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ABSTRACT

A literature review was conducted to discover what programs, philosophies, and methodologies are recommended on the college level for teaching oral Standard English (SE) to speakers of Vernacular Black English (VBE) and to suggest areas of research needs in oral SE training. Most of the speech communication courses in this area are part of remedial programs, with students being required to take the courses because of low scores on standardized tests. Some educators, however, object to this procedure, claiming it stigmatizes the students involved. The philosophy that VBE is a legitimate linguistic system underlies almost all recommended methodological approaches. Several authors have argued that the teachers' belief in the linguistic validity of VBE is a condition of effective language training. The importance of student motivation is also stressed. In keeping with the bidialectic approach, contrastive analysis is most often recommended, with drills, mimicry, repetition, and substitution being the standard techniques. Using behavioral objectives and student self-monitoring have also been suggested. Still, a lack of serious research on bidialecticism and the doubts of some linguists indicate that more study of this approach is needed. Surveys of programs and approaches currently being used are also called for. (JL)

BLACK DIALECT AND SPEAKING

TEACHING THE ACQUISITION OF ORAL STANDARD ENGLISH ON THE COLLEGE LEVEL

1982 SCA Convention

Seminar on "Black Dialect:

Its Nature and Role in Education"

A paper prepared by

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Black Dialect and Speaking

Teaching the Acquisition of Oral Standard English on the College Level

It is widely known that many black dialect speakers enter college without an ability to speak Standard English.[1] It has also been established that students who speak only Vernacular Black English (VBE)[2] are hindered academically (for example, Gwin, 1980; Crystal, 1972; Williams, et al., 1976; Taylor, 1974; Walker, 1977; Popper, 1978). In most speech communication courses, for example, the use of Standard English (SE) is a prerequisite for satisfactory course performance (Hopf, 1971; Lee, 1971; Decker, 1982). Thus nonstandard English speakers are at a distinct disadvantage. Of course, these students are hurt in many other ways. Most linguists believe that written English reflects the spoken and that if a person speaks only VBE that person will encounter significant problems in writing due to black dialect influence (Whiteman, 1981; Crystal, 1972; Cronnell, 1981; Wolfram and Whiteman, 1971). Other studies reveal the social and economic disadvantages of not speaking the accepted linguistic norm (for example, Miller, 1975; Hopper, 1972; Tomlinson, 1975; Popper, 1978).

Because of the problems faced by nonstandard English speaking students, some speech communication programs have been designed to help college students acquire the ability to speak SE, and a few scholars have written articles advocating certain methodologies for this language training. One purpose of this paper is to discover what programs, philosophies and methodologies are recommended for colleges and universities in teaching oral SE to VBE speakers. A second purpose is to suggest areas of research needs in oral Standard English

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[1] One of the simplist and clearest definitions of Standard English is given by Allen (1969) who writes that it is the "... kind of English habitually used by most of the educated English-speaking persons in the United States" (p. 123).

[2] Vernacular Black English is defined by Whiteman (1981) as the "dialect of English spoken primarily by working class Black Americans" (p. 154).

training.

It should be pointed out that the majority of the research in black dialect was published in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is true in speech communication and also in English composition and reading. In 1980, the linguist Shuy noted that "... relatively little new research has been carried out since 1970 and that few programs have been developed since that time" (p. 3-4). Yet due to the 1979 Ann Arbor Court decision,[3] Shuy wrote that a renewed interest in second dialect training was emerging. A review of the literature reveals that there is an increase of published activity in English composition and linguistics but not in speech communication. Yet even in the 1960s and early 1970s, little material was published in speech, particularly when compared to the wealth of material on teaching VBE speakers how to write using SE.

Description of Recommended Programs

Most of the speech communication courses which are described and recommended in the literature and which have the objective of teaching the oral use of SE are part of remedial programs (D' Aponte, Goldstein, McKenzie, 1977; Decker, 1982; Gwin, 1980; Hopf, 1971; Walker, 1977). However, the courses are not limited in objective to the acquisition of SE and include other objectives such as the improvement of listening and organizational skills. Students are usually placed in the course because of low standard aptitude and achievement test scores. One author, Decker (1982), questions the validity of this common placement procedure.

