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ABSTRACT

This article describes how, over the past 25 years, sociolinguistics and education have entered into a methodological and intellectual dialogue that has significantly changed both views of language and theories of how language enters into school learning processes. The first section, "Literacy, Language and the Problem of Differential Learning," defines the relevant issues. The next three sections ("From Linguistic Deficit to Cultural and Linguistic Difference: The 1960s," "The 1970s: Teaching as a Linguistic Process," and "Schooling as a Sociolinguistic Process: The 1980s") discuss theories, methods, and findings, keeping in mind their relevance to literacy. The fifth section, "An Interactional Perspective," describes how this approach to schooling processes focuses on the interplay of linguistic, contextual and social presuppositions which interact to create the conditions for classroom learning. The sixth section, "Theory of Communication as Interpersonal Inferencing," argues that the task of interactional sociolinguists in modern educational settings is to chart the process by which theories of educability are put into daily practice, and to uncover the implicit theory of learning that underlies classroom strategies and that informs the teachers' practices and the schools' policies. The seventh section is a conclusion which discusses interactional sociolinguistics and literacy research. A section on future research issues concludes the paper. Fifty-four references are attached. (SR)

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Jenny Cook-Gumperz and John Gumperz

December, 1990

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CHANGING VIEWS OF LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY RESEARCH: AN INTERACTIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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In order to answer the question as to the ways in which language has entered into studies in education over the past decades, we will begin by defining what we see as the relevant issues and then go on to discuss the theories, methods and findings, keeping in focus their relevance to literacy. For it seems to us that the study of literacy is the key to understanding the relationship of language both to schooling as a process and to the role of education as a major institution of social change in this century. The recent history of linguistics and sociolinguistics in research in education has sought answers for issues of equity in educational experience. The assumptions both of values and methodological process are intrinsically related to the study of the ways in which social equality can be enhanced through education. Our owr disciplinary approach—that of interactional sociolinguistics—will, we hope, be seen in this short text as a response to this recent history. Over the past twenty-five years, sociolinguistics and education have entered into a methodological and intellectual dialogue that has significantly changed both our views of language and our theories of how language enters into school learning processes.

Literacy, Language and the Problem of Differential Learning

Disappointments with the growth of literacy rates and with society's failure to achieve universal literacy after nearly a century of increasing educational effort have been taken as indicative of a major crisis in schooling over the past few years. We know that such crises are not completely new. They seem to recur at regular intervals in history (Resnick & Resnick, 1977). While explanations for this failure vary, the majority of the critics return to some version of the differential learning issue as the problem which lies at the heart of public education: why is it that children exposed to similar school instructional experience appear to show different levels of educational achievements (Mehan, 1989)? And perhaps more significantly, why, after decades of increasing expenditure, do differences in literacy and educability persist (Hansot & Tyack, 1982)? The reason for the centrality of literacy and language is easy to see: for more than a hundred years literacy has been seen as the basic skill, ability, mode of discourse—each term engages a different ideological realm—upon which all other schooling achievements must rest. However what is meant by literacy is far from clearly specified. It counts as the skill which not only defines an educated person but, more importantly, an educable one. That is, literacy becomes a measure of educability of both individuals and social groups, and any limitations in an individual's or groups literacy suggests flaws in the educational system. The heart of the current literacy crisis is the dramatic decrease in the test scores of minority and low-income children after the first few years of schooling (Ogbu, 1988). Test performances show that the achievement gaps between middle- and low-income children increase with grade level. This suggests the need for studies of the schooling process that can provide a better understanding of the role of language in educational experience and especially how a sociolinguistic and linguistic perspective can serve to clarify this role.

To understand the contribution that current research can make, it is necessary to begin with a brief historical recap of earlier issues, issues that we will show are still relevant. Thus, questions of language usage which in the past were the subject of great controversy, and at the time seemed to have been resolved, now re-emerge within the

context of the back-to-basics movement and the political debates over bilingualism and "English only" (Hakuta, 1986; Nunberg, 1989).

From Linguistic Deficit to Cultural and Linguistic Difference: The 1960's

Earlier in the century, thinking on literacy and schooling rested on the assumption that learning was basically accomplished through classroom instruction. Policy-makers and educators had traditionally believed that, while children come to school with different social backgrounds and while these differences can, under some circumstances, be seen as providing an initial handicap, what counted was the curriculum and how it was presented (Graham, 1980). In the last three or four decades, explanations for differential learning have increasingly turned away from this limited, instrumental view of learning to point to factors and experiences outside of school instruction itself in order to explain what happens inside the school. Explanations have ranged from seeing children's background as merely a minor handicap that can best be ignored in classroom practice, to claims that differences are a problem that must be dealt with and overcome in the early years, if larger learning problems are not to result later, to the more recent view that cultural diversity is a positive factor which serves to enrich classroom experience. Similarly, the history of linguistic and sociolinguistic involvement with education is the history of how we have transformed our earlier view of language into one where language both serves to convey academic content and at the same time sets or constitutes the environment in which learning takes place.

