ABSTRACT
                Registers--language varieties set apart from other
varieties by the social circumstances of their use--are linguistic
universals operating in all speech communities. Ghetto black children
learn to control registers pertinent to the domain of family and
neighborhood--most of which are spoken in their vernacular. Ghetto
children are also expected to add other registers, that is,
"standard" features, to their linguistic repertoires after they enter
school. The language spoken in school, the language of instruction
register (LIR), often conflicts with the linguistic components of the
black child's vernacular registers. After having studied the
responses of black vernacular speaking children in grades 1, 3, and
5, it was found that the older the child, the more LIR features he
produced--by grade 5, 71% of all responses were made in the LIR. Only
word final consonant clusters (-sks and -sts) demonstrated very low
levels of acquisition--4% by grade 5. The findings supported the
contention that the process of language acquisition is a continual
one, especially when sociolinguistic factors are taken into account.
(HOD)

SOME PARAMETERS OF REGISTER

IN

ADULT AND CHILD SPEECH

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In press, Journal of the
Institute of Applied Linguistics,
spring 1973 (Louvain, Belgium)

There is a growing body of research and speculation about types of social variation in language, but relatively little seems to have been investigated about their intersection with or influence on child language acquisition. For example, in America the social variety called Black English or black ghetto vernacular has been given much space in scholarly journals and much time at various meetings. But the developmental aspects of the vernacular as well as the black ghetto child's language acquisition of more varieties in his speech repertoire have often been ignored. Secondly, another type of social variation in language, often called register and discussed in some detail below, is undoubtedly an aspect of language acquisition. But again its role is poorly understood and little researched.

In order to probe in more detail the role of social variation in language acquisition, especially in school age children, this paper will first describe in some detail the concept of register, one type of social variation in language. Then it will examine the intersection of these two types of social variation, black ghetto vernacular and register, in a vernacular speaking child's developing repertoire.

Register: Conceptual Framework

Register, a type of social variation in language, is not limited to the American speech repertoire as is black ghetto vernacular, a

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social variety used by some speakers in black inner city slums in the urban north. Rather, it seems to be a linguistics universal (Verma 1969) operating in all speech communities and on all varieties, although the specifics of operation are determined by a specific society and by the formal characteristics of a variety.

Before defining the concept further, let me make clear that the term 'register' is not crucial to the concept. In other words, linguists may talk about 'register' or 'style', the British seeming to prefer 'register' (perhaps after Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens 1964, although Houston 1969 and Hymes 1972, both Americans, use it). 'Style' seems to be preferred by Americans (see Ferguson and Gumperz 1960, Labov 1964, 1969, Burling 1970, Fascid and Shuy 1970). Or other words may be coined to name this type of social variation. One reason I chose 'register' was to be able to use a term not so fraught with the many denotations and connotations 'style' seems to have. Also the definition of register I present may alter radically given more descriptive information on this type of variation. Certainly we need to be aware of David Crystal's observation: "Any situationally-distinctive use of language may be called register, it seems, regardless of what the most important criteria of distinctiveness are." (Crystal, 45) Of course, the other horn of the dilemna is triviality in the sense that register could become so narrowly defined as to make it a powerless concept. What is needed to develop a workable definition is research into how speakers and writers actually signal social changes in their linguistic repertoire.

The term 'register' has been given to varieties which are set apart from others by the social circumstances of their use. If a social

situation changes, the register a speaker uses may also change at

least to some extent in its phonology, syntax, and lexicon as well as

being accompanied by paralinguistic changes. Lexical changes are

probably the most obvious distinctions between registers, at least in

American English. Note the switch from eccelesiastical lexicon to

educational lexicon in the following poem probably for purposes of humor.

> Our Father figure who resides in the upper-echelon domain,
> May Thy title always be structured to elicit a favorable response.
> Reward us today, bread-wise,
> And minimize our unfavorable self-concept, resulting from credit
>   over-extension,
> As we will strive to practice reciprocal procedures.
> And channel us, not into temptation-inducing areas,
> But provide us with security from situations not conducive to moral
>   enrichment.
> For Thine is the position of maximum achievement in the power
>   structure,
> Not to mention the prestige-attainment factor that never terminates.