[3] In the Ann Arbor Black English Case, Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children, et al. v. Ann Arbor School District Board, the court found that students who spoke Black English were prevented by this "language barrier" from making normal progress in school. The 1974 Equal Educational Opportunities Act asserts, "No State shall deny educational opportunity to an individual ... by ... the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional problems." The court ruled that the school district had not taken appropriate action to overcome this barrier, and thus was not in compliance with the Equal Educational Opportunities Act. (See The Ann Arbor Decision, 1979.)

The results of his investigation suggest that the verbal score of the Scholastic Aptitude test is not adequate for making the assignments of students to remedial communication courses.

Students usually have no choice in the placement into the remedial communication courses. One writer, Preston (1971), strongly objects to second dialect training being part of a remedial course and to the students' lack of choice in whether they wish to acquire additional SE skills. Preston argues that "socially stigmatizing factors" (p. 238) are bound to the course and to the nonstandard dialect when the course is remedial. He is joined by Lee (1971) in arguing that when students do not have a choice the same stigma is attached and that social cohersion in the form of "linguistic engineering" (Preston, 1971, p. 246) is the result.

Many of the remedial courses are part of an integrated communication program combined with other areas such as writing and reading (D'Aponte, Goldstein, and McKenzie, 1977; Gwin, 1980; Walker, 1977). The program developers recommend the approach because they believe students benefit by having a concentrated format. Yet according to Hopf (1971), not everyone favors this approach. Hopf cites the results of a survey that revealed that "... lack of cooperation between Speech and English departments seemed to block progress" at some institutions and when the English and Speech departments did try to "... work together, it appeared that the English department dominated the curriculum" (p. 211).

Philosophies

A review of the literature revealed that one philosophy underlies almost all recommended methodological approaches. That philosophy is based on the belief that VBE is a legitimate linguistic system (for example, Lee, 1971; Holt, 1970; Preston, 1971; Allen, 1969). One dialect is not superior or better developed than another. SE is simply the accepted norm, and an inability to conform to this linguistic norm significantly hinders a person academically and professionally.

Thus the students' vernacular speech should not be considered faulty, bad, incorrect, sloppy, or invalid. VBE speakers possess a fully developed linguistic system: the problem is that characteristics of this system are different from what is considered standard by the dominant culture in American society.[4]

Several authors have argued that a condition of effective language training is the teachers' belief in the linguistic validity of VBE (Lee, 1971; Preston, 1971; Williams and Rundell, 1971; Holt, 1970; Allen, 1969). Stokes (1976) contends that if teachers do not change "their negative attitude toward dialect and dialect speakers" then it is doubtful that any program will be successful regardless of the teaching methods used (p. 3). Johnson (1969) observes that the greatest problem in teaching SE to dialect speakers is the teachers' negative attitudes toward the dialect. Holt (1970) agrees and argues that for speech programs to be effective teachers must be re-educated and must abandon the familiar "language destruction process" (p. 98). Teachers' attitudes must change so that their expectations and evaluations of students will change. The research in self-fulfilling prophecy illustrates the significance of teacher attitudes (for example, Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). To break the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy, some researchers have recommended incorporating the needed linguistic training into teacher education programs (Harpole, 1975). Lewis (1980) reports that informing teachers about VBE can make a difference in both teacher attitude and student performance.

