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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews some recent research on the relationship of group processes and cultural milieux to choice of linguistic form and Its implications for problem solving in small (minority) groups. Basic to the discussion is the concept that language usage conveys important social information and is therefore not a matter of choice but must be rule-governed. The initial section differentiates linguistic competence (ability to produce grammatically correct sentences) from communicative competence (ability to select appropriate forms from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available). Techniques for eliciting communicative competence are then discussed and compared; all methods are seen to depend on the investigator's knowledge of the cultural make up of the group concerned. With regard to the analysis of elicited conversational material, Labov's notion of sociolinguistic variables and the concept of "background expectation" are discussed, among others. Research dealing with social origin and communicative ability is also reviewed. The author concludes that the basic understandings achieved in the studies considered can aid the study of problem solving in small group studies by giving the researcher insights into basic communication processes, thus improving the validity of his own field work both cross culturally and within his own society. (FWB)

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SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND COMMUNICATION IN SMALL GROUPS

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Sociolinguistics
and
Communication in Small Groups

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Language is relevant to the study of small groups in two ways. On the one hand, it serves as a medium for the exchange of ideas and interaction among group members, whose conversations can be recorded and analyzed by social scientists observing their behavior. On the other hand, the social scientist wishing to study group processes indirectly (through non-observational methods like interviews, projective tests, etc.) must also rely on language for much of his information. In either case, it is necessary for the success of the research that all concerned, participants and researchers, control the same code.

But unfortunately, communality of code has been more frequently assumed than demonstrated empirically. To the extent that they have explicitly dealt with language, social scientists have treated it largely as a reflection of individual psychology. They have focussed on the content of what is communicated, assuming that as long as everyone concerned "speaks the same language", form presents no problem. Choice of expression, words or speech style is regarded primarily as a matter of individual intent, a reflection of a person's attitude or psychic state. Yet, these very choices also convey important information. Members of any speech community ordinarily have little difficulty in distinguishing informal from formal or familiar from deferential speech. They can tell whether people are engaged in a serious discussion, or just chatting, without knowing exactly what is being talked about. Similarly, one can learn much about a speaker's social background, educational achievements, and sometimes also his regional origin just from the way he speaks. Since it conveys important social information, language usage is not, and cannot be, merely a matter of individual choice. It must be rule-governed. This paper will review some recent research on the relationship of group processes and cultural milieux to choice of linguistic form, for its implications for problem solving in small groups.

Linguistics and Sociolinguistics

Linguistics is best known as the formal study of grammatical systems. Social scientists in recent years have been particularly interested in Chomsky's (1965) notion of linguistic competence--that is, the study of the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language, defined as his control of the rules by which meanings are encoded into sounds. The linguist's remarkably explicit models of these processes have come to serve as examples of scientific rigor to investigators in related fields of psychology and anthropology.

One of the most significant features of the notion of competence is the fact that it deals with underlying constraints upon behavior rather than with actual performance. It refers to ability to act, rather than to what is done in particular instances. The goal of a linguistic analysis of competence is not to classify forms appearing in a particular body of data, but rather to explain occurring patterns in terms of deeper, more abstract regularities. It has been possible to show, for example, that although the number of sentences in a particular language is infinitely varied, they can in fact be generated from a finite body of rules. Generative grammar, as it is called, thus captures the creativity which is inherent in human language processes and which distinguishes them from non-human sign systems (Lenneberg, 1967).

The processes by which speakers code meanings into sound are largely automatic and hence only partially subject to conscious control. Regardless of individual intent, the form of one's speech always depends on the grammatical system of his language, and his interpretation of what he hears. There is no such thing as impartial observation or measurement of verbal behavior: measurement is always affected by distortions. To some extent these distortions can be overcome by analytical techniques, however; and the study of linguistic forms provides tools to deal with a level of subconscious behavior which, when compared with an individual's actual behavior on the one hand, and his expressed opinions about his behavior on the other, can offer entirely novel insights into social processes.

The findings of generative grammar and its general orientation to the study of human action have had a profound effect on psychology and anthropological study of cognition (Chomsky, 1959; Smith and Miller, 1966). Attempts to establish direct relationships between grammatical rules and broader social processes, however, suffer from the fact that until quite recently, formal grammatical analysis dealt only with relatively limited aspects of verbal messages. In their search for methodological rigor, linguists tended to confine themselves to the internal linguistic patterning of linguistic forms within isolated sentences, ruling out consideration of the broader conversational context or the social settings in which such sentences are embedded. The resulting grammars account for what can be said in particular language, but they make no attempt to specify what constitutes appropriate behavior in particular social circumstances.

In an effort to extend some of the general principles of formal grammatical analysis to the study of speech as a form of social interaction, sociolinguists have advanced the concept of communicative competence (Hymes, 1967). Whereas linguistic competence covers the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his ability to select from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters. The following examples of communication failures will illustrate the contrast between the two approaches to language.

1. From William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, & Lucy McKin Garrison, Slave Songs of the United States (New York, 1867, p. xxvii) quoted by Stewart (1968): A report by a white teacher of a century ago on an interchange with southern Negro boys:

> I asked a group of boys one day the color of the sky. Nobody could tell me. Presently the father of one of them came by, and I told him their ignorance, repeating my question with the same result as before. He grinned: "Tom, how sky stan'?" "Blue," promptly shouted Tom.