<div align="center">Amen</div>

Midlothian, Texas   Tom Dodge

A register is generally conceived to be situationally conditioned;

switch the person's social situation and he may switch registers if he

has the competence to do so and if the social situation calls for it.

According to Verma, "They [registers] cut across dialectical ... varieties

and may be used for specific purposes by all the speakers/writers of a

language." (1969, 294) Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens note that

registers "are not marginal or special varieties of language. Between

them they cover the total range of our language activity." (1964, 89)

And not only do registers cut across social dialect boundaries, but they

also may cut across languages. Many Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, to

name only one linguistic minority group in the United States, switch

from one language to another. A child may use a variety of Spanish in
his home to talk with his mother and then switch to English in school
when talking to his teacher. Verma (1969) calls this register-oriented
bilingualism, in which the language used is constrained by the social
situation, 'registeral bilingualism.'

Except perhaps for bilingual or multi-lingual speech communities,
registers across social or geographical dialects share many features
in common. As Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens put it:

> No one suggests, of course, that the various registers
> characteristic of different types of situations have nothing
> in common. On the contrary, a great deal of grammatical
> [syntactic] and lexical material is common to many of the
> registers of a given language, and some perhaps to all.
> (1964, 89)

So registers used by members of a speech community may share many,
if not most, features in common. But they will not share features of
lexicon, syntax, phonology, and paralinguistics which are peculiar to
specific registers. It may be helpful to think of registers as
largely overlapping sets of features with a small portion of each
set not shared. However, what is shared may also differ according to
such variables as frequency of appearance in speech. For example, in
ghetto black vernacular, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1969) suggests that
syntactic features reflect a speaker's register switching either by
decreasing or increasing their frequency of use, not by their absence
or presence. Yet certain lexical features may not be shared at all
among certain types of registers. Witness the jargon used by various
professionals, including the author of this paper.

These registers have been conceptualized as governed by the inter-
section of field, mode, and style of discourse (Halliday et al. 1964) in

specific ways. Field of discourse refers to the area of operation of the language activity; it may be technical areas such as biology or math or it may be a domestic area. Verma (1969) makes a gross distinction between technical and non-technical fields of discourse. But research needs to be done in order to determine tne actual occurrence of various fields.

It would seem that field of discourse may be largely determined by the social situations comprising the various behavioral domains in a speech community. In sociolinguistics, a domain is often thought of as a cluster of these social situations which are related by common sets of behavioral rules. Scientists behave in certain 'scientific,' technical ways when in their work domain, while they may behave in quite different ways, (non-technical could we say?) when in their roles as father or mother in the family domain. Spanking or baby talk are generally not considered appropriate scientific behavior.

Mode of discourse has been used to refer to the medium of the language activity. Is it spoken or written? These are probably the two grossest distinctions we make in a literate society, although they may not turn out to be as revealing as other modes. However, in an oral society such as the one of ghetto blacks, distinctions might be made between spontaneous or extemporaneous speech and partly memorized, more ritualized speech in which certain verbal formulas would play a large role and in which there may be relatively little audience feedback (Ure). Undoubtedly other finer distinctions can be made between or within modes.

Finally, style of discourse has been used to refer to the role relationships between speaker and listener or writer and reader, generally

along an informality-formality continuum. Along this continuum style can vary from most intimate, informal discourse with a high shared context and a low lexical load (Ure) to highly formal, ritualized, formulaic writing with very little shared context depending on the relative position of the participants in the situation.

When various styles, modes and fields of discourse intersect, it is postualted that specific registers are the outcome. And all variables are probably influenced by the social situation the participants are in, in other words, the extra-discourse features.

Within a speech community, there is probably a range of registers which encompasses those connected with each of the behavioral domains. The number and type of domains may differ among sociological analyses, but common ones are family, playground and street, (neighborhood, or friendship), education, religion, and employment. The behavioral rules constraining each domain also include language behavior rules. In the educational domain, a child does not say certain things to his teacher, even when angry, that he will say to his peers on the playground which is another domain.

