DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 712 AL 002 337

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TITLE	Teachers' Ratings of Urban Children's Reading Performance.
PUB DATE	Mar 70
NOTE	115p.; Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, Minneapolis, Minn., March 4, 1970
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.15
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Grades, Group Norms, Negro Dialects, Negro Youth, *Oral Reading, Phonotape Recordings, *Reading Ability, Reading Comprehension, Social Dialects, *Socioeconomic Background, *Speech Evaluation, Standard Spoken Usage, *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This study is partly based on Bloomfield's early commentary on primary, secondary and tertiary responses to language. The author maintains that despite prodigious evidence to the contrary, "there are still too many teachers who either do not listen or cannot listen to and accommodate in their schemes even objective straightforward information about language." The investigator recorded four 4th grade boys reading a 40-word passage with a difficulty range on a third grade level. The boys represented four different levels of reading ability, two different levels of socioeconomic background, and two different ethnic groups. After the tapes were made, 36 teachers in a first level graduate reading course were asked to rate the reading performance of "some 4th grade boys." Scrambled and inaccurate information about the socioeconomic or ethnic background of the boys was given to the subjects, to check the influence of labeling. Results indicated that the labeling had little or no effect, because the ratings of the 36 subjects were highly consistent and reasonably accurate about the reading ability of the boys. Full details of the study and sample rating sheets are included. (FB)

TEACHERS' RATINGS OF URBAN CHILDREN'S READING PERFORMANCE

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Presented at the American Educational Research Association
Minneapolis, March 4, 1970

The objective of this study was to determine the effect of speech variation and labels assigned to urban children of differential reading ability, socio-economic background (SES) and ethnic membership on teachers' ratings of reading performance. It was hypothesized that teachers' attitudes toward language, and children's speech in particular, would be reflected in their assessment of children's oral reading.

While any exploration in depth of teachers' attitudes toward language is beyond the scope of this study, some consideration of these attitudes is appropriate. In an article written more than twenty-five years ago and titled "Secondary and Tertiary Responses to Language," Leonard Bloomfield touched squarely on an issue which is central to many current educational concerns, particularly those relating to the child whose speech characteristics don't match the characteristics corresponding to many teachers' fixed notions of what constitutes "good language" (Bloomfield, 1944). Bloomfield defined one form of a secondary response as "utterances about language ... the most important [of] which are made in the systematic study of language--the utterances, above all, which, recorded in books and essays, embody the past results of linguistic science." But Bloomfield dealt primarily with what he called the "traditional" or "popular lore" which operates "on other than a scientific level [wherein] our culture maintains a loosely, organized but fairly uniform system of pronouncements about language." Examples of such secondary responses to language and language use are abundant in both oral and written form, and one example here

should be sufficient. Among other comments regarding the "disadvantaged listener and speaker," one widely-used teacher's text has this to say: "...their family's use of English may dispense with word endings or word beginnings, and substitute postures, gestures, and facial expressions for all but one or two words in a sentence....Knowledge and use of 'book English' are essential readiness for reading English in school books. The old recipe for providing this readiness is still a pretty good one one: seat the child beside a great talker and let nature take its course" (Tinker and McCullough, 1968). At the end of the chapter containing these statements, a reinforcing summary begins: "This chapter has concerned itself with linguistic and cognitive sensitivity that must be developed to create an effective reader. 'Book English' must be heard and spoken as preparation for the reading of English."

Bloomfield introduced the notion of tertiary responses to language in the following manner:

> The tertiary response occurs almost inevitably when the conventional secondary response is subjected to question. The tertiary response is hostile; the speaker grows contemptuous or angry. He will impatiently reaffirm the secondary response, or, more often, he will resort to one of a few well-fixed formulas of confutation.
>
> Invariably, in my experience, the linguist's counter-statements are treated as eccentric personal notions--even by speakers who otherwise are aware of the cumulative character of science.

