language Behavior, Progress Report VIII.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
Descriptors-Age Differences, Grade 5, Grade 6, Language Styles, Lower Class, Middle Class Values, *Negro Dialects, *Nonstandard Dialects, *Psycholinguistics, Racial Characteristics, *Social Attitudes, *Social Class, Social Dialects, Social Differences, Standards, Stereotypes
Identifiers-Detroit Dialect Study

The subjects in this study, 18 fifth- and sixth-grade students from a middle-class area, were asked to listen to a tape recording with excerpts of conversations by speakers of three dialects: middle-class white, lower-class white, and lower-class Negro. Subjects were asked to rate the personality of each speaker by voice cues alone. In addition, the children listened to the tape again in order to determine race and probable occupation. It was predicted and confirmed that this technique would elicit stereotypes based on the dialects. The middle-class white speakers were judged significantly higher than the lower-class white speakers, who in turn were rated significantly higher than the lower-class Negro speakers. Thus, it was found that children of 10 and 11 years of age are indeed aware of the social significance of language differences. (Author/JD)

PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ATTITUDE STUDY[1]

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Fifth and sixth graders were asked to listen to a tape recording with excerpts of conversations by speakers of 3 dialects: middle-class White, lower-class White, and lower-class Negro. Ss were asked to rate the personality of each speaker by voice cues alone. In addition, the children listened to the tape again in order to determine race and probable occupation.

It was predicted and confirmed that this technique would elicit stereotypes based upon the dialects. The middle-class White speakers were judged significantly higher than the lower-class White speakers who in turn were rated significantly higher than the lower-class Negro speakers. Thus, it was found that children of 10 and 11 years of age are indeed aware of the social significance of language differences.

Linguists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and educationists have all been concerned with variations of speech patterns within one language. Such variations are a universal phenomenon. Dialectal differences can be systematically associated with regional differences, social class differences, in-group patterns, and other variables. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss how aware speakers are of these variations and what implications that awareness has for them.

Labov (1966) and associates have done a monumental study of pronunciation differences in New York City. An attempt to systematize speech variations, the project involved the analysis of interviews designed to elicit various speech styles from each informant. At the end of the interview, however, a subjective evaluation test was given to determine attitudes toward pronunciation usage.

Labov found an impressive unanimity among adults in all of New York City, even the Negroes in the ghetto, on evaluative norms, despite wide diversity in actual performance. To explain the various stereotyped attitudes toward how various groups speak, Labov (1967b) refers to the social basis of perception--the listener generalizes variable data to categorical perception in absolute terms. For example, linguistic analysis shows that many aspects of pronunciation

attributed absolutely to one group and not another actually occur in both groups. The difference is one of relative frequency of use.

Labov detected several levels of awareness of pronunciation differences. The people who were the most sensitive to the stigma attached to certain forms were those who used them. The term "insecure" was applied to those who said that they did not use the standard form or their evaluative norm. Those who said they did something while they actually did another were said to be listening to themselves in terms of their norm more than their actual speech.

Regardless of widespread agreement on the standard, the use of language variants was found to be determined by patterns of social and stylistic norms. Labov (1966) claims that awareness of social stratification of dialect begins in early adolescence. Apparently, this striking unanimity of adult evaluation of pronunciation norms occurs only at age 25, when it is apparently too late to change speech patterns. Thus, although a child learns his native language (competence?) at a surprisingly early age, he learns the evaluative norms much later.

Although awareness of fine social stratification does not develop until early adolescence, Labov adds that children learn early, of course, that there are careful and casual styles and are perfectly able to recognize the teacher's special style. However, the wider social significance of dialect differences seems to be hidden from them to a surprising extent.

In a conversation with a Black educator in Ann Arbor, the writer found an illustration of some awareness of speech variations for six-year-olds. Ghetto children are usually labelled "non-verbal" although they talk constantly among their peers. They appear to be without language in school because they are embarrassed to speak. They already know that their language is different from the teacher's and that their way is not right. Not knowing the correct forms, they are forced to remain silent.