It seems that registers cluster within domains, so that the complete range could be broken up in that way. The registral clusters reflect to some degree the social situation clusters that comprise the behavioral domain. A social situation is defined by an interaction of social time, setting, and role relationship. For example, in an elementary school classroom situation in the educational domain, the social time is clearly delineated by the actual time of the school day. Also, that time is

broken down into smaller units devoted to different types of instruction on different subjects and to inculcation into middle class or 'mainstream' culture. The time is spent in a specific educational setting, usually a classroom which is physically different from other settings. The roles usually included are those of the teacher and pupil, each with a set of expectations as to 'proper' role behavior. Grimshaw (1972) indicates the role relationship to be one of superordinate teacher to subordinate pupil. Dell Hymes (1967) has classified it as a formal role relationship as opposed to the more informal ones of friendship and neighborhood. The interaction of these factors, probably plus other not yet identified, determines the social situation which in turn determines the register or registers used in that situation. Finally, the specific speech acts and events which make up the actual discourse between pupil and teacher reflect the situational constraints just described. Later in this paper I will present data on specific speech acts performed by black ghetto vernacular speaking children which include certain registral forms appropriate to a specific classroom situation in the educational domain.

So the entire range of registers undoubtedly reflects the range of social situations in a speech community or culture, but not in a one to one, direct matching relationship. However, it is doubtful any single adult could control the entire range because probably no one could have experienced all the social situations in great enough depth to permit learning the entire set of registers. Probably an adult controls a limited range of registers within the community's total range; this sample I call an individuals' repertoire of registers. The adult's repertoire seems to be constrained by a variety of factors such as

socioeconomic status, sex, age, occupation, educational level, and special interests. Probably an individual's repertoire includes clusters of registers in certain domains in which he is deeply involved and fewer registers in those areas of less personal involvement. For example, a housewife who takes care of small children will for at least a time have a different cluster of registers in the family domain than will her husband whose occupation is demanding of his time and energy and largely determines his status.

Undoubtedly also there are competence and performance differences in register as there are in other types of language activity. Within competence, there seems to be a difference between receptive and productive registral competence. I find it shows up quite clearly in ghetto vernacular speaking black children who may not control selected registers they hear through the mass media but who evidently seem to understand large parts of them. Ervin-Tripp makes this same point when she says that a kind of bilingualism may exist at the comprehension or reception level, "as it does with those Spanish and Navaho speakers who can under-stand [more English] than they can produce." (1971, 40) So probably adults control for production those registers required for participation in the domains in which they are most active, while they can comprehend (receptive competence), recognize, and expect other registers they can't or don't usually have to produce. For example, church goers probably expect certain registral features in the minister's sermon and prayers which they may not be able to produce themselves.

Undoubtedly also there are socially-constrained rules which speakers and listeners have internalized for register switching but which have yet

to be discerned. They need to be written, but since social constraints
in rules have only begun to be built in and since we know relatively little
about the specifics of what triggers switching, it will probably be some
time before such rules can be written and considered adequate in any way.
However, we may find we can apply a marking system to registral analysis
and rule building. For example, Goehegan (1969) reported that people
listening to address forms could identify "a regular, expected, reportable,
unmarked form which is predictable from social features such as setting,
age, rank, sex, and so on." Certainly address forms are features of
various registers. Perhaps we will find that the use of certain marked
forms or of enough marked forms signals a switch in register.

The Development of a Repertoire of Registers

As with other forms of language behavior, whether governed by
formal rules or by social rules (constraints), adult competence and
performance are different from child competence and performance.
Probably adult and child register repertoires differ both in kind and
in degree of control, the adult repertoire being larger and containing
some registers not included in a child's repertoire. The developmental
aspect of register can be seen by comparing a six year old's repertoire
to an adult's. One crucial element in this restricted repertoire seems
to be the more constricted set of domains a child is exposed to. Before
he goes to school, thereby entering the educational domain, a child's
social domains are largely those of the home and neighborhood. He has
peer relationships in the neighborhood, but his role in the family domain

is that of a subordinate to the superordinate parent. But whatever the

parameter of, say, a pre-school child's register repertoire, the child

must learn to produce the socially relevant and demanded registers at

the appropriate times and must be able to switch from one to another when

the occasion prescribes it. Certainly part of a child's acquisition of

language is this acquisition of adult socially constrained language

patterns and of knowledge of the constraints themselves.