At this point, Bloomfield appended a brief, illustrative anecdote which unfortunately has a most contemporary and relevant ring:

> After I had outlined the relation of writing to speech, with explicit reference to the history of our science, before a group of educationists who were interested in elementary reading instruction, I was finally refuted by the statement that 'you'll have to SHOW the modern educationist.' (Bloomfield, 1944)

I'd like to paraphrase Bloomfield somewhat:

> After I had outlined the nature of the ghetto Negro child's speech as a formally structured linguistic system, with explicit reference to studies which supported this view, before a group of educationists who were Masters degree students in elementary reading instruction, I was finally refuted by the statement "oh, then that means organized error!"

From ignorance involving both secondary and tertiary responses to language, much mischief has been promoted in what could be called the language arts area of elementary schooling. Increasingly, however, these secondary and tertiary responses are encountered in the area of reading instruction, and to some extent, this is to be expected in light of the increasing emphasis--some of it enlightened and some of it benighted--being placed on reading as a language-based skill. What follows is a fairly representative example of a confused [redacted] treatment:

> What to say and how to say it--this is a big problem for children. Partly it is learned by example, partly by strongly motivated attempts at expression.
>
> "Do we got time fo' one mo'?" --big eyes pleading--
> "Have we time for one more?" --teacher helping--The basal reader will not contain sentences with "do we got's," "fo's," and "mo's" in them.
>
> Then cautiously, "Have-we-time-for-one-more?" (Under the heading "Verbal Facility" in a chapter titled "Recommended Practices in Kindergarten," Tinker and McCullough, 1968.)

The necessity of distinguishing carefully between reading and speaking--especially the ability to read with comprehension and the ability to speak as the teacher does--has been pointed up for some time, and concomitantly, the consequences of confusing these two sets of performance variables have been dealt with by, among others, Ecroyd (1968), Fleming (1968), Goodman (1965), Labov (1967), Wardhaugh (1969) and several contributors to Teaching Black Children to Read (Baratz and Shuy, 1969). But there still are too many teachers who either do not listen or cannot listen and accommodate in their schemes even objective, straightforward information about language. As Modiano indicated in

a recent article titled "Where are the Children?" many teachers can and do accept the child where he is with his many manifestations of individual differences, but acceptance all too often does not extend to differences in speech (Modiano, 1969).

Although this was a small, preliminary study, its framework is broad: the relationship between teachers' attitudes toward urban children's speech characteristics and the children's reading performance. Teachers often are taught to assess a child's reading performance level by administering what is sometimes called an informal reading inventory. Their subsequent judgments of course should be based only in part on this informal assessment, but many teachers give great weight to this sort of assessment, and the main point to be noted is that they judge on what the child sounds like to them--gross and minor errors sometimes not withstanding. What a group of teachers was asked to do for this study does not differ substantially in kind from what is recommended generally as standard procedure in the teaching of reading.

METHOD

Oral Reading Samples

A 40-word standard passage with a difficulty range of about third-grade level was read into a tape recorder by four 4th-grade boys representing four different levels of reading ability, two different levels of socio-economic background (SES) and two different ethnic groups. One white 4th-grader came from a lower-urban background and had a 2nd-grade reading level (LUW-2GRL); his white counterpart came from an upper-urban environment and had a 6th-grade reading level (UUW-6GRL). Similarly, one Negro 4th-grader came from a lower-urban environment and had a low 4th-grade reading level (LUN-4GRL), and his counterpart came from an upper-urban background and had a high 5th-grade reading level (UUN-5GRL). Socio-economic status (SES) was determined by parents'

education, occupation, income and place of residence. Reading levels were determined from standard scores in school records and teachers' assessments which concurred.

The taped recordings of these four boys reading the same standard passage then were judged for level of reading performance by a panel of three reading specialists whose ratings corresponded unanimously with the prior assigned levels. That is, the UUW fourth-grader with the 6th-grade reading level consistently was rated as better by specialists than the UUN fourth-grader with the 5th-grade reading level, who, in turn, was rated better than the LUN with a low 4th-grade level, and all three of these fourth-graders consistently were rated better than the LUW child with a 2nd-grade reading level.