Labov (1967a) used subjective reaction tests to determine unconscious evaluations of individual variables within a dialect pattern. Evaluation scales allowed the listeners to place the speaker along a scale of job suitability and also along a scale of toughness or masculinity. For Harlem youth, the use of a certain form, such as the fricative "th" in <u>this thing</u>, raises a speaker on the job scale while lowering him on the other scale. (The forces of solidarity and status discussed by Roger Brown in his book <u>Social psychology</u> appear to be at work here.) Although it has long been known that the non-

standard forms are supported by values of group identity and opposition to middle-class norms which are strong among lower-class people, Labov claims that his tests indicate that the school system may actually be supporting this opposition. Whereas the adolescent boy knows that there is little correlation in fact between the use of non-standard English and toughness, his teacher, in teaching middle-class values of good English, simultaneously passes on the notion that good English is not consistent with her students' highly valued characteristics of toughness and masculinity.

Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley (1967) report on the Detroit Dialect Study which is in many ways similar to Labov's investigations in New York City. Although they have not yet published data from testing subjective evaluations, they attribute various phenomena to awareness. For example, it is said that women use non-standard forms less frequently than men in all social classes because of a greater sensitivity to the implications of dialect.

They provide much data on social stratification based on distinctive changes in the relative frequency of use of various grammatical and phonological indices. In support of Labov's claim that awareness of social stratification begins at early adolescence, it was found that the fine stratification in performance occurs at early adolescence only, not before. Prior to that age, relative frequency tends to be extreme, either 0 or 1. With adolescence comes the fine stratification by relative frequency into as many as four distinctive classes.

It is also claimed that the more conscious the feature, the finer the social stratification. Thus, adults exhibit strong stratification for the multiple negative and the "ing" because they are more conscious of them than vowel pronunciations, for instance.

Wallace Lambert (1967) in Montreal has developed a research technique that makes use of language and dialect variations to elicit the stereotyped impressions which members of one social group hold of representatives of a contrasting group. The procedure was originally developed for use with French-English bilinguals in Quebec. The procedure used involves reactions of listeners (called judges) to the taped recordings of a number of perfectly bilingual speakers reading a 2-min. passage at one time in one language (e.g., French) and the translation equivalent at another time. The judges were kept unaware that they were actually hearing the same voice twice. They were asked to listen to this series of recordings and evaluate the personality characteristics of each speaker as well as possible, using voice cues alone.

This "matched-guise" technique appears to reveal judges' more private reactions to the contrasting groups than direct attitude questionnaires do. Many experiments have been performed with this technique since it was first developed in 1958. An example of the fascinating results is that the French Canadian judges rate the speaker in English guise even better than the English Canadian judges do. Thus, this instrument has exposed an inferiority complex among the French Canadians.

Tucker and Lambert (1967) modified this procedure to determine reactions to various dialects of English. Since perfectly bilingual people were not available for the matched guise, several speakers of each dialect were used. This is important, as one is interested in group characteristics, not individual variations. It was found that Southern Negro college students have more favorable impressions of people who use Standard Network Style English than they do of those who speak their own style. On the other hand, they are more impressed with their own speech style than with that of educated Southern Whites. This study was done in conjunction with plans to design a freshman English course at the Mississippi Negro college from which the judges were selected. The results of this study indicate how important it is that the instructor be a speaker of Standard Network Style English, rather than a Southern White, the likely candidate for such a position.

The following experiment was designed as an extension of Tucker and Lambert's study on the arousal of stereotypes by dialect differences. It has been shown that college students exhibit differential judgments of speakers of different dialects. As previously discussed, Labov and Shuy consider that awareness of social stratification of language begins only with early adolescence. The purpose of this experiment was to determine whether fifth- and sixth-grade pupils (10 and 11 years old) will demonstrate differential attitudes with the technique developed by Lambert and his associates.

Method

Subjects. The Ss were 18 fifth- and 19 sixth-grade students, both male and female, from the University School in Ann Arbor. They represent middle-class children who have had more than the usual range of experiences for their ages. For example, they are often subjects for psychological experiments and some have travelled extensively with their parents. No claim is made that these are typical children, but they were the only group available at the time of the study.