The difficulties in communication here are linguistic. We assume that since Negro boys did not understand the teacher's question, it was no more grammatically correct in their dialect than "How sky stan'?" is in English. The boys speak only Gullah, a plantation Creole of the Caroline Coast current at the time; the teacher speaks only standard English. Their languages have different grammatical systems and therefore speaker and addressee are unable to exchange factual information.

2. From a report of a Congressional hearing in the New York Times, March 9, 1968, p. 28C:

> Studies of the Detroit riot show that Negroes are more interested in human dignity than in jobs, housing, and education, George Romney said.
>
> He quoted a survey showing that 80 percent of the Negroes of Detroit complain of the way they are treated by whites. They particularly object to being patronized, as when a white policeman addresses a Negro man as "boy", he said.
>
> Mr. (John L.) McClellan broke his silence. In his section of the country, he said, it was an old custom for whites to call Negroes "boy", and no offense was intended.
>
> "I sometimes us it, as a custom, a habit," he said. "But I mean no disrespect."
>
> "I try to avoid it, but sometimes I say, 'Boy, this, oh boy, that.'"
>
> Negroes are too sensitive about that, he said. It makes no sense to start a riot over such a matter as being called "boy", he said.

> "People have to rise above these little things," he added.
> It was the Governor's turn to sit silent. Then he stammered, "Well, it's a hard thing--"
> Mr. McClellan interrupted, "Yes," he said sternly, "and if it comes to it, we can deal with it in a hard way."

As in the first example, the two speakers do not seem to be communicating. Yet in this case both have the same grammar. They may differ in pronunciation but this is not relevant. What is important here is that they differ in the social norms governing the appropriate use of the address form "boy".

A third example illustrates how such divergence in sociolinguistic norms can be used to the communicative advantage of one party to an exchange, and the disadvantage of another.

3. From an experience of a Negro psychiatrist on a streetcorner in the southern United States in 1967, quoted by Ervin-Tripp (1969):

> '"What's your name, boy?" the policeman asked....
> "Dr. Poussaint. I'm a physician...."
> "What's your first name, boy?..."
> "Alvin."
> 'As my heart palpitated, I muttered in profound humiliation.... For the moment, my manhood had been ripped from me.... No amount of self-love could have salvaged my pride or preserved my integrity.'

Here the two speakers understand each other perfectly: the policeman means to insult, and he achieves this by an imappropriate demand for the victim's first name and by addressing a physician with a term reserved for a servant.

All three examples show rule-governed behavior. But only in the first case would the relevant rules be covered in the linguist's analysis. The alternants involved in the second and third examples--"Alvin", "Dr. Poussaint", and "boy"--are all equally grammatical and have the same basic function in the sentence. They are terms of address which may refer to the same individual. Use of one term or another does not change the nature of the message as a form of address; but it does determine how the person addressed is to be treated, and to what social category he is to be assigned. Selection among such grammatically equivalent alternants thus serves social rather than linguistic purposes. The study of sociolinguistic categorization processes provides a method of relating verbal behavior to social processes, adding an important dimension to the linguist's grammatical analysis.

Although our evidence is somewhat scanty, there is some reason to believe that sociolinguistic selection, like the coding of meanings into sounds, constitutes automatic behavior. The following example from recent fieldwork in a small Norwegian community (Gumperz 1964) shows that the discrepancies between actual speech behavior and the speaker's opinions about his actual behavior may be surprisingly large. Residents of this community speak both a local dialect and standard Norwegian (Bokmål) and read the latter. Their feelings about the appropriate times and places in which to use these two varieties are very strong. The standard language is used primarily in formal situations: teaching, business negotiations, and church services. On all other occasions, but above all in casual meetings, only the dialect is considered appropriate. To test the relationship of these attitudes about language usage to actual speech practice, we organized a series of informal gatherings for three local groups of differing social characteristics. In each group, various topics of conversation were introduced and the conversations recorded. In two of the three groups, speech practice was found to conform closely to locally-held steriotypes about language usage. Since the gathering was considered an informal one, even such topics as community affairs and the economic development of the region were discussed in the dialect. The third group, however, differed, in that "serious" topics like economic development and politics usually elicited a shift from the dialect into standard Norwegian, even though the members of the group were friends and the gathering informal. The majority of this group were university students spending about six months of the year in various university centers far distant from the community. Their residence

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in the city, however, had not changed their attitudes to the dialect. So strong was their allegiance to local values regarding speech behavior that they claimed, with perfect sincerity, that their entire conversation had been in the dialect. When the recorded conversation was played back to them, they were appalled and vowed not to repeat such slips of the tongue again. Yet the same phenomenon was observed during a subsequent meeting of this group! The cause of this group's difference on speech behavior is complex and does not concern us here. What is important for us is the evidence this example provides for the existence of compelling patterns of speech behavior which may not be realized by the speaker at all.