Teacher Rating Materials

Thirty-six teachers in a first-level graduate course in reading were asked to rate the reading performance of "some fourth-grade boys who lived in an urban environment." The teachers were given no criteria for rating beyond the instruction that they use their own judgment. Their task was to rate 12 readers, using a rating sheet containing a scale of 1-5 which represented "poor" to "very good." The recordings of the 12 readers actually consisted of the same tape presented three times for each of the four 4th-graders. Two random orders of the readers were used to control for an order effect.

The standard passage each child had been asked to read appeared at the top of the rating sheet, and for half of the subjects, there was some additional information. Eighteen Ss had access to labels misrepresenting the actual SES or ethnic membership of the readers while the other 18 Ss had no labels appearing on their rating sheets. The rating sheets had been stacked and distributed in such a way that every other one of the Ss received a sheet which contained inaccurate labels in the left-hand margin next to the first eight of the twelve

response lines. This part of the experiment was handled as casually as possible. While distributing the rating sheets, the E off-handedly mentioned that "some people would be receiving sheets with some socio-economic and ethnic membership coding on the side--such as LW for lower-urban white or UN for upper-urban Negro--but this information could be ignored." In addition, a mumbled apology was given to the effect that because of some last-minute dittograph problems, "some people would be using sheets left over from a different study which involved the same children."

One reason for devising the rating sheet in this manner was the desire to provide a few distractions which would draw attention both to and away from the focus of the intended responses. Also, having Ss rate the same child three times (but never consecutively), some information could be gained regarding the consistency of responses to the same stimulus. Whether or not the Ss realized that they were rating the same reader three times--and from a subsequent discussion with the Ss and an analysis of the data it appears that most Ss were aware of this--essentially did not matter. All the better if the Ss thought this was the main name of the game. Moreover, by providing 18 Ss with access to labels misrepresenting the actual SES or ethnic membership of the readers, some information could be gained regarding the influence, if any, of a label. As has already been noted, these labels accompanied only the first eight of twelve response lines for half the Ss. (Items nine-twelve, representing all four readers, had no accompanying labels so a comparison could be made not only between responses of those Ss with and without labels, but also between the first eight and the last four responses of those with labels.)

The misrepresentation of labels was handled in the following manner. Labels were systematically varied for either SES or ethnic membership, but not both

simultaneously. For example, in the margin next to the line where the response to a LUW would be registered, the label UW appeared, and in another location corresponding to the same reader, the label LN appeared. Similarly, the LUN reader was mislabeled UN and LW; the UUW was mislabeled LW and UN, and the UUN was mislabeled LN and UW. Apart from attempting to balance a design, while excluding labels which would strain the credibility of many Ss (as for example, mislabeling an UUW as a LUN or the converse), it was believed that if sufficiently different responses were obtained as a result of access to labels, the source of these differences could more easily be distinguished and interpreted. (See sample rating sheets in Appendix.)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Consistency and Accuracy

The ratings of all 36 Ss--those with and without labels--were highly consistent and reasonably accurate in accord with the prior assigned levels for three of the four readers. The ratings for the UUN however represented a notable exception to these findings. Inspection of the data revealed that, in large part, there was only a small difference between the ratings of those 18 Ss with labels and the 18 Ss without. An indication of the consistency of these responses can be noted by looking at the total number of Ss whose three ratings for the same reader were identical (indicated by A, B, C in the Tables).

For the LUN reader, 19 of the 36 Ss responded each time with an identical rating. The LUW reader elicited the same rating three times from 29 of the 36. Ss. For the UUW reader, the corresponding figure was 31, and for the UUN, 23. These findings indicate consistency only. As for the accuracy of these consistent ratings, 18 Ss rated the LUN a 2(Fair)--his assigned accurate rating--and one S rated him lower with a 1(Poor). For the LUW reader, 22 Ss rated him accurately

with a 1(Poor) and 7 Ss gave him a higher rating of 2(Fair). For the UUW reader, 30 Ss rated him (accurately) with 5(Very Good), and only one S rated him lower with a 4(Good). At this point, the general pattern of these findings begins to dissolve for the UUN reader received an accurate rating of 4(Good) from only 13 Ss; one S consistently rated him 5(Very Good), but 9 Ss consistently gave him a lower rating of 3(Average).