Apparatus. A tape recording was prepared using as source material a tape from the Psycholinguistic Attitude Study of Detroit done by Roger Shuy of the Center for Applied Linguistics. (Since that study has not yet been published, this writer is unaware of either the procedures or results of it.) However, on the test tape were, in two different orders, 1 min. parts of conversations by six male Detroit speakers, two middle-class Whites, two lower-class Negroes, and two lower-class Whites. Class was defined in terms of occupation and education as described in Shuy et al. (1967). It was apparent to the E that three distinct dialects were represented. Middle-class Negro speakers were not used because the E thought that there was no difference between their speech and the middle-class White speakers. For this study distinct dialects were desired, not representatives of all social and racial classes.

For each presentation order, the first speaker was presented again to test the consistency of the children's responses.

The rating form consisted of 15 personality traits and a number scale. The more the specified trait characterized the voice of the speaker, the higher the number to be circled. Three different orders of traits were used.

Procedure. The fifth-grade children were tested in small groups of five whereas it was necessary to test the sixth graders together as a class. The children first rated a practice voice, the E's. Then, the taped excerpts were played separately, one at a time. All the fifth graders heard Order 1 and all the sixth graders heard Order 2. After each passage, the children were asked to fill out the form, rating that speaker's personality traits on the basis of the voice cues alone.

In addition, after the rating task was completed, the children listened to the alternate order and determined whether each speaker was White or Negro. The sixth graders also were asked to guess the speakers' occupations, choosing from among the following: janitor, gas station attendant, fireman, teacher, and doctor.

Results

The results of the personality rating test are summarized in Tables 1 - 4. Actual mean ratings (rounded to one decimal place) appear on the left and the rankings of the means on the right. Because of the different treatments for the fifth and sixth-graders, the data were analyzed in two separate groups.

Tables 1 and 2 represent the mean ratings over all Ss for each adjective and each dialect. This is the manner in which Lambert (1967) did his analysis. A Friedman two-way analysis of variance test (Hays, 1963) was used to test whether the speakers of the three dialects were systematically rated differently. For both groups, the results were significant at the .01 level.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Tables 3 and 4 provide the mean ratings over all adjectives for each S and each dialect. It seemed that this comparison was more meaningful since one is, in fact, interested in a given S's differential rating of the dialects. Again with the Friedman test, the results were highly significant (at .01 level for fifth graders and .05 level for sixth graders).

Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here

The Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test (Hays, 1963) was selected to test the differences of dialect ratings in pairs (i.e., White-middle vs. White-lower; White-middle vs. Negro-lower; and White-lower vs. Negro-lower). Tables 3 and 4 (ratings S by S) were used for this analysis. This test is based not only on the direction but also on the magnitude of the differences in scores. While the results of the previous test indicated that the three dialect ratings were different, the Wilcoxon test was used in order to determine whether this result could be accounted for by only one or two of the pairs (see Table 5).

Insert Table 5 about here

Thus, one can see that there is a significant difference between each pair of dialects. It seems that 10- and 11-year-old children rate speakers of White-middle-class dialect higher than speakers of White-lower-class and those significantly higher than speakers of lower-class Negro dialect.

Examination of Table 6 indicates that the representative members of the various dialect groups were assigned occupation levels consistent with the differences in ratings discussed above, and this difference was significant at the .05 level.

Insert Table 6 about here

The children also guessed at the speaker's race. Table 7 shows that the lower-class White speakers caused the most confusion, as one would have predicted. The Ss correctly identified the race of White-middle and Negro-lower dialect speakers, but their identification of the non-standard English speakers was at chance level.

Discussion

Quite clearly these 10- and 11-year-old children could reliably differentiate the dialects, at least in gross terms. Stereotypes aroused by the dialects led to highly significant differences in personality ratings. The trends are very similar to the results obtained for adults.