The changes we refer to were influenced by what were initially three separate research traditions. Anthropologists' ethnographic studies of urban poverty, psychologists' research on parenting, and educators' observations on what they saw as serious gaps of children's command of English grammar. Cultural anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1966) and, following him, sociologist Nathan Glazer and urban planner Daniel Moynahan had argued that the economic and environmental decay of inner cities and the prevailing poverty had led to the breakup of family structures and the loss of traditional values. The resulting culture of poverty, they claimed, had brought about a condition of "cultural deprivation" among inner-city children which prevented them from benefitting from schooling. Developmental psychologists, on the other hand, basing themselves on small-group experimental studies, had suggested that social classes and cultural groups differed in styles of parenting and that these differences in large part accounted for the educational outcomes (Hess & Shipman, 1965). Finally, in educational practice the argument took still a different form. School psychologists and educators who had noted what appeared to them as minority students' poor pronunciation and grammar, as well as their inability to form complete sentences and express themselves in clear English, concluded that these students must also lack adequate reasoning skills. They came to regard such "language deficiencies" as the major cause of elementary school failure.

Putting together these three lines of argument, we can reconstruct a rationale for what, on the model of the anthropologists' term "cultural deprivation," has come to be known as the "linguistic deprivation" hypothesis. The claim was that the cultural environment in which many low-performing, minority-group children grew up did not provide adequate exposure to adult talk, resulting in inadequate command of basic English grammar. Because of their supposed lack of grammar, the same children were also seen to lack the cognitive or verbal bases they needed in order to assimilate what they were taught in school.

It must be pointed out that this concern with the child's home environment as the main influence on educational outcomes had originally been seen by its proponents as a response to earlier views on the biological inheritability of talent. The orientation was part of a new movement to counteract the cultural biases of views of educability that used I.Q.

testing to support claims that differential schooling outcomes could be explained solely in terms of inheritance of talent, an issue with a history throughout this century (Gould, 1983). It was this biological determinism, and its connotations of racial prejudice, which was attacked by those who understood that cultural difference shaped ability through a variety of differentiated experiences. Thus, the focus on the consequences of differing styles of parenting and on the effects of the poverty cycle can be seen as at least a liberal reform option through which remedies could be sought through educational programs (de Lone, 1979).

In fact, a variety of remedial programs were initiated in this period to make up for the supposed deficiencies. Some, such as the well-known Headstart Project, provided pre-school training for cultural enrichment to redress the supposed lack of home stimulation. Other programs taught basic English and relied on grammar and pronunciation drills in standard English, on the assumption that children must catch up on basic oral skills before being exposed to more advanced reading and writing instruction. While these programs had some success, they also met with serious objections from minority-group members who saw their own, valued cultural traditions being neglected, as well as from academic scholars who readily recognized that the above remedial efforts rested on two essentially false premises.

One premise is that surface observations of what happened in school could yield proof that children of minority or lower-class background were lacking cognitive abilities they needed to profit from schooling. Linguists challenged this perspective, arguing that grammatical knowledge is cognitive knowledge that takes the form of internalized processing principles governing individuals' ability to produce and understand grammatical sentences. Research in developmental psycholinguistics, moreover, provides overwhelming evidence to show that all normal children, no matter where and under what conditions they grow up, have full command of the grammatical system of their own language or dialect by the age of five. It has also been shown that grammatical knowledge is used automatically without conscious reflection; it is not readily subject to overt recall and grammatical rules are not always directly apparent from surface speech. To study another person's grammatical system, therefore, requires indirect, in-depth methods of analysis. This research challenges the view that we can rely on naturalistic observation of speech behavior to guard against the tendency to evaluate others' speech in terms of one's own grammatical presuppositions.

For example, we know from the history of linguistics that when the new, in-depth methods were used to reanalyze some of the American Indian languages that nineteenth century investigators had dismissed as primitive, overly concrete and lacking the means to express abstract thought, it was discovered that these languages had a grammatical system every bit as complex as any other. The reanalyses proved that earlier scholars who lacked basic analytical skills had failed to perceive key phonological and morphological distinctions and had thus been unable to do justice to the languages they had described and to the cognitive abilities of their speakers.

The second false premise was that minority children's behavior in class was directly indicative of linguistic and cognitive ability both in and outside of the classroom. Although the earlier intervention approaches had been motivated by the intent to supplement a lack, they had the effect of entirely disregarding the child's contribution to the schooling process by ignoring what some children had learnt during their first five years of creating meaning through language (Wells, 1986). The fact that children, by virtue of their minority status, were not simply seen as different but as disadvantaged meant that the school was not giving them the opportunity of building on the linguistic competence and on the language varieties that they had learned at home. Schools that do not understand the real nature of language

differences are likely to underestimate the difficulties that children face in adapting to the classroom environment, so that in working to correct grammar alone they can do more harm than good. While the blame was not with the child, it did seem to attach to the family, the social community and its language code, so that the family rather than school instruction itself could potentially be seen as the target for intervention (Bernstein, 1972).