These findings can best be summarized by referring to Tables 5 and 6. Table 6 shows the 108 (36 x 3) ratings each reader received on the 1-5 scale, and these figures point up even more dramatically the decline in the number of accurate yet consistent responses elicited by the UUN reader. Disregarding the relatively small differences between those Ss with and without labels (with the possible exception of the #3 ratings for both LUN and UUN), some comparative figures include the following: the LUN(4GRL) received 78 ratings of 2(Fair) plus 21 ratings at the higher level rating: 3(Average), totaling 99 for what might be called "an accurate plus one rating higher level." Similarly, the LUW(2GRL) elicited 79 ratings of 1(Poor) plus 28 ratings at the higher level of 2(Fair) for a total of 107 for the "accurate plus one total." The UUW (6GRL) received 99 accurate ratings of 5(Very Good), and from this ceiling level, we consider the ratings for the UUN: he elicited 55 (accurate) ratings of 4(Good) and 8 ratings of 5(Very Good) for a substantially lower total for that "accuracy plus one total" of only 63--this compared with the corresponding figures of 99, 107 and 99.

One could consider another comparison apparent in Table 6--the number of responses for each reader representing one rating lower than the measured and prior judged levels. Inasmuch as Ss could not accurately rate the LUW any lower than 1(Poor), we can compare only the relevant figures in this context for the

LUN - 8; UUW - 8; UUN - 43. No matter which way one interprets the data, one finding appears to stand out distinctly. When responding to the UUN reader, Ss tended to lower his rating regardless of the presence, absence or type of given label. Because the study initially was designed to determine the effect, if any, of differential reader-types and the presence or absence of labels misrepresenting SES and ethnic membership, a two-way analysis of variance was carried out, using as data only the ratings of the 36 Ss on the first 8 readers they heard. (See Table 7)

Scoring Procedures

A scoring procedure was adopted for the responses to the four readers rated for the first and second time only. Corresponding to the independent measures of reading achievement (LUW-2GRL; LUN-4GRL; UUW-6GRL; UUN-5GRL) as well as the unanimous judgments of a panel of reading specialists which matched these achievement scores (UUW is a better reader than UUN who is better than LUN who is better than LUW), a score of 3 was assigned under the following conditions:

when	LUW	was rated	1(Poor)
"	LUN	" "	2(Fair)
"	UUN	" "	4(Good)
"	UUW	" "	5(Very Good)

A score of 2 was assigned under the following conditions:

when	LUW	was rated	2(Fair)
"	LUN	" "	3(Average)
"	UUW	" "	4(Good)
"	UUN	" "	5(Very Good)

A score of 1 was assigned under the following conditions:

when	LUW	was rated	3(Average)
"	LUN	" "	1(Poor)
"	UUW	" "	3(Average)
"	UUN	" "	3(Average)

In effect, a rating of 3(Average) was penalized in any event, but the largest penalty was assigned to ratings given to readers who were independently measured and judged to be farthest from average.

Analysis of Variance

With 18 cases in each cell, the mean scores in Table 8 were computed on the basis of the ratings shown in Table 7. A two-way analysis of variance yielded no significant differences for groups (with and without labels), nor was there a significant interaction between groups and reader-type. Reader-type, however, was significant at the .001 level.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To return to the theoretical underpinnings of this study, these findings would seem to support the contention that many teachers tend to confuse norms of speaking and reading performance variables. This inability to distinguish between speaking and reading would appear to influence their judgment of children's reading. In particular, there is a strong likelihood for this confusion to prevail among teachers of reading teaching children whose speech differs considerably from their own. At the end of a recent, and largely unsuccessful, discussion about some possible distinctions between reading errors and dialect differences of ghetto Negro children, one of my graduate students had the final word on what she believed was the issue. With all the vehemence of what Bloomfield had called the "irate tertiary response," she insisted that "They'll have to talk like us eventually!" This, essentially, is not the point. Worse, it doesn't even beg the issue. It doesn't recognize the issue. And that is the point.