Research in sociolinguistics has dealt with socially determined selection in a variety of societies and at a variety of levels of analysis. What aspects of language are subject to this kind of variation? The problem is one which has never been completely neglected, and social variations in speech have been observed in many different kinds of societies around the world (Hymes, 1964). Until quite recently, however, such social variations have tended to be described only when they were clearly reflected in the data gathered by linguists as part of their ordinary linguistic field work procedures. What has tended to be studied are phenomena which, like the choice between "tu" and "vous" in French, are reflected in the grammatical system itself. This has created the impression that social distinctions are revealed only in some languages but not in others.

But this is not the case. Although members of all societies categorize each other through speech, groups differ in the linguistic means by which such categorization is accomplished. What some groups accomplish by alternating between familiar and respectful personal pronouns, such as "tu" and "vous", others achieve by shifting between Mr. Smith and John. Still others may achieve similar ends by simply switching from a local dialect to a standard language.

The major reason that such social variation in speech has not been studied systematically in all societies lies not in the speech behavior of the populations concerned, but rather in the way in which their speech has been recorded. The almost exclusive concern of linguistic elicitation procedures with reference (in the sense in which that term was used above) has led to the recording of the most commonly used equivalent for particular objects or ideas. The very artificiality of settings where linguists interview a single informant, and where speech samples must be produced in isolation from the customary circle of friends and family is hardly likely to bring forth the subtleties in selection of speech forms, shifts in formality and informality, which characterize everyday interaction.

The reproduction of natural conversation is difficult even for a highly skilled writer. It is certainly more than could be expected from the ordinary person. At best the linguist-informant interview yields samples of a single speech style, usually a relatively formal one. Suitable data for the analysis of communication processes has therefore simply not been available. The systematic study of communicative competence requires special elicitation techniques capable of capturing the speaker's skill in responding appropriately to significantly different social stimuli. Complete records of actual conversations must replace the recording of single sentences. Furthermore, comparison of the same speaker's verbal responses in at least two different settings should be emphasized.

Sociolinguistic Elicitation Techniques

How can such data be collected, and what information do we need to interpret it? One of the most obvious elicitation methods is the recording of naturalistic speech in unobserved settings. In a pioneering study of this type Soskin and John (1963) secured the assistance of a married college student couple for this task. The subjects were given two week's free vacation at a holiday resort. After their arrival they were each equipped with small microphones disguised as part of their clothing. They had the option of turning off the mocrophones when privacy was desired, but they were asked to keep the microphones during much of their day on, especially to record their meetings with other vacationers at the resort. Their speech was recorded through a transmitter station located a few miles from the locale of their activities. Similar naturalistic techniques of observation have been used in studying the behavior of nursery and kindergarten play groups. In one such study (Sher and Harner 1968) all children were equipped with microphone pins of which all but one or two were dummies. Recordings were then made by experimenters seated behind a one-way mirror. This type of situation offers the advantage of allowing the investigator to make visual observations of the group while they were talking.

Methods of this type have produced some of our first extensive recordings of natural speech, providing much material potentially useful for sociolinguistic analysis. But the analysis of such conversation presents some serious problems. At the outset, masses of recorded data are necessary if a sufficiently large range of stylistic variation is to be obtained. This presents serious transcription problems, since even a roughly accurate transcription of one hour of recorded natural speech requires ten to twelve hours of transcription time. More faithful transcription involves a much heavier investment of time. Even after the material has been recorded, it is sometimes impossible to evaluate its social significance in the absence of ethnographic knowledge about social norms governing linguistic choice in the situation recorded.

Consider the account of the Congressional hearing cited above. In order to understand what is going on, we must be aware of the difference between Seantor McClellan's traditional Southern speech norms and Governor Romney's egalitarian Northern values. The policeman in the poussaint incident effectively degrades Dr. Poussaint because both speakers share a common set of values about the social meaning of the alternants employed. One problem with so-called naturalistic observation is that the experimenter sometimes cannot "understand" what he hears because of his unfamiliarity with the norms of the group he is observing. It is one of the striking characteristics of our society, and for that matter of any society undergoing rapid change, that values about speech behavior may differ from small group to small group and sometimes from generation to generation. Failure to recognize these sources of variation in value systems makes it difficult for us to understand such phenomena as hippie speech or black power rhetoric. Naturalistic observation and random sampling of speech must therefore be preceded by "ethnographies of communication" (Hymes 1964a)--that is, by unstructured observation not tied down to any rigid experimental design.

The Norwegian experiment mentioned in the beginning of this paper was based on such fieldwork. The discussion sessions reported above took less than a week to stage, but this phase of the project was preceded by more than two months of intensive ethnographic study by two anthropologists, including an examination of local demographic records, study of economic life, local class stratification and its relation to friendship patterns, formal interviews about speech, and above all, participant observation. One of the investigators was a native Norwegian with several years of ethnographic experience in village Norway. Elaborate preparatory fieldwork of this kind provided the basis for selection of conversational groups whose speech behavior could be predicted by our knowledge of the local social organization.

Several kinds of group elicitation techniques were employed in Labov's (1968a) study of six adolescent and pre-adolescent peer groups in Harlem. Here is Labov's description of his procedures:

> "The paradigm for investigating the language of these peer groups may be summarized as follows:
>
> (1) The group was located by the field worker--in most cases a participant-observer living in the area.
>
> (2) Several individuals, including the leaders of the group, were interviewed in face-to-face situations.
>
> (3) Our staff met with the group on several outings and trips to various parts of the Metropolitan area. The field worker maintained daily contact with the group, and made notes on group membership and activities.
>
> (4) In several group sessions, multi-track recordings were made of the group in spontanious interaction; in these sessions, the dominant factors controlling speech are the same as those which operate in every-day conversation.
>
> (5) All of the remaining individuals were interviewed in face-to-face interaction, and in addition, a large number of isolated individuals in the neighborhood ("lames") were interviewed."