According to the research, teachers need to believe in the legitimacy of VBE so that they can impart to the students that they are not being asked to

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[4] One author, Preston (1971), questions whether the belief espoused by some in the validity of VBE is sincere. He notes writers who proclaim this belief, but at the same time describe VBE speakers as "communication cripples" who need "refinement of their verbal skills" (pp. 237-38). Preston argues that these phrases indicate that the authors do not have an appreciation of VBE and believe that the language skills of VBE speakers are deprived. I also noticed that in the results of a 1971 survey (Hopf) of communication programs for disadvantaged students, the word "defect" was used to describe dialects (p. 210).

eradicate a dialect that is appropriate to their culture and a part of their cultural identity (Holt, 1970; Preston, 1971; Lee, 1971; Tomlinson, 1975; Allen, 1969; Brooks, 1969). But rather students are being asked to learn an additional dialect. The advocates of this bidialectic approach believe that the approach is positive. Unlike the eradication approach, supporters argue that bidialectism should not damage the self esteem of the students by telling them their speech is wrong and must be abandoned. Supporters of bidialectism also believe the approach increases student motivation. The argument is that if teachers have a respect for the students' home dialect and are not asking them to give up that dialect, then students will be more willing to learn the standard dialect.

Many researchers have indicated that motivation is the key to second dialect acquisition (Lee, 1971; Holt, 1970). The linguists Wolfram and Fasold (1974) go so far as to argue that what is done "... in the classroom with regard to spoken English is irrelevant" because the motivated students will learn and the unmotivated will not (p. 183). Wolfram and Fasold and others believe the key to motivation is the students' desire "... to become a member of the group represented by the speakers of the new ... dialect" (Wolfram and Fasold, 1974, p. 183). Lee (1971) agrees and observes, "Convergence to the norm of Standard English requires as a precondition the students' desire to change reference groups" (p.3).

Methodologies

In keeping with the bidialectic approach, the most frequently recommended methodology is contrastive analysis (Allen, 1970; Preston, 1971; Holt, 1970; Smith, 1966; Lewis, 1980; Wolfram and Fasold, 1974). This analysis is defined by Shaughnessy (1977) as "a technique developed in foreign-language training that uses a common analytical frame to describe the mother tongue and the target language at the points where differences between the two languages produce interference errors" (p. 156). Thus acquiring a second dialect is compared to learning to speak a foreign language. Many writers (Lin, 1965; Allen, 1969;

Feigenbaum, 1969; Wolfram and Fasold, 1974) recommend this approach if the differences between learning a second language and learning a dialect are taken into account. Wolfram and Fasold (1974) believe teachers must imaginatively adapt the methodology of second language training for it to be successful.

The standard techniques used in contrastive analysis appear to be drills in mimicry, repetition, and substitution (Allen, 1970). Some writers (Lin, 1965; Allen, 1969; Johnson, 1969; Feigenbaum, 1970) point out the need to adapt these drills to second dialect learning to make them interesting and challenging to the students. For example, in two articles describing suggested adaptations of drill techniques, Feigenbaum (1969, 1970) suggests that drills (1) be given content that is appropriate and has inherent interest to the students, (2) have a quick pace and be used for short periods of time, (3) have a sequential progression of difficulty, and (4) should end with exercises which allow for some free expression.

Another suggestion for second dialect training is the use of behavioral objectives where performance criteria are specifically stated. Lee (1971) believes that if tasks are clearly delineated and attainable, then students are more likely to take responsibility for their own learning. He also argues that the use of behavioral objectives can counteract the expectation of failure which he believes most of these students have. With behavioral objectives, they know what is expected and what they must do. In addition, he writes that behavioral objectives are particularly helpful for remedial students "... who have a low tolerance for ambiguity, and so they are given the more complete planning objectives" (p. 3).

Some program developers have been particularly concerned that students learn to self-monitor their own language and suggest using techniques which encourage and help a student to acquire this capability (Lee, 1971; Walker, 1977). The use of audio taping is the most frequently suggested tool to use in reaching

this objective. Lee (1971) also writes of the importance of giving specific performance feedback, particularly on the spot evaluation, in helping students learn to self-monitor.

Other than the recommendations cited above, few specific methodologies are recommended. Most of the available research deals with what teachers should do - not how they should do it. As Walker (1977) points out there is little published material describing successful methodologies. Most of the discussion of methodology is too general to be of much value. For example, in one program students were to develop "satisfactory" oral grammar "... through example, through an examination of common American idioms, and through assignments which stress the effective oral use of language" (D'Aponte, Goldstein, McKenzie, 1977, p. 329). In another program, the methodology is described as follows: "Standard English voice and diction were to be drilled using a laboratory technique and available self-teaching material in the IPA" (Gwin, 1980, p. 8).