In the acquisition of both syntax and semantics, children are

hypothesized to progressively develop and revise sets of 'rules' through

differentiation of the input until they reach the level of adult competence.

It may also be possible to hypothesize that in acquiring registers a child

learns, through progressive differentiation of his speech community's

social situations, the language features which accompany them and, in a

rule-governed way, modifies his speech forms to fit those situations.

Perhaps part of this development can be observed in children's role

playing during which they not only explore adult roles but also use

adult language as best they can. Ervin-Tripp (1971) suggests this could

be the case.

Unfortunately we have relatively little data on children's acquisition

of registers. However, some indications of acquisition of register can

be gleaned from the literature. William Labov (1966) suggested in his

lower-east-side study that an adult-type register repertoire is not in

evidence until age 14 or 15. Even at this age, typically children still

have more control over informal features than over formal ones, as

formality in social situations seems to increase as one enters more adult

oriented domains. At age 14 or 15, most children will not yet have

entered the work domain.

Variations of form in different social situations is evidently
learned very early by a child, but the forms may be different from these
in the adult repertoire. Jean Berko Gleason (1971) notes that the
earliest form of register switching is simply a distinction between
talking (infant's first words, etc.) and silence. This fits in with
Ervin-Tripp's proposal (1971) that the first social features to be
distinguished are major setting and addressee contrasts. The ir
or 'tiniest child' as Gleason puts it, is not afraid to talk or babble
in front of familiar faces but will often fall silent in front of
strangers (one type of addressee contrast). A major setting contrast
would be home versus not-home for an infant. Probably he is more
readily silent out of the home than in his own familiar surroundings.
Gleason also indicates that pre-school children's register repertoire
includes the whine. (Adults like to think that's dropped out of their
repertoire.) They will whine to a parent or parent figure (1971, 7) but
not to other adults. So already there is some social distinction made
among various adults in the child's life.

Other distinctions may be grossly based on age as the dominant social
factor triggering register switching in pre-school children. Gleason
noted that older but still pre-school children in her sample talked
'baby talk' to infants, used a peer group collequail register with their
age mates, and used a more formal register with adults. She also noted
another element in a child's repertoire - a register of socialization
evidently used with somewhat younger children in which the older child
gives linguistic cues as to the younger child's expected behavior. So
age-grading among people coming into contact with a child seems to be

important in register development. Certainly adults often have highly
developed, age-graded registers for use in talking to different ages of
children (Gleason 1971).

School also seems to be a socially significant factor in register
switching for the ... ic an who are in school. They evidently add
registers appropriate to the educational domain which they are finally
encountering. For example, Houston (1969) reported in her study of
Florida black children's language a school register, as she called it,
which was distinct in many ways from non-school language. She felt it
represented 'careful' speech. In my research of a specific educational
register I noted its being acquired in black vernacular speaking children's
repertoire of registers. So school defintely seems to be a significant
domain in children's lives which then allows for the acquisition of new
registers. Ervin-Tripp (1971) notes that school is an unambiguous setting
for the child, quite distinct from home and church domains. (Unfortunately
our knowledge of register acquisition in other domains such as work is
ve , limited, so adult competence levels are achieved without our
knowing the details of that acquisition.)

Development of a Formal Register in Black Children

The above discussion of register and its developmental aspects,
the outlines of both being far from clear, is, in my mind, a necessary
prelude to an understanding of ghetto black children's language
acquisition. All too often their language is perceived categorically,
e.g., as being totally 'nonstandard' [or dialectal] by those not in their

culture, which in practice means most of their teachers and other laymen with whom they come in contact. But vernacular speaking black children participate in register acquisition which includes many so-called standard features, just as Cambridge, Mass., white middle class children do.

Before school age, ghetto black children learn to control registers pertinent to the domain of family and neighborhood, but again these registers will be constrained by age which precludes certain social experience in the young child. However, features which can be called 'standard' are expected by black adults to appear early in this repertoire. Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1969) reports that in the Oakland, California, ghetto when a child becomes about 5 years old, he receives increased pressure from his parents to realize more so-called standard features in his speech. The school provides his most consistent input of 'standard' features, and by age 9 or so, the black children, according to Kernan, are aware some forms are more socially stigmatized than others. Such growing awareness is probably a feature of acquisition of the repertoire of forms and attitudes in a given speech community. Certainly it reflects reported adult attitudes. In Oakland, black adults view speech with more so-called standard English (actually socially unmarked) features in it as 'careful' style.