In a recent study of London school children, Bernstein succeeded in generating stylistic variation by exposing children to different communication tasks as part of a half hour structured interview session (Robinson 1968). To initiate proceedings the child brought a painting or model to the interview room and talked about it. The child then constructed a model room with furniture and family figures supplied by the interviewer and answered several questions about these. The other tasks comprised the narration of stories about three sets of pictures, the description of objects and events in three postcard-size reproductions of paintings by Trotin, an open-ended story about what a child did in a free day, an explanation of how to play one of three games, and the description and explanation of the behavior of a toy elephant.

In interviews where the investigator brings a portable tape recorder to interview a small group of individuals (as in a family), it has sometimes been found useful for the investigator to leave the room or to step aside for a time, leaving the tape recorder running while participants talk among themselves. This technique proved productive during a recent interview with black West Indian high school children in Birmingham, England. We had asked the principal of a local school to get together a group of students to talk to us. The students met us in a small seminar room seated around a table. All of them were native speakers of Jamaican Creole who use a very Creolized form of English among themselves and in family settings, although most of them can also employ normal Birmingham English in the classroom. When we entered the room, we questioned them about their background, their schoolwork, and their interests. They answered in fairly formal English. During the course of the conversation it appeared that the students frequently performed skits in the classroom dealing with everyday life. When they volunteered to put on a skit for us, we offered to step out of the room to give them an opportunity to plan their performance. We left the tape recorder running during our absence, and when we listened to the tape later, we found remarkable shifts both in style and fluency. Students who seemed to have difficulty in talking when we were present suddenly became very fluent when the style of the language shifted to Creole.

While the elicitation procedures reported here differ greatly, they all depend to a large extent on the investigator's knowledge of the cultural norms and behavior patterns of the group concerned. Given such background knowledge, investigation need not be confined to a few small groups randomly selected. There is no reason why systematic and structured interview methods cannot be designed which can accomodate samples of relatively large size. Bernstein's group, for example, sampled a total of 350 children and their mothers in London. It is crucial, however, that procedures are followed which are meaningful to both interviewer and interviewee. The right questions must be asked in exactly the right way. This is especially important in working with small friendship or family groups where communication, as Sapir and Bossard have pointed out, relies heavily on shared knowledge. As Labov, a highly skilled sciolinguistic investigator, remarks: "If you want a child to tell you about baseball, questions such as 'Tell us the rules of baseball' are unlikely to elicit responses." To obtain a natural answer, the investigator must display his own knowledge of the game by questions like "How do you know when to steal third base?" Labov's recently completed study of peer group speech in the New York ghetto is perhaps the best examples of this approach (Labov 1968b).

Structural Aspects of Speech Behavior

To suggest that the structure of longer conversational passages bears significant resemblances to the structure of sentences is to say that these passages must be patterned along two dimensions: the sequential or syntagmatic, and the paradigmatic. By paradigmatic structure, we refer to the fact that in any one speech event, speakers always select from a limited repertoire of alternates. Take, for example, the sentence, "We ______ out to dinner last night." In filling the slot here, we select one of a number of possible forms of the verb "go": "go, goes, went". Note that selection is determined by the grammatical environment; only the last of the three forms fits, because of the adverbial phrase "last night". Since grammatical rules are automatic, all but beiinning learners of English as a second language are unaware of the possibiltiy of selection in this case. When we decide how to address someone who enters our office, similar selection among alternates takes place. But here social factors, rather than grammatical rules, are operative. Thus we may say "Come in and sit down, John", "Come in, Mr. Smith," or "Won't you come in, Sir?" Our choices in these matters are never quite free. We select a form of address on the basis of what we know about our interlocutor and what the behavioral norms allow. The difference between grammatical and sociolinguistic selection rules is one of degree, not one of kind.

By syntagmatic or sequential structuring, we refer to the fact that longer stretches of speech can be divided into distinct elements which are ordered in relation to each other. Just as sentences consist of clauses and phrases, conversations sub-divide into episodes (Watson and Potter, 1962) or discourse stages, as Frake (1964) has termed them in his highly detailed and suggestive analysis of drinking encounters among the Subanum tribe in the Phillippines. These drinking encounters are culturally important as dispute settling mechanisms. Yet, the introduction of information about interpersonal conflicts is strictly constrained by the order of discourse stages. Encounters begin with long, ritualized introductions, in which wording is relatively pre-determined. They end with similarly ritualized codes. Only the skillful speaker knows how to introduce new information in the transitions between these ritualized sequences.

A dramatic example of the importance of order in conversations is provided by Schegloff (1969) in an analysis of opening gambits in telephone conversations. Schegloff shows among other things that the person who answers a ringing telephone is always the first speaker, and that the caller speaks next. Thus the conversation has a defined order, like the order of words in a sentence. So strong are our expectations about the order in which the conversation will proceed, Schegloff has discovered, that it is possible to foil obscene telephone calls by simply picking up the ringing telephone but refusing to say "Hello". Schegloff further shows how purposeful distortions in sequential ordering can seriously affect the intelligibility of the message.