At this point that sociolinguists became directly involved in education, reasoning that although the so-called linguistically-deprived minority-group children in urban schools spoke variant dialects of English and not distinct languages, there seemed no grounds to suppose that the early twentieth century linguists' generalizations do not apply to them. A number of sociolinguists embarked on extensive field work to test this proposition through in-depth, ethnographically-based studies of language usage in school as well as in home and peer group settings. It was soon found that the educators' assumptions about minority students' supposed verbal impoverishment, on which many of the remedial programs were based, were simply unfounded. The very children who had appeared to be unresponsive in class work and lacking in verbal ability were found to be extraordinarily skilled communicators in and out of school peer group situations. The minority dialects they spoke were indeed significantly different from English, but the expressions that had been cited as evidence of "degenerate grammar" were shown to reflect underlying grammatical rules that were every bit as systematic and indicative of complex cognitive abilities as those of standard English. Moreover, they could be derived from earlier English dialects by generally accepted laws of linguistic change. The notion of linguistic deprivation, therefore, has no more validity than the nineteenth century evolutionists' notions of linguistic and cultural primitivity, which earlier anthropological linguists had so effectively disproved (see note 1).

To summarize what we have said about language so far, there have been three different views of the role of language in education. In the earlier decades of this century, what we can call the instrumental, *school-primer-based* notion of language as a written code prevailed, which emphasized correct written grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The assumption was that this correct usage could be taught and drilled in the classroom along with, and in somewhat the same way as, good handwriting (Cremin, 1990). Later on, when language came to be seen as an essential part of the learning experience, in the sense that literacy acquisition presupposes knowledge of grammar and pronunciation, attention came to focus on spoken language. But what was meant by spoken language was the standard variety of English, as if that were the only valid form, so that now it became part of the school's task to insure that the child had proper pronunciation and grammar as a precondition for acquiring literacy skills. Since reading texts, curricula, and teachers focused on the importance of correct oral usage, we can call this second approach the *speech correction model.*

Finally, the sociolinguists' empirical studies of home and school usage made available a fuller knowledge of the facts of linguistic diversity. This brought about a third significant change in views of the role of language in education. It is not just Standard English that is important for learning. Modern educational systems are, in fact, faced with situations where speakers control different speech varieties reflecting "separate but equal" grammatical and cultural systems. In other words, while languages and varieties of the same language differ, they are ultimately equal in communicative value and rhetorical potential. We have, therefore, no reason to assume that otherwise normal American children whose grammar deviates from the accepted school language lack the cognitive pre-requisites for learning. This relativistic view gradually influenced thinking and practice in the nineteen seventies as the *linguistic and cultural enrichment* view.

The 1970's: Teaching as a Linguistic Process

One important argument established in the 1960's was that since differences in children's educational performance cannot be due to lack of linguistic/grammatical knowledge, problems of educability must lie not with the child's linguistic knowledge nor its cognitive contribution to understanding but with the schools' practices of instruction. Neither was it the child or the family that lacks understanding; the problem is the school's failure to incorporate different language and knowledge systems into its pattern of instruction. Because of their failure to acknowledge the facts of linguistic diversity, schools could be seen to lack sensitivity to different ways of presenting information. There were some who interpreted the sociolinguists' findings about diversity as suggesting that speakers of linguistically distinct dialects are in a situation similar to that of second language learners whose native grammatical system interferes with their ability to decode and process the school language. This implies that their learning problems cannot be solved by programs that simply seek to root out deviations from Standard English without recognizing that there is a deeper grammatical basis underlying the children's performance. It was argued that contrastive grammatical studies are needed to discover what the child's grammatical knowledge actually is before new teaching curricula can be instituted (Baratz & Shuy, 1969; Shuy, 1974).

Other researchers turned their attention to the school and began to explore the processes by which knowledge is transmitted in classroom instruction. A common hypothesis at the time was that linguistic diversity created a potential for misunderstandings that can occur through different language usage patterns. These misunderstandings over time can be seen as interfering with the learning process. This focus on the role of language in the learning process also changed the way literacy is viewed. From this perspective, the literacy learning that the child does in school can no longer be seen as the acquisition of a particular set of techniques specific to school tasks. Rather, school learning must be seen as part of the total language socialization experience by which children learn a set of complex cognitive and linguistic skills which begin with the earliest moves into language and speech. The schooling process is viewed as part of a wider set of linguistic experiences which begin and end outside of the school itself. The focus of research is on those linguistic processes that are particularly important in the classroom, and most specifically in the early years of schooling when linguistic and discourse patterns are first learnt. The answer to the problem of culture difference was to see the school's role in the learning process as centrally located in the classroom, where changes in this process could be achieved in several ways: (a) through the teacher being seen as a broker for different cultural and linguistic messages; (b) through the classroom being viewed as a meeting place for different cultural groups and where some commonality of experience could be developed; (c) through the students being seen as bringing different patterns of discourse to the classroom from which all can learn, and from which the common and differing elements in literacy and language experience can be discussed.

The problem of literacy and learning is reflected, from this point of view, in the NIE guidelines for research on *Teaching as a linguistic process*, published in 1974.

> The study of linguistic phenomena in school settings should seek to answer educational questions. We are interested in linguistic forms only insofar as through them we can gain insight into the social events of the classroom and thereby