While the speech community these children live in is one of great complexity and one in which verbal ability is highly prized, the black ghetto child is also expected by his family and his teachers, when he enters school, to learn to add other registers to his repertoire based on exposure to the educational domain. Repertoire enlargement is

facilitated by expanding role relationships. One of the role relation-
ships which begins to expand for the child is the superordinate-subordinate,
adult-child relationships in which the teacher, not the parent, becomes
the significant adult. Linguistic 'appropriateness' is expected; if
expectations are not met, the consequences for the child's success can
be severe. Wolfram (1969) rightly notes that the registers, or 'styles'
as he called them, elicited in the speech of children to a variety of
adults are among the most important in American society. He feels these
registers help an individual make moves up and down the social scale.

As a research question, I was interested in finding to what degree
black ghetto vernacular speaking children living in Oakland, California,
were acquiring registers associated with social situations in the
educational domain. Because of the highly limited nature of the study,
I was able to only collect data on the acquisition of one register, a
register I called the Language Instruction Register.* I would characterize
this register as being one of the registers of English language learning.
Vernacular speaking black children are often expected to use the LIR in
the classroom when the situation demands it. However, components of
the children's vernacular registers may not be shared with the LIR. In
LIR, past and pass are not homonyms, while they often are in probably
most vernacular registers, no matter who speaks them.

A field of discourse in schools is language instruction as in a
situation in which a teacher is concerned with how to speak in certain ways.

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*Subsequently, the Language Instruction Register will be referred
to as the LIR.

The mode of discourse of major interest in this study was the spoken
language rather than the written. The style of discourse for language
instruction is more formal or 'polite' as opposed to informal; the
teacher tends to pronounce words more carefully than in many other
classroom situations. For example, I get a wave of recognition from
teachers when I note that in a spelling lesson a teacher will say "The
first word today is desks. Desks.", and then a bit later may say "All
right, pull your dess into a circle."

The LIR could be part of what Douglas Barnes (1969) calls the language
of instruction. He found in British secondary schools in rooms having the
equivalent of our sixth grade students what he called a Math Instruction
Register, or MIR, which the teachers used specifically while teaching math.
Such specialization, especially in lexicon and pronunciation, is not
surprising. Mary Rainey (1969) noted a teacher in a black Headstart class
used /iŋ/ while story reading (a farily formal situation) and while
formally teaching. She would then switch to /in/ when trying to get
attention from or create closeness with the children. In instruction, the
unmarked, formal form /iŋ/ was used. Also it is often expected of the
vernacular speaking children in such formal situations. In my estimation,
there is a great deal of significance attached by teachers and parents
to black vernacular speaking children's acquisition of the LIR. They
tend to see it as acquisition of 'proper speech' and undoubtedly have
great difficulty in separating its production from the acquisition of
reading and writing.

The speech situation for LIR includes a school building and classroom,
time during the school day, a teacher-like adult (authority figure), and a

school type of testing situation. Houston (1969) noted such a situation

increased the frequency of 'standard' features produced in her Florida

black children's sample. Labov has also noted this same increase when a

black child is interviewed alone by an adult (1968). Finally, Williams

and Naremore (1969) found similar results when an interviewer used only

'standard' English features and no mixture with vernacular features.

Given the above conditions for eliciting the children's ability to

produce the LIR, I reproduced the speech situation calling for it as

closely as possible. I created a formal social situation paralleling the

teaching-student role relationship. I interviewed each child individually;

I was a strange white adult; the speaker on the stimulus tape produced

'standard' features and none in the children's vernacular; the physical

setting was the child's school building.

Using a repetition task, I taped the responses of 180 black vernacular

speaking children in grades 1 (age 7), 3 (age 9), and 5.(age 11) (60 each),

in two Oakland, California, ghetto schools which were 95% black. The

more LIR responses a child made on the repetition task, the more LIR he

was defined as having acquired.