> A phone rings in Jim's home:
> Jim: Hello.
> George: Hi, how are you?
> Jim: O.K., but listen, I'm in a phone boothe and this is my last dime. Barbara's phone is busy and I won't be able to meet her at seven. Could you keep trying to get her for me and tell her?
> George: What the hell are you talking about?

The key linguistic concept for the analysis of paradigmatic aspects of language behavior has been the notion of sociolinguistic variables as developed by Labov (1966) and others. Alternate terms of address and formal-informal word pairs such as "buy-purchase", "munch-eat-dine", can all be regarded as instances of such variables. A striking discovery based on contextual realistic linguistic fieldwork has been that social variation is by no means confined to lexical features and address terms. It affects all aspects of grammer including phonology and syntax. This is true for both monolingual societies like the United States and for bi-dialectal or multilingual societies.

In a pioneering study of verbal behavior in New York City Labov (1966) noted that variations in the pronunciation of certain words were so extensive as to cut across the articulatory range of what structural dialectologists using traditional field techniques has analyzed as distinct phonemes. The vowel in bad for example could be homophonous with the 'i' in beard; the 'e' in bed or the 'ae' in bat. Three distinct phonemes thus seem to collapse into a single articulatory range. Since there is no phonetic basis for isolating distinct articulation peaks within this range, Labov argues that any attempt to deal with such shifts by postulating alternation between distinct systems is without empirical foundation. They must be treated as variable within a single system. He goes on to suggest that the discreteness of phonemic systems is an artifact of the linguist's field practice of abstracting rules from the speech of one or at most a few informants and of de-emphasizing variation. Intensive study of speech behavior should, in any one speech community, reveal both phonemes and variables. While phonemes are characterized by pronunciations clustering around definable articulation peaks, variables are defined by a starting point and a scale of values varying in a certain direction. The values along such scales are conditioned by social factors in a manner analogous to that in which phonological environments condition the phonetic realizations of allophones.

Not all grammatical or lexical alternates in a language can automatically be regarded as sociolinguistic variables, however. Since the same language may be spoken in a number of socially distinct societies, it must be demonstrated that selection among alternates carries social significance for some group of speakers. Furthermore, since social meaning is always embedded in reference, it is useful to speak of sociolinguistic variables only when alternates are referentially equivalent, i.e., when they signify the same thing in some socially realistic speech event. Items with the same or similar dictionary meanings may not be substitutable in actual conversation and, per contra, some variables are semantically equivalent only in specific contexts. An example will illustrate the problem. Few would ordinarily claim that the words 'wife' and 'lady' are homonyms in English. Yet they are used as such in the following extracts from an invitation to an army social quoted in a recent issue of the San Francisco Examiner: 'Officers with their ladies, enlisted men with their wives'. Referencial equivalence here underlines social differences.

There is evidence to show that selection of sociolinguistic variables is rarely completely free. Variables tend to be selected in co-occurent clusters. In other words, the speaker's selection of a particular value of a variable is always constrained by previous selections of variables. Thus, if a speaker varies between (i·), (e·), and (æ) in bad, and, in addition, has alternates ain't, is not, going, and goin', he is most likely to say 'This ain't gonna be (bi·d) in some situations and 'This is not going to be (bæd)' in others. It would be unusual for him to say 'This is not going to be (bi·d).' It is important to note that sociolinguistic selections or constraints which generate such co-occurrences cut across the normal components of grammar. Their study, therefore, extends the application of linguistic analysis to data not ordinarily considered a part of grammar.

So far, our discussion of linguistic variables has dealt only with features of phonology and grammar. During the last few years, some of the methodological principles employed in the study of grammar have also begun to be applied to the sociological analysis of communication content. Content, however, is not studied for its own sake. The goal here is the empirical investigation of the manner in which content is manipulated as part of communicative strategies. Stereotyped opening gambits such as "What's new?" suggest that the selection of conversational topics often serves social ends other than the transmission of factual information. Here, the speaker identifies himself as a friend and signals his readiness for further talk. Ervin-Tripp (1969) points out similarly that when a wife greets her husband by announcing that her visitors are discussing nursery schools, she may be suggesting that he absent himself, since in our culture husbands are not potential members of nursery school mothers' groups. In both cases, the important information in the conversation is contained in inferences hearers are expected to draw from their knowledge of the social relationships underlying the ostensible topic. Choice of content, therefore, is part of the code; like choice of grammatical form, it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

To say that selection of topic communicates information about social relationships is to imply that these relationships, or for that matter, social structures in general, cannot simply be regarded as fixed, jural rules having an existence of their own apart from human action. They must themselves be a part of the communicative process, and thus presumably subject to change or reinforcement as the cumulative result of everyday communicative acts. The view that social structures are assigned through interaction is most clearly documented in the writings of Erving Goffman (1963). Through his study of interaction in various special settings, such as games, hospitals, work groups, and the like, he provides dramatic evidence for the fact that a single role or relationship may be realized through different types of behavior in different situations.