Discussion of Needed Research

In 1974, Arthur Smith discussed several frontiers in black communication where research was needed. He wrote, "Bidialectal research, which would explore the use of contrastive approaches in teaching speakers of Black English, is of pedagogical significance" (p. 114). Orlando Taylor (1974) also noted that research was needed in "... effective philosophies and techniques for teaching blacks Standard English" (p. 157). Since almost no research by speech communication professionals has been carried out since Taylor and Smith made their recommendations and since the results of my investigation also indicate a sparcity of serious research, it is clear that there is still a need for research in the teaching of oral Standard English.

The bidialectic approach, in particular, needs more study since some linguists have expressed doubts about the approach. One of the most respected linguists, Walt Wolfram (1974), writes that "... the maintenance of two dialects is not

possible because there are not enough linguistic distinctions between them" (p. 181). If this is so and if a curriculum were successful, the result, if not the intent, would be eradication of the nonstandard dialect. Another scholar, Patrick Hartwell (1979), also argues that "... Functioning bidialectals are a rare breed, and some linguists have ventured to doubt that they exist" (pp. 12-13). To my knowledge, this controversy has not been publicly discussed in the speech communication discipline. Nor did I find any studies which illustrate that speakers can, in fact, maintain two dialects. In the speech communication literature, it is assumed one can become bidialectic with training and motivation. However, one author (Holt, 1970) does call the approach she recommends for children's speech training a "modified bidialectal" one because she believes the goal of avoiding dialect blends and keeping the two dialects separate is a difficult and unrealistic goal.

Another respected author has raised a pedagogical question about the bi-dialectic approach in the teaching of college writing and a question which has obvious implications in the teaching of oral SE. Shaughnessey (1977) notes that in teaching writing to VBE speakers doubts arise "... over whether there is among native-born students who speak in other dialects a sufficient range of interference-based errors, at this age and academic level, to warrant the elaborate pedagogical apparatus involved in teaching two grammars instead of one" (p. 156). To my knowledge this question has never been publicly addressed by speech communication scholars.

It would also seem that current research is needed on what programs are now being offered. Most of the material describing recommended programs is over ten years old, and no doubt many of these programs no longer exist.

A survey of what approaches are being used today in second dialect training is also needed. Whether the recommended philosophies and methodologies are being adopted is not known. In 1971, Hopf conducted a survey of some of the

speech communication programs designed for disadvantaged students. One could conclude from his survey results that a haphazard approach to language training appeared to exist at the colleges surveyed and that the recommended philosophies and methodologies were not widely adopted. Although the results of a survey could be embarrassing, it is important to know what is actually going on in the classroom in 1982.

The available research describes and recommends specially developed courses that are offered at a limited number of colleges. According to Walker's survey (1977), few universities have such courses. What happens to nonstandard speakers at other universities? Do speech communication instructors attempt to help the students acquire SE? If so, how? In what specific ways are VBE speakers hindered in their classroom performances? These are but a few of the questions needing answers.

Conclusion

This study revealed that most speech communication courses described in the literature which have the objective of students' acquisition of SE are remedial in nature and not limited to second dialect training. The literature review also disclosed that suggested approaches in teaching oral SE to black dialect speakers are primarily based on (1) the belief in the validity of VBE as a linguistic system, (2) the importance of teachers' positive attitudes toward VBE, and (3) the prerequisite of student motivation to language learning. The dominant recommended methodology is contrastive analysis, and drills are the most frequently suggested and used technique.

A review of the literature also revealed that little current research is available and that additional research is needed. In the literature search, I also noticed that the more specific and applicable material has been published by scholars outside the discipline of speech communication, primarily by linguists. Clearly researchers in speech communication have not given needed attention to the

acquisition of oral Standard English and to pedagogical innovations for teaching this acquisition.

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