It seems that the dialect aroused an attitude toward the speaker, which was then translated into generally higher or lower ratings on all the adjectives. Certainly, there was no basis to rate Whites as taller than Negroes other than the general trend to rate the Whites higher.

The children were less clear on the identification of the race of the speaker for the lower-class White dialect. Their difficulty on this task indicates that they probably treated that dialect as a form in between standard and Negro styles, not as a separate dialect itself.

The Ss rated most highly the speakers of their own dialect. It would be of interest to repeat this experiment with lower-class Negro children to see whether they rate their own dialect or the so-called prestige standard dialect higher. At that age, which is more important, status or solidarity?

One difference between this study and Tucker and Lambert's should be mentioned. Whereas the speakers read a uniform passage in the latter, the speakers in this study were participating in normal conversation. Thus, some of the uniformity was lost. This occurred because of the unavailability of dialect speakers and because of the availability of the Detroit dialect tape. It is certainly possible that the children reacted to differences in content in addition to dialect differences. However, reading passages often eliminates many aspects of dialect, leaving only pronunciation differences. Also, the use of several speakers should have tended to attenuate the effects of the content differences.

Despite the claims of Labov and Shuy about social stratification developing only in early adolescence, it was found in the present study that children of 10 and 11 years are aware of the social significance of differences in at least three major dialects of this area.

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Footnote

[1]The research reported herein was performed in part pursuant to Contract OEC-3-6-061784-0508 with the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, under provisions of P. L. 83-531, Cooperative Research, and the provisions of Title VI, P. L. 85-864, as amended. This research report is one of several which have been submitted to the Office of Education as Studies in Language and Language Behavior, Progress Report No. VIII, February 1, 1969.

Table 1

Ratings of each dialect type by fifth graders - by trait

Traits	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower
	Means			Ranks of Means		
1. Wise	5.6	3.9	3.7	1	2	3
2. Amusing	4.3	4.9	4.4	3	1	2
3. Nice	5.4	4.7	4.9	1	3	2
4. Gentle	5.3	4.4	4.3	1	2	3
5. Tall	5.8	5.4	4.5	1	2	3
6. Religious	4.8	4.6	5.0	2	3	1
7. Trustworthy	5.1	4.4	4.4	1	2	3
8. Self-confident	4.7	5.1	4.1	2	1	3
9. Intelligent	5.2	4.2	3.2	1	2	3
10. Good-looking	5.1	4.8	4.2	1	3	2
11. Helpful	5.9	4.9	4.8	1	2	3
12. Interesting	4.4	4.6	3.3	2	1	3
13. Friendly	5.2	5.0	4.9	1	2	3
14. Kind	4.5	4.2	4.5	1	3	2
15. Good-disposition	4.8	4.9	4.1	2	1	3
				—	—	—
Sums				21	30	39

$\chi^2_2 = 17.5$ .01 significance level

Table 2

Ratings of each dialect by sixth graders - by trait

Traits	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower
	Means			Ranks of Means		
1. Wise	4.8	5.0	3.6	2	1	3
2. Amusing	3.3	4.0	2.9	2	1	3
3. Nice	5.1	4.6	4.6	1	2	3
4. Gentle	4.2	4.2	4.1	2	1	3
5. Tall	5.5	4.9	4.9	1	2	3
6. Religious	4.4	4.1	4.1	1	2.5	2.5
7. Trustworthy	5.5	4.8	4.3	1	2	3
8. Self-confident	5.0	5.3	4.6	2	1	3
9. Intelligent	5.1	4.8	4.0	1	2	3
10. Good-looking	4.3	3.9	3.6	1	2	3
11. Helpful	5.0	4.6	4.1	1	2	3
12. Interesting	4.8	3.8	4.2	1	3	2
13. Friendly	5.6	5.8	5.2	2	1	3
14. Kind	5.4	5.2	4.9	1	2	3
15. Good-disposition	4.9	4.4	4.1	1	2	3
Sums				20	26.5	43.5