Building upon similar theoretical premises, Harold Garfinkel (1967) concentrates somewhat more directly on the cognitive rules by which members of a society assess the significance of actions in everyday life. In essence, Garfinkel's view is that a person's previous experience and his knowledge of the institutions and practices of the world around him act to constrain his interpretations of what he sees and hears, in somewhat the same way that grammatical rules constrain his perception of sound sequences. He uses the term "background expectation" to characterize the outside knowledge that an individual employs in the interpretation of events.

In a study of the function of such "background expectations" in everyday communication, Garfinkel (1969) asked a group of students to report a conversation in which they had participated in the following fashion: they were to write on the left-hand side of a piece of paper what was actually said, and on the right side they were to explain in detail what they understood the conversation to mean. Here is a sample of the record obtained in this way:

Speaker:	Verbatim Transcript	Detailed Explanation
Husband:	Dana succeeded in putting a penny in a parking meter today without being picked up.	This afternoon as I was bringing Dana, our four-year-old son, home from the nursery school, he succeeded in reaching high enough to put a penny in a parking meter when we parked in a meter zone, whereas before he had always had to be picked up to reach that high.
Wife:	Did you take him to the record store?	Since he put a penny in a meter that means that you stopped while he was with you. I know that you stopped at the record store either on the way to get him or on the way back.

The interchange in the verbatim transcript would be inexplicable without an assumption of shared "background expectations."

Garfinkel then went on to demonstrate the function of "background expectations" by asking his students to substitute detailed explanations of the kind shown in the right-hand column in the example above for the usual expressions employed in ordinary family discourse. The results were instructive: when they did, they were accused of "acting like strangers". One wife asked her husband, "Don't you love me any more?" Thus, the students' relatives perceived detailed explanatory language as a rejection of family values. Reliance on background expectations thus seems to serve an important purpose in distinguishing small group or family conversations from interaction with non-members.

Where Garfinkel points out the importance of background expectations in communication, Harvey Sacks (1967) proceeds to specify how the speaker's implicit use of these expectancies generates conversation exchanges. Among the most important of these are the "social categories" or social reactions implied by speech content. Sacks' basic data is derived from natural conversations. In analyzing the following sentence sequence taken from a verbatim transcript of a child's story: "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up," he notes that members of our society will automatically recognize the "mommy" in sentence 2 as the mother of the infant in sentence 1. Yet, there is nothing in the overt linguistic structure of either sentence which provides for this identification. Pronouns such as "his" or "her" which ordinarily express such relationships are lacking.

What perceptual or cognitive mechanisms, Sacks asks, must we postulate in order to explain the hearer's understanding of the mother-child relationship in the absence of linguistic clues? Sacks observes that forms like "mommy" and "baby" can be regarded as "membership categorization devices" which assign actors to certain social categories and invest them with the rights and duties implied therein. It is not possible, however, to determine the social category implied by a term by considering that term in isolation. The isolated term "baby", for example, could be part of the collection baby-child-adult, or of the collection mommy-daddy-baby. In the example given above, we identify it as part of the latter collection by examining both sentences. The cognitive process is somewhat as follows: 1) We perceive a semantic tie between baby and the activity of crying, which is more reminiscent of family relationships (mommy-daddy-baby) than of age grading (baby-child-adult); 2) This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that the mommy in sentence 2 forms part of the collectivity (mommy-daddy-baby) but not of the collectivity (baby-child-adult).

The concept of membership categorization device has some similarity to the symbolic interactionists' concept of role. Both Sacks and Garfinkel, however, seem to avoid this conventional terminology in order to circumvent the association of roles with separately existing jural rules which has been built up by much earlier writing on role. As Cicourel (1968) has pointed out, they see social structure as constraining behavior in somewhat the same way that syntax constrains the encoding of sounds. The goal is to devise empirical methods by which to discover social categories directly through conversational data. Despite the newness of these insights, a recent study of Moerman's (1969) shows that Sacks' concepts can be used, with the aid of an informant, to analyze the cultural basis of everyday behavior in groups whose culture is strange to the observer. These techniques should also be applicable to the analysis of sub-cultural difference in family groups in American society, and seem to me to hold considerable potential value for a range of applications, from group therapy for families to social psychological and anthropological analysis of small groups.

Although Sacks limits his analysis to communication content, sociolinguistic variables of the types discussed above can also be regarded as membership categorization devises. In the following joke told to my colleague Alan Dundes by a black student, the social label "Negro" is conveyed by the syntactically and phonologically marked utterance "Who dat?":

> Governor W. died and went to heaven. When he knocked on the door, a voice answered: 'Who dat?' He said, 'Never mind, I'll go to the other place.'

The notion of categorization devices thus extends to both linguistic form and linguistic content. Although I know of no serious study of the use of linguistic form as a categorization device, it would seem that both types of evidence should be utilized in the study of interpersonal relations in small groups.

How Do Different Groups Develop Different Linguistic Codes?