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TABLE 1

Individual Ratings of Lower-Urban Negro Reader*

	S	1 (Poor)	2 (Fair)	3 (Average)	4 (Good)	5 (Very Good
Without Labels	1		AB	C		
	2	A	C	B		
	3		A	B	C	
	4		ABC			
	5		A	BC		
	6		ABC			
	7		ABC			
	8		ABC			
	9		ABC			
	10		A	BC		
	11		A	BC		
	12		ABC			
	13	A	BC			
	14		A	BC		
	15		ABC			
	16		ABC			
	17		A	BC		
	18		AB	C		
With Labels	19		A C	B		
	20		ABC			
	21		ABC			
	22		ABC			
	23		ABC			
	24		AB	C		
	25		ABC			
	26		ABC			
	27		ABC			
	28		ABC			
	29	B	A C			
	30		ABC			
	31	A	C	B		
	32	A		BC		
	33		AB	C		
	34	ABC				
	35		AB	C		
	36		ABC			

*4th-grade reading level; A=1st (B=2nd, C=3rd) time heard.

TABLE 2

Individual Ratings of Lower-Urban White Reader*

	S	1 (Poor)	2 (Fair)	3 (Average)	4 (Good)	5 (Very Good)
Without Labels	1		ABC			
	2		ABC			
	3	BC	A			
	4	ABC				
	5	A C		B		
	6	ABC				
	7	ABC				
	8	AB	C			
	9	ABC				
	10		ABC			
	11	AB	C			
	12	ABC				
	13	ABC				
	14	ABC				
	15	ABC				
	16	A C	B			
	17		ABC			
	18	ABC				
With Labels	19	ABC				
	20	ABC				
	21	ABC				
	22	ABC				
	23			ABC		
	24	ABC				
	25	ABC				
	26	ABC				
	27	ABC				
	28	ABC				
	29	ABC				
	30			ABC		
	31	ABC				
	32			ABC		
	33	ABC				
	34	ABC				
	35	A		BC		
	36	ABC				

*2nd-grade reading level; A=1st (B=2nd, C=3rd) time heard.

TABLE 3

Individual Ratings of Upper-Urban White Reader*

	S	1 (Poor)	2 (Fair)	3 (Average)	4 (Good)	5 (Very Good)
Without Labels	1					ABC
	2					ABC
	3					ABC
	4					ABC
	5					ABC
	6					ABC
	7				A	BC
	8					ABC
	9					ABC
	10					ABC
	11					ABC
	12				ABC	
	13					ABC
	14				AB	C
	15					ABC
	16					ABC
	17					ABC
	18					ABC
With Labels	19					ABC
	20					ABC
	21				A	BC
	22					ABC
	23					ABC
	24					ABC
	25				BC	A
	26			B	C	A
	27					ABC
	28					ABC
	29					ABC
	30					ABC
	31					ABC
	32					ABC
	33					ABC
	34					ABC
	35					ABC
	36					ABC

*6th-grade reading level; A=1st (B=2nd, c=3rd) time heard.

TABLE 4

Individual Ratings of Upper-Urban Negro Reader*

	S	1 (Poor)	2 (Fair)	3 (Average)	4 (Good)	5 (Very Good)
Without Labels	1				AB	C
	2					ABC
	3			A	B	C
	4				ABC	
	5			A	BC	
	6				ABC	
	7			ABC		
	8			A C	B	
	9				ABC	
	10				A C	B
	11				ABC	
	12		A C	B		
	13				ABC	
	14			ABC		
	15				ABC	
	16			ABC		
	17				ABC	
	18				ABC	
With Labels	19			C	AB	
	20				ABC	
	21			B	C	A
	22				ABC	
	23				ABC	
	24				ABC	
	25			ABC		
	26			ABC		
	27			ABC		
	28			ABC		
	29				ABC	
	30			BC	A	
	31			A	BC	
	32			AB	C	
	33			ABC		
	34			AB		C
	35			A C	B	
	36			ABC		

*5th-grade reading level; A=1st (B=2nd, C=3rd) time heard.

