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ABSTRACT

Two purposes guided this study: (1) to investigate the effects of modeling on the verbalizations of lower-class, black, preschool children; and (2) to investigate the relationships between the dialect employed by the model and children's language production. As subjects, 72 black, preschool children in lower-class neighborhood day care centers of New York City were randomly assigned to one of six conditions, with each group consisting of six boys and six girls. Models were two dark brown, neuter gender hand puppets representing an adult and a child, while visual stimuli consisted of three pictures--a drum, a clown, and a dog. In the pretest, a visual stimulus was presented to all children who then wrote a story about it. Four modeling conditions varied in either the linguistic style (Black English or standard English) or the relative lengths of the modeling story, while two control groups provided comparative information. Children's pretest and posttest responses were tape-recorded. The major finding revealed that modeling in a shorter sequence, using Black English, caused greater verbal productivity. (JM)

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Modeling and Verbalizations of Lower-Class, Black, Preschool Children: Educational Implications

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The degree to which language performance is modifiable is of great importance to the educational success of lower-class children. Numerous studies have documented relationships between social class and linguistic variables in children (Bernstein, 1967; Cazden, 1966; Deutsch, Levinson, Brown & Peisach, 1967; Loban, 1963; Templin, 1957). Moreover, Loban found that children rated poor in language skills by their teachers were more often lower-class and did not show substantial improvement through their elementary school years, while children rated highly by their teachers were more often middle-class and continued to improve. It is important to devise methods which might increase language skills that are rewarded in school, for lower-class children.

Modeling is one method which has been shown to effectively alter the linguistic performance of children (Bandura & Harris, 1966; Hutinger & Bruce, 1971; Liebert, Odom, Hill & Huff, 1969; Odom, Liebert, & Hill, 1968; Rosenthal & Carroll, 1972; and Rosenthal & Whitebook, 1970).

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of modeling upon the verbalizations of lower-class, black, preschool children.

A second purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between the dialect employed by the model and children's language production. Since recent investigations have indicated that the apparent restricted speech of lower-class, black children may not be deficient, but rather consists of a dialect governed by rules which represent both extensions and restrictions of standard English rules (Baratz, 1970; Labov, 1970; Marwit, Marwit & Boswell, 1972) it might be expected that the particular linguistic pattern used by the model would affect the linguistic performance of these children.

It was also of interest to determine the extent to which verbalizations would be modified by the relative length of modeling sequences.

Method: Subjects: The subjects were 72 black, preschool children attending day care centers located in lower-class neighborhoods in the New York City area. Thirty-six boys and 36 girls were randomly assigned to 1 of 6 conditions. Each group consisted of 6 boys and

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6 girls, and the mean age within groups ranged from 4-4.6 to 4-6.9.
Models: Two, dark brown, neuter gender hand puppets, one representing an adult and the other representing a child, served as models. They were identical in all respects except for greater length of the adult puppet which indicated greater height.
Visual Stimuli: Three pictures (a drum, a dog, and a clown) from the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test were used to elicit verbalizations. Presentation of the pre- and postmodeling stimuli (drum and dog) was counterbalanced. The clown was always presented in the modeling conditions.
Pretest: Children in all conditions were presented with a visual stimulus and were asked to tell a story about it.
Modeling and Control Conditions: Four modeling conditions varied on two dimensions: (a) the linguistic style (either black or standard English); and (b) the relative length of the modeling story (short or long). Two control groups were included to determine whether familiarity with the model without verbal modeling would enhance language performance, and whether instructions to verbalize would be as effective as modeling. Children in all 6 conditions observed a puppet show. For the modeling conditions, and in response to the adult puppet's request, the child puppet told a story about the clown, and was given a cookie for its success. The short, standard English (SSE) story consisted of 6 sentences and 69 words. For the long, standard English (LSE) story, 4 sentences were added to the short story, for a total of 10 sentences and 112 words. The short and long black English (SBE & LBE) stories were the same as their respective standard English counterparts, except they were spoken in black English. In the card control (CC) group, Ss played cards with both puppets for an amount of time commensurate with that of the long modeling sequences. In the instruction control (IC) group, the S was instructed by the adult puppet to tell a story about another picture.

The puppets' voices were tape recorded in advance by a bidialectal black woman. Each child was seen individually by a white, female E, who conducted the pre- and posttests, and manipulated the puppets in all conditions.
Posttest: All Ss were instructed to tell another story in response to a new visual stimulus.

Children's responses in the pre- and posttest were tape recorded.
Measures: Total verbal productivity (TVP) and the total number of different words (TD) were chosen for analysis. For TVP, all words, including repetitions, were counted, while for TD, only different words were counted.

Results: For each dependent variable, analysis of covariance was conducted to determine the extent to which all conditions contributed to posttest scores above and beyond the contribution of the pretest, and also to control for pretest variablility. A regression model was used (Cohen, 1968). The pretest was the covariate. For TVP, but not for TD, the F ratio was significant ($F=2.45$, $df=5/65$, $p < .05$) indicating that one or more of the conditions had significant effects which contributed to the prediction of Ss' posttest scores beyond the contribution of the pretest. To determine which of the conditions was significant,

the differences between all possible pairs of adjusted means were compared using the Tukey method (Winer, p. 772). This analysis revealed that 5 comparisons were significant (p .01). When compared with every other group the SBE modeling condition resulted in significantly greater gains on the posttest. No other comparison was significant.

Discussion: The major finding was that modeling in a shorter sequence, using black English, resulted in Ss' increased verbal productivity. This finding indicates the importance of cognitive variables in producing modeling effects. Neither modeling, linguistic style, nor length of the story unequivocally affected performance. However, the model's use of more familiar linguistic rules in the short, black English condition, in contrast to the short and long standard English modeling conditions enhanced the children's subsequent verbalizations. Conversely, despite language familiarity, the long black English modeling condition did not result in significant posttest gains. The increased length of this sequence may have limited Ss' comprehension of, or attention to the story due to limited cognitive capacities of young children. Nonsignificant posttest gains in all other conditions can be attributed to practice or warm-up.

The lack of significant posttest increment for the TD measure may have been due to the lack of strong attention focusing instructions which would have directed Ss to observe the models' use of different words. Instructions have been important in other studies (Bandura & Harris, 1966; Rosenthal & Carroll, 1972). It also seems reasonable to conclude that vicarious reinforcement was secondary to the effects of linguistic style and length, since the other modeling conditions did not change Ss performance.

Teachers and other educators should be award of specific situational factors which modify children's verbal productivity. Cazden (1970) has emphasized the role of stimulus differences in producing variations in children's language production. The present study emphasizes that the particular social situation in which children are momentarily involved may affect their verbal productivity. Children's language performance in school may often be assessed under temporary stimulus and social conditions which are not optimal for language productivity. The problem of performance under different environmental circumstances must be considered when assessing children's abilities, and situational variables should be included. These considerations should caution educators to refrain from inferring children's language competence from their performance.

Since it has been shown that modeling in conjunction with specific linguistic and length variables may be an effective method for modifying children's verbal behavior, its power as a teaching and evaluative technique should be recognized.

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