ABSTRACT

        The concept of a speech community is investigated
within the theoretical frameworks of sociology and linguistics, and
it is concluded that the collective competence models of Ferdinand de
Saussure and Noam Chomsky are inadequate. They fail in that they are
limited as linguistic models which have consistently overlooked the
sociological importance of the distinction between speech communities
(the Gemeinschaft model) and language societies (the Gesellschaft
model). The family resemblance model with its communicative chains of
dialects is offered as a viable model of language and society. This
model enables speakers to bridge the disparaties among their
linguistic communities. Even this model, however, has a problem in
that it is not fully able to explain how linguistic units function
within political structures. The implications of this model are
discussed, and suggestions for strengthening it are offered.
(Author)

THE FAMILY RESEMBLANCE MODEL AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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INTRODUCTION

With the advent of Sociolinguistics as a research paradigm, new ques-
tions must be raised about the interface between Sociology and Linguistics.
Each discipline brings with it a set of theoretical assumptions about
language and society; and where these assumptions create a conflict, they
must be resolved within a metatheoretical framework which transcends the
traditional boundaries of the language sciences.[1] As a case in point,
consider the way in which linguists approach language in a social context.
The fact that we have borrowed some of the terminology and methodology of
Sociology demonstrates our intent, but our inquiry remains on the level
of superficiality. We have failed to address the substantive issue of
just what the morphological prefix Socio- means to the linguist, and
whether or not the sociologist sha es this same view. In this paper, we
will approach this issue from the sociological point of view which Durkheim
explicated in his theoretical essays. Next, we shall review concepts of
langue and parole in the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure and draw several
similarities between his work and that of Durkheim. Finally, in discussing
several of the inadequacies of both models, we shall propose a cognitive
model of language based on Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance.
We shall draw on the implications of this model for a theory of communica-
tive competence.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW

Durkheim (1893) was concerned with the contrast between people as
individuals versus people as members of a group. He questioned how a multi-
plicity of individuals can create a society and pondered over the way in
which individuals acquire social values and obligations. As a consequence
of this activity, he concluded that individuals are bound to a society by
means of solidarity. On the level of tribal communities, Durkheim reasoned,
man forms a bond of mechanical solidarity in which individuals resemble one
another in their behavior. They share the same emotions, cherish the same
values, and hold the same things sacred. In contrast to tribal man, the
individual in an industrial society shares a form of organic solidarity
with his fellow man. As a group, they express a greater degree of differ-
entiation in their emotions, their values, and the things which they view
as sacrosanct. When they cohere as a collective unit, it is not because
of tradition or by means of a common fear, but by arriving at some form of
a consensus. Another way of describing the dichotomy between these forms
of solidarity is by analogy to the process of manufacturing a commodity.
In the model of mechanical solidarity (Gemeinschaft), each individual shoe-
maker, for example, is involved in the total process of production. But,
in the model of organic solidarity (Gesellschaft), a factory worker partici-
pates in only one small part of the total product. Each person has a

separate and distinct function in the development of a collective venture.

The models of solidarity which Durkheim developed were not without value judgements. Since man has evolved from the Gemeinschaft mentality of the tribe into the Gesellschaft model characteristically associated with the rise of modern nationalism, it is only natural for Durkheim to conceive of mechanical solidarity as archaic or primitive. It was here that tradition played a dominant role and where the "collective consciousness" of the group was fortified by tribal rites and religious practices. As we move towards a more complex society, the social prohibitives and imperatives take on a new form and rationale for existence. Collective consciousness no longer forms the central concern of the individual's thought. A diversity of individual interests are proliferated, and this leads to great disparities among the members of a group. Eventually, the group is divided into individual communities and their only common bond is an allegiance and abstract consensus to organic solidarity. Should this consensus fail, the norms of society are disintegrated and anomie result (Durkheim, 1897).

Since Durkheim was raised in the tradition of positivism (Comte, 1853), he shares in the belief that Sociology should emulate the postulates of the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften). For this reason, he has developed the concept of a social fact (fait social) which, he argues, is similar to physical facts, i.e., they can be discerned by an observer, they reside outside of the individual, and they exercise constraints on his behavior in much the same manner in which the real world of physical objects impinge on the mind and control and limit movement through space (Durkheim, 1895).

If individuals can move from a Gemeinschaft model towards a Gesellschaft model of society, this creates interesting parameters for a theory of language in social context. In particular, it raises the question of just what the word Socio- means in a theory of Socio-linguistics. This perspective on language has gone unnoticed at a time when it should be of paramount concern among those who have a vested interest in the Sociology of Language.

SAUSSURE AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

When we turn to the pronouncements of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), we find that he shares many similarities with his contemporary, Emile Durkheim (Doroszewski, 1933). First, Saussure contrasted the individual versus the social use of language. Parole is individual speech, whereas langue is social in nature. Second, he conceived of langue as comprised of linguistic facts which exist outside of any one speaker and which belong to a communal storehouse of knowledge. This is especially evident in his comment that dead languages continue to exist as a system even though individual native speakers may no longer exist. Third, he viewed langue as a form of collective competence which permeates the speech community and this is reminiscent of Durkheim's concept of a collective consciousness which provides solidarity among the individuals of a tribal community. These similarities are important because they demonstrate that Saussure has incorporated Durkheim's concepts into his Sociology of Language.