TABLE 5

Number of Subjects with Consistent and Accurate Ratings*

	Consistent				Consistent and Accurate			
	LUN	LUW	UUW	UUN	LUN	LUW	UUW	UUN
Without Labels	8(2)	9(1)	15(5)	8(4)	8	9	15	8
		4(2)	1(4)	3(3)				
				1(5)				
With Labels	10(2)	13(1)	15(5)	5(4)	10	13	15	5
	1(1)	3(2)		6(3)				
Total*	19	29	31	23	18	22	30	13

*Figures in parentheses denote assigned ratings; consistency defined as three identical ratings; accuracy defined by prior determined levels; possible total = 36.

TABLE 6

Ratings of All Readers Heard Three Times*

Readers	1 (Poor)	2 (Fair)	3 (Average)	4 (Good)	5 (Very Good)	Total
LUN	8 (2,6)	78 (37,41)	21 (14,7)	1 (1,0)		108
LUW	79 (37,42)	28 (16,12)	1 (1,0)			108
UUW		1 (0,1)	18 (6,4)	97 (48,49)		108
UUN	2 (2,0)	43 (14,29)	55 (32,23)	8 (6,2)		108
Total	87	108	66	66	105	432

*First and second figures in parentheses denote respectively the number of ratings by Ss without labels and with labels.

TABLE 7

Ratings of All Readers Heard Two Times*

		Ratings									Total
		1 (Poor)		2 (Fair)		3 (Average)		4 (Good)		5 (Very Good)	
Readers	LUN	7	(2,5)	55	(27,28)	10	(7,3)				72
	LUW	53	(25,28)	18	(10,8)	1	(1,0)				72
	UUW					1	(0,1)	7	(5,2)	64 (31,33)	72
	UUN			1	(1,0)	30	(10,20)	37	(22,15)	4 (3,1)	72
	Total	60		74		42		44		68	288

*First and second figures in parentheses denote respectively the number of ratings by Ss without labels and with labels.

TABLE 8

Mean Scores on Ratings of Readers Heard Twice

	Readers				
Group	LUN	LUW	UUW	UUN	Total
Without Labels	5.3889	5.3333	5.7222	4.5556	5.2500
With Labels	5.2778	5.5556	5.7778	3.7222	5.0834
Total	5.3334	5.4445	5.7500	4.1389	5.1667

Table 9

Analysis of Variance for Rating Means

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Variance Estimate
Without/With labels (rows)	1.0000	1	1.0000
Reader-types (columns)	54.0556	3	18.0185*
Interaction	.9444	3	.3148
Within cells	191.0000	136	1.4044
Total	247.0000	143	

*Reader-type F = 12.83; $p < .001$.

Judgments of Reading Performance

Rate the twelve oral reading performances on the basis of 1 - 5; circle your answer

1 = Poor (needs much help)
2 = Fair
3 = Average
4 = Good
5 = Very Good (primarily an independent reader)

All Children read the following passage:

The boy saw the car go around the corner. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. The boy watched the car go around the corner four times before he saw who was in it. It was his friend Danny.

UN	1.	1	2	3	4	5
UW	2.	1	2	3	4	5
LW	3.	1	2	3	4	5
LN	4.	1	2	3	4	5
UN	5.	1	2	3	4	5
LW	6.	1	2	3	4	5
LN	7.	1	2	3	4	5
UW	8.	1	2	3	4	5
	9.	1	2	3	4	5
	10.	1	2	3	4	5
	11.	1	2	3	4	5
	12.	1	2	3	4	5

NAME _____

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1.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	1	2	3	4	5

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