$\chi^2_2 = 19.6$ .01 significance level

Table 3

Ratings of each dialect by fifth graders - subject by subject

Subject	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower
	Means			Ranks of Means		
1	4.8	4.8	3.5	1.5	1.5	3
2	5.6	5.1	4.3	1	2	3
3	7.2	4.4	3.9	1	2	3
4	4.9	3.4	4.4	1	3	2
5	6.1	4.7	3.9	1	2	3
6	5.4	4.2	4.9	1	3	2
7	7.1	6.3	5.2	1	2	3
8	5.5	5.2	4.7	1	2	3
9	6.5	5.1	4.5	1	2	3
10	6.7	7.1	5.8	2	1	3
11	3.1	3.3	2.9	2	1	3
12	4.8	4.3	3.8	1	2	3
13	6.2	5.4	5.3	1	2	3
14	5.5	4.6	4.1	1	2	3
15	4.3	4.1	4.8	2	3	1
16	5.0	3.6	3.3	1	2	3
17	4.4	4.4	4.7	2	3	1
18	3.0	3.2	4.7	3	2	1
				—	—	—
Sums				24.5	37.5	46

$\chi^2_2 = 13.03$ .01 significance level

Table 4

Ratings of each dialect by sixth graders - subject by subject

Subject	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower
	Means			Ranks of Means		
1	5.6	4.4	3.8	1	2	3
2	6.1	5.4	5.1	1	2	3
3	2.9	3.4	2.6	2	1	3
4	4.1	3.8	3.4	1	2	3
5	6.3	6.0	5.4	1	2	3
6	5.5	5.2	5.0	1	2	3
7	5.4	5.5	5.0	2	1	3
8	3.4	3.3	2.9	1	2	3
9	4.9	4.6	4.1	1	2	3
10	5.9	4.2	4.7	1	3	2
11	2.9	2.9	3.3	2	3	1
12	4.6	4.4	3.4	1	2	3
13	6.4	4.6	5.3	1	3	2
14	4.2	4.4	4.7	3	2	1
15	4.5	4.6	4.7	3	2	1
16	4.3	4.7	4.5	3	1	2
17	2.8	5.6	3.7	3	1	2
18	3.5	4.9	2.5	2	1	3
19	4.0	3.9	2.5	1	2	3
Sums				31	36	47

$\chi^2_2 = 7.05$ .05 significance level

Table 5

Wilcoxon Test

Pair	Values of W (significance level) Fifth Grade	Sixth Grade
White-mid White-lo	16.5 (.01)	60.5 (NS)
White-mid Negro-lo	19.5 (.01)	21.5 (.01)
White-lo Negro-lo	37.5 (.025)	36.5 (.01)

Table 6

Ratings of occupation by sixth graders*

1=janitor 2=gas station attendant 3=fireman 4=teacher 5=doctor

Subject	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower	White Middle	White Lower	Negro Lower
	Means			Ranks of Means		
1	3	4.5	1	2	1	3
2	2	2	3.5	2.5	2.5	1
3	2.5	5	2.5	2.5	1	2.5
4	4	4	2	1.5	1.5	3
5	3	2.5	3	1.5	3	1.5
6	4.5	3.5	3	1	2	3
7	3.5	2	3	1	3	2
8	4	2.5	1.5	1	2	3
9	3	2	3.5	2	3	1
10	3	2.5	3	1.5	3	1.5
11	4	3	2.5	1	2	3
12	4.5	3.5	2	1	2	3
13	4.5	2.5	2	1	2	3
14	4.5	2	1.5	1	2	3
15	3	3	1	1.5	1.5	3
16	3.5	1.5	1.5	1	2.5	2.5
Sums				23.5	34.0	39.0

$\chi^2_2 = 9.8$ .05 significance level

*3 Ss failed to respond to this test.

Table 7

Percentage misidentification of race of speaker

Grade	White		Negro
	Middle	Lower	Lower
Fifth*	4.5%	45.4%	4.5%
Sixth	18.4%	56.8%	10.5%

*Based on only 11 listeners. The other 7 listeners did not have time for this test.