This question is but one aspect of the broader problem of social differentiation in speech: of how a person's social origin affects his ability to communicate with others. Basil Bernstein's (1969) theories of restricted and elaborated codes represent the first systematic attempt to deal with this question in cross-culturally valid or universal terms. In the United States, Bernstein's earlier work has frequently been taken to assert that there is a direct or causal relationship between middle and working class status and elaborated and restricted codes, respectively. His recent writings present a considerably different picture (Bernstein, 1969). The basic assumption underlying Bernstein's empirical research is that the network of social relationships in which the individual interacts, and the communicative tasks which these relationships entail, ultimately shape his linguistic potential. Following Elizabeth Bott (1957), he makes a scalar distinction in family role systems between closed or postional systems, and open or person-oriented systems. The former polar type emphasizes communal values at the expense of freedom of individual expression and initiative. Such emphasis tends to limit the introduction of new information through verbal means, stressing social propriety in speech and leading to a predominance of ritualized exchanges. Hence the term "restricted code" to describe a way of using language which is largely formulaic, and more suited for reinforcing pre-existing social relationships than for the transmission of new factual information. Person-oriented role systems, on the other hand, emphasize individual freedom and adaptability. They tend to generate "elaborated codes", capable of expressing information about the physical and social environment and emphasizing the ability to use speech creatively, for the transmission of such information.

While all speakers show some control of both types of speech code, there are important social differences in the extent to which elaborated speech is used. Individuals socialized in open role systems, while they may use restricted codes in their own family or small-group settings, are trained to speak in and respond to elaborated codes in serious discussion, in school, and in public life. Persons socialized in closed role systems are less flexible. The socialization process they have undergone has generated certain attitudes to speech as a vehicle for the transmission of new information. These attitudes create conflicts when children are faced with the kind of verbal learning tasks usually required in school. Bernstein suggests that it is the schools' inability to bridge the communication gap with restricted code speakers which accounts for the fact that so many children are slow to learn verbal skills. He rejects the notion of cultural or linguistic deprivation: the problem is one of differing socialization methods, and the difficulty lies in devising a strategy for communicating with children unaccustomed to the types of social relations required in school.

The value of Bernstein's theory for sociolinguistics lies in the fact that it postulates a direct relationship between socialization practices and the individual's ability to express social relationships through speech. The relationships thus postulated are subject to empirical verification both through interview methods and the study of natural conversations of mothers and children. Recently published studies conducted by Bernstein's group (Robinson 1968) have in fact produced some impressive evidence of the connection between mothers' socialization practices and the way their children perform on communicative tasks of the type mentioned in the discussion of field methods given above. There is no doubt that, at least in Britain, children of various groups differ significantly in their ability to take the role of the other, and that this difference is measurable through the study of the childrens' language.

Recent sociolinguistic research in the United States, however, raises some doubt about the generalizability of the concepts of restriction and elaboration in their present form. William Labov (1969) using elecitation techniques which relied heavily on natural conversation, found that the very children who in school or in interviews with strangers speak only in short and highly formulaic utterances, usually characterized as "restricted codes", show themselves to be highly creative and effective communicators when they are interviewed in a setting which they perceive culturally realistic, or when their natural interaction with peers is recorded. Similarly, Herbert Kohl's (1968) stimulating account of his class room experiences in ghetto shcools shows that children who place low on conventional linguistic achievement tests are capable of highly creative and effective writing under the right conditions.

Labov's and Kohl's observations are confirmed by preliminary results from cross-cultural research on language socialization by a group of anthropologists from the University of California, Berkeley,who lived as participant observers with the groups they studied and were thus able to compare psycholinguistic test results with their own observations and tape recorded natural conversations (C. Kernan, 1969, K. Kernan, 1969, Blount, 1969, Stross 1969). Findings, some of which are summarized by Ervin-Tripp (1969a), point to the importance of peer group socialization in verbal development in non-Western cultures and in lower class Western groups. Whereas parent-child interaction tends to be quite restricted, peer group interaction shows a great deal of verbal communication. Black teen-age groups in American ghettos place unusual value on such verbal skills as story telling, word games, verbal dueling, etc. (Labov, 1968). If they seem uncommunicative in formal interviews or if they perform badly on tests, this may be in large part due to the unfamilarity of the setting or to their attitude to the test.

The present state of our knowledge therefore provides little justification for associating absolute differences in verbal skills with class or ethnic background. It would be more useful to assume that different social groups use different verbal devices for the transmission of social meaning. 'Lexical elaboration', to paraphrase Bernstein's term for the code which relies most heavily on the expression of non-referential meaning through words is only one of these devices but by no means the only one. Similar information can be conveyed through style shifting, intonation, special 'in group' vocabulary, topical selection and like devices. The sense of 'who dat' in the joke cited above could for instance also have been conveyed by the phrase 'A heavily accented negro voice answered: Who is that?'. The social significance would have been the same, but the joke less effective.

Differences in communicative devices have important social consequences. Communication through style shifting, special intonation, special in group terminologies, topical selection basically relies on metaphor, and is heavily dependent on shared background knowledge. Only individuals who are aware of the cultural stereotype which associates the pronunciation 'who dat' with Negro race can understand the joke cited above. On the other hand, the greater the verbal explicitness the less the reliance on shared commonality of background. At the extreme end of the explicitness scale an individual needs to know little more than the rules of grammar and the relevant vocabulary. Wherever education is public and open to all these matters can be learned by everyone regardless of family background. The cultural knowledge necessary for the understanding of metaphors is not that easily accessible. Ability to understand and communicate effectively here depends above all on informal learning through regular interaction. Frequency of interaction alone moreover is not enough. The context in which the communication occurs and the social relationships relevant to it are also important. Whites in our society may regularly interact with blacks, but in most cases such interaction is relatively impersonal. Communication in intimate family contexts of the kind which is characterized by free, unguarded, give and take, is still quite rare. It is therefore not to be expected that whites have the cultural basis for judging the quality of interaction in black family groups.