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These relationships may not be directly verified by actual quotations from the eminent sociologist, but the indirect evidence is compelling.

Several modifications of Durkheim's concepts have occurred, however, in the transition from a theory of the division of labor in society to a theory of sociolinguistics. First, Durkheim favored the <u>Gesellschaft</u> model of society with its organic solidarity whereas Saussure proposed that the collective linguistic competence of language take the form of a <u>Gemeinschaft</u> model. Hence, Saussure assumes the existence of speech communities rather than the linguistic diversity of a society. Second, Durkheim conceived of social facts as things and compared them to the physical facts of the natural sciences, but Saussure, on the other hand, viewed <u>langue</u> as a repetoire of mental facts which take on social significance and which are abstracted from the mass of individual speakers as a Boolean product. Therefore, he viewed language in terms of a unified speech community and not as a mere aggregate of lects. It is important to note that this concept of a collective linguistic competence still plays a role in contemporary theories of language.

CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS OF COLLECTIVE COMPETENCE

Chomsky holds the view that his distinction between competence and performance has direction correlation with Saussure's dichotomy of <u>langue</u> versus <u>parole</u>, but with minor stipulations.

> We thus make a fundamental distinction between <u>competence</u> (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and <u>performance</u> (the actual use of language in concrete situations). . . The distinc-- tion I am noting here is related to the <u>langue-parole</u> distinction of Saussure; but it is necessary to reject his concept of <u>langue</u> as merely a systematic inventory of items and to return rather to the Humboldtian con- ception of underlying competence as a system of generative processes.

(Chomsky, 1965: 4)

However, when we inquire about Chomsky's view of language in a social con- text, we find that he has made some interesting modifications in the <u>Gemeinschaft</u> model of Saussure. Chomsky proposes a homogeneous and ideal social context of language use.

> Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-hearer, a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and unaffected by .. . . grammatically irrelevant conditions . . . in applying his knowledge of language in actual performance.

(Chomsky, 1965: 3)

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What this means, in effect, is that linguistic competence is shared by.
each and every native speaker of a language, and that this position is
consonant with Saussure's Gemeinschaft model of sociolinguistics. Simi-
larly, the conception of language as a Boolean product of mental facts
which Saussure adhered to also ccurs in Chomsky's view of language. How-
ever, instead of treating mental facts as existing outside of the individual,
Chomsky considers it to be an intrinsic part of his acquired collective
competence.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The use of language in a social context has always been of major interest
to the British school of linguistics (Halliday, 1964), and they were among
the first to seriously question the concept of the Gemeinschaft model of
Chomsky with its ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous community.
Subsequently, Gumperz and Hymes (1964) modified the notion of competence to
include the knowledge which a speaker has about which speech code to use in
the social context of language. Hence, this redefinition not only reflects
a sociolinguistic ability to perform, but also implies a Gesellschaft model
because not every native speaker of a language is fully cognizant of all the
varieties and contexts of language use. This contribution to linguistic
theory is important because it provides the rationale for a different and
perhaps more productive research paradigm of language diversity.

THE FAMILY RESEMBLANCE MODEL OF LANGUAGE

It would appear that with minor revision the concept of a homogeneous
speech community could be retained as a theoretical construct. This could
be done, we might argue, by appealing to homogeneity at the abstract level
of deep structure in syntax, and the abstract level of systematic phonemes
in phonology. However, this revision in favor of a Gemeinschaft model is
not feasible in the final analysis because it cannot account for such common
phenomena as speech chains in language, latent communication and non-recip-
rocal communication across linguistically related systems (St. Clair, 1973;
1974). This being the case, it would appear that the model of communicative
competence espoused by Gumperz and Hymes (1964) would provide a viable
alternative to Chomsky's model of the ideal speaker-hearer in a completely
homogeneous speech community.

Although the Gesellschaft model of Gumperz and Hymes may have distinct
advantages over its predecessors, there are still certain problems which it
cannot adequately deal with in its present formulation. The complex manner
in which the varieties of language are related to each other in a society
needs to be further explicated in theoretical terms which transcend the
current structure of their model. Some dialects in the spectrum from mutual
communication to fragmented non-intelligibility, for example, share a family
resemblance (Wittgenstein, 1953), and others do not. Among those which do
participate in a network of overlapping similarities, there exists a speech

chain which can only be bridged by means of linguistic strategies (St. Clair, 1974).