I want to make it very clear that the features elicited in the

repetition task do not define the entire set of LIR features. They can

only suggest the dimensions of the register, especially because lexicon

was not studied and undoubtedly is significant in the LIR. Also many,

if not all of the features studied, are shared with other registers. I

feel, however, that the LIR requires a higher frequency of so-called

standard responses than many other registers. Also some features may be

different in kind. Charles Ferguson has suggested that the standard

pronunciation of masks is mass with a prolonged -s. Masks is probably

limited to a relatively few formal registers.

The most general developmental finding was that the older the child,

the more LIR features he produced. ~~Right~~ *Richard* Light (1971) also noted in his

study that the highest percentage of vernacular features were used by the

youngest black children. By grade 5, 71 percent of all responses made

were in the LIR. It would appear that the black vernacular speaking

children in this study were going through the process of learning to

respond in a linguistically appropriate manner to specific social demands

on them in the educational domain.

These findings lend support to the contention that the process of

language acquisition is a continual one, especially when sociolinguistic

factors are taken into account. Also, a vernacular speaking child may

have learned to produce more formal registers such as the LIR than he is

often credited with. Abrahams, in a personal communication (1972), also

notes this underestimation of ghetto black children's language ability.

> I have been convinced for some time that Black kids come
> into the classroom with a much wider range of registers (both
> productive and receptive) than we give them credit for. In-
> formally I have tested this and had it tested by other class-
> room teachers by asking the kids to mark ('imitate and dramatize)
> on some story both in 'TV talk' and the way they would hear it
> and see it at home or on the streets. Their ability to pro-
> duce 'TV talk' varies from individual to individual and from
> feature to feature, but is certainly much greater than anyone
> has heretofore given them credit for.

Specifically, fourteen of the sixteen features examined followed this

pattern of an increase in LIR responses, with the greatest increase

falling between grades three and five. Even though there was this general

increase in LIR production across grade, different features showed very

different levels of acquisition. I found that the LIR negative verb with
indefinite pronoun even in first grade showed a high level of acquisition
with only a 5 percent vernacular response, as in "I ain't got none." By
fifth grade the multiple negative vernacular form had virtually disappeared
in the children's responses in a formal situation but certainly not in
their vernacular. Light's data on Washington, D.C., black children, for
example, showed that when no adults were present, the children realized
the multiple negative 100 percent of the time it was possible to do so.
The virtual disappearance of the multiple negative was an interesting
finding because multiple negation tends to be highly socially stigmatized
throughout the United States (Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1967) and is
considered a marker of lower class speech. It is possible that even six
year old black ghetto children have some awareness of the social un-
acceptability of multiple negation in a formal school situation.

At the other extreme were several LIR features which even by fifth
grade (age 11) demonstrated very low levels of acquisition. Of the six-
teen features, the lowest was word final consonant clusters -sks and -sts
as in masks and ghosts. This was atypically low; by grade 5, the LIR
responses of masks was realized 4 percent. Some children didn't produce
the LIR form at all. The majority of the responses to the masks stimulus
took the form of mas without the prolonged s common in many other registers.
Perhaps these forms of masks and ghosts are virtually absent in the
vernacular. I also suspect there is a highly mixed input by the teacher
as well; she probably says mass most of the time, so the child has no
consistent pattern to follow. Mitchell-Kernan suggests that Oakland black

students had no stable notions of what the 'standard' alternative was in their own repertoires (1969). So if the teacher is relatively inconsistent in her patterning, the irregularity Labov (1968) noted in Harlem boys' formal test speech could well result.

For this study I would conclude, keeping in mind the limited sample of features (sixteen in all) representing the LIR, that black vernacular speaking children do tend to acquire the LIR as they grow older, but most importantly that they differentially control certain features within the LIR. Some features show significantly lower levels of acquisition.

This formal register acquisition is more a matter of being able to produce a higher realization of so-called standard forms already in the black child's vernacular registers (Henrie 1969), which contain many more standard forms than we expect, than it is learning completely new forms. I agree with Light (1971) that "The children's [black vernacular speaking children] productive as well as their receptive control of standard English should not be underestimated." (167)

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