Some Applications for Small Group Studies.

The fact that family communication relies heavily on shared background expectations, which so far have received relatively little formal study has some serious consequences for the investigator working with family groups. Small group studies depend on the observer's or coder's ability to evaluate communication content. Bales' (1950) well known twelve categories for interaction analysis, for example, require that the observer make relatively fine judgement as to the degree of solidarity or tensions expressed in an utterance or that he distinguish between suggestions or expressions of opinions, etc. It is exactly this type of judgement of speech function which is most radically affected by subcultural variation and is likely to cause difficulties for investigators working with populations of social class and ethnic background different from their own. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that speakers think of themselves as speaking the same language. It is assumed that as long as speakers share a grammar and vocabulary they can always make sense of each other's statement. But the investigators interpretation of what is meant by a particular utterance may be radically different from that of his subjects.

An example from my own recent field work experience will illustrate the problem. In the course of a discussion session with a group of black teenagers in a ghetto neighborhood in which my assistant and I were the only whites present I felt myself repeatedly the target of remarks such as the following. "You are racist". "You wouldn't give a black man a chance". A series of these and similar remarks made me feel increasingly under attack. I responded "You know nothing about me. How do you know that I discriminate?" The reply was "You means the system not you. We are not blaming you personally."

Communication difficulties are not confined to evaluation of behavior in small groups. A family therapist attempting intervention techniques may similarly find that his instructions are misunderstood or that his comments unaccountably cause resentment. The white middle class school teacher's experience with ghetto children provides many examples for this type of failure. How can such communication gaps be overcome? Should the investigator learn to speak his subjects' language? This would be difficult and not necessarily effective. An outsider using "in group speech" may give the impression of talking down or intruding on others' private affairs. It is more important to concentrate on methods for diagnosing the relevant differences in language usage. In the examples cited above for instance, the problem lies in the ambiguity between the personal and impersonal meaning of "you". In middle class English usage the impersonal "you" tends to be marked linguistically either by occuring in constructions such as "you people" or in stereotyped expressions like "you never know" or by appearing in the same sentence with an abstract impersonal noun. In lower class English, as well as in lower class black speech the interpretation of "you" as personal or impersonal is more frequently ambiguous and its interpretation depends on the non-linguistic context. My reaction was due to my failure to see this possible ambiguity. The speaker took advantage of this failure on my part to show me up.

In the absence of detailed enhnographic data, intensive analysis and exposure to natural conversation of culturally different groups is one of the best ways of acquiring the cultural background necessary to interpret their speech.

It would be useful here to adapt a practice which is becoming more and more common in minority schools, (Labov, 1968b): to employ as an assistant a local resident--not necessarily someone with a proper degree, but a person who through leadership in local groups has shown himself to be a good communicator. Such an individual would act as an intermediary between the researcher and his subjects, to make sure that instructions are given in the right manner and that explanations are properly understood. He would tutor the investigator in the usage rules and politeness formulas of the group, teach him such matters as how best to open a conversation, when to interrupt, when not to speak his mind, etc. and also provide tapes of natural conversation in relevant settings for analysis.

The natural unit for such conversational analysis is the interactional exchange or sequence of two or more utterances, not an isolated utterance. Two questions are relevant in the analysis. (1) What is meant by the exchange? What does it reflect about the speaker's state of mind and his relationship to the group? Comparison of the assistant's judgment in these matters with those of the investigator should be useful to reveal relevant subcultural differences. (2) By what verbal devices are the relevant effects obtained ? Are there any special features of style, pronunciation of special vocabulary which are significant? It is here that the work of Sacks (1967) and Schegloff (1969) and Moerman (1969) should be useful.

With relatively little additional research an investigator with some training in sociolinguistics could develop indeces for the study of interaction patterns in family solving groups, to be used in addition to conventional communication indeces such as those now employed by Strauss (1968) and others. The method here would be to follow the sociolinguist's practice in studying the same individuals' reaction under varying social stimuli. A subject's performance on similar problem solving tasks could be measured first in a family group and then in a peer group setting. Techniques for the study of variable selection devised by Labov (1966) as well as the recent linguistic work by Bernstein's group (Mohan and Turner, 1968, Henderson 1968) on measures of elaboration and restriction could be adapted here.

Throughout our discussion we have given primary attention to sociolinguistic analysis as a diagonstic or ethnographic tool for the study of small group interaction. Little if any attempt has been made to make direct predictions, e.g., of the effect of particular types of speech behavior on problem solving ability. In part this is due to the newness of sociolinguistics.

Although we have made considerable advances in basic theory we are faced with a great paucity of reliable descriptive data. More direct application would require more detailed research on family problem solving by skilled sociolinguists. In the absence of such work it would seem that the basic understanding we have achieved can aid the student of problem solving primarily by giving him an insight into basic communication processes and thus improve the validity of his own field work both cross-culturally and within his own society.

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