The metaphor of a family resemblance model is important because it differs in a substantial way from the Gemeinschaft model of Chomsky (1965), and the Gesellschaft model of Gumperz and Hymes (1964). A clarification of this point can be made by considering its implications for the traditional model of logic which Wittgenstein (1953) argued against. In logic, the members of a class can be described in two ways. Either the class is formed by appealing to some unique defining property which each and every member shares (the Gemeinschaft model), or it can be described by definition as an ad hoc assemblage of disparate elements (the Gesellschaft model). Neither formal description does justice to the facts. Hence, Wittgenstein found it necessary to advocate a family resemblance model as a compromise between the two extremes. In language, the same problem of formal description exists. The various speech communities which comprise a linguistic society are not readily defined by means of a unique defining property as claimed by the advocates of the dependency principle, and neither are these communities mere conglomerations of disparate and unrelated systems of speech. In reality, it is a combination of both, and the family resemblance model recognizes this fact.

The communicative competence model in its present formulation is static and does not recognize the role which perceptual strategies play in language (Cicourel, 1974; Neisser, 1967; St. Clair, 1974). This new hypothesis recognizes the fact that some form of template-matching must form the basis for such strategies (Selfridge and Neisser, 1960; Uhr, 1963; Gibson, 1963). The concept of receptive competence (Troike, 1969) is also consistent with this model in that one need not have a productive command of a dialect in order to understand it. All that is needed is a repetoire of successful strategies based on sociolinguistic assumptions and cultural expectations of the context which will enable participants in a conversation to systematically bridge the gap among related dialects (St. Clair, 1974).

DEVIANT SPEECH COMMUNITIES

The family resemblance model may provide certain theoretical insights about how communication is accomplished within a cognitive framework, but it is not the panacea of sociolinguists. Its strength comes from its ability to account for such phenomena as the speech chain effect, non-reciprocal communication, and latent bidialectal abilities. Its weakness, however, is that it cannot provide a theoretical explication of bilingual societies in which the major languages are not related by means of a family relationship. In the case of Canada, French and English are both Indo-European languages and they could be conceived as belonging to the extremes of the spectrum of a complex and historically produced speech chain. In India, the relationship between English and Hindi produces a comparable situation. Although these examples do not provide critical counter-examples to the speech chain concept, they do seriously challenge the cognitive salience which their native speakers may have for this phenomenon. A more interesting and

challenging example can be found in the interface between the Dravidian
languages and the Indo-European languages of India. As Gumperz has noted
in his writings (Gumperz and Hymes, 1964), code switching and mutual commu-
nication does exist among these languages. What is critical about this
example is that it simultaneously provides a counter-example to the family
resemblance model and an extreme case of the phenomenon of receptive
competence (Troike, 1969).

In order to save the family resemblance model, we must find a way of
excluding or redefining counter-examples which are critical to the paradigm.
In linguistic terms, those special speech communities which do not partici-
pate in the chain of overlapping linguistic systems can be excluded by
definition. Hence, Hindi and Telegu or Kannada, for example, do not belong
to the same linguistic society. However, in political terms, both languages
are part of a national unit. In this situation, the Gesellschaft model
provides a better description of the political facts. What this means, in
effect, is that the term "language" is highly ambiguous. This situation can
be resolved by means of new terminology which reflects both the political
and the linguistic aspects of this term in communal and societal frameworks.
Hence, I suggest the following nomenclature which is based, in part, on the
current literature:

LANGUAGE

LINGUISTIC USE

Gemeinschaft   Speech Community

Gesellschaft   Language Society

Family Resemblance   Linguistic Society

POLITICAL USE

Gemeinschaft   Language Community

Gesellschaft   Language Society

Since the Gesellschaft model refers to a collection of communities without
a prerequisite infra-structure, I refer to both the linguistic and the
political use by the same term - language society. The family resemblance
model, however, does imply an infra-structure, and for this reason it merits
a special term, i.e. linguistic society.

CONCLUSION

Linguistic diversity has been and continues to be the major problem of
theoretical linguistics. The problem, however, is not unique to linguistics.
In sociology, this problem has surfaced in the writings of Emile Durkheim
(1893; 1895; 1897) as a dichotomy between mechanical solidarity and organic

solidarity. Saussure (1916) has incorporated the Gemeinschaft model into his view of langue, and Chomsky (1965) has modified the concept of mechanical solidarity within a psychological framework. Gumperz and Hymes (1964), on the other hand, have argued for a Gesellschaft model of communicative competence in order to cope with the complexities of linguistic diversity. Although this model contributes a major insight into the complexity of language, it does not deal with the whole spectrum of related linguistic systems within a society. It does not address itself, in particular, to the phenomena of non-reciprocal communication, and the use of cognitive strategies in communicative interaction (Cicourel, 1974; Goffman, 1959; Neisser, 1967). To account for such facts, the family resemblance model of language has been advocated (St. Clair, 1973; 1974). But, the family resemblance model has its problems in that it fails to account for the relationships of political units or communities within a society. It cannot account for the difference between the infra-structures of linguistic societies and the conglomeration of disparate communities in language societies. Hence, this raises new problems for a model of language and politics.

FOOTNOTES

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1. For a discussion of why interdisciplinary research must originate
on a metatheoretical level, consult my paper on "The nature of
Interdisciplinary Linguistics," (St. Clair, 1975).

2. Leon Jakobovits (1971) has also noted the importance of perceptual
strategies in language. His discussion of the inferential nature
of speech within a framework of shared assumptions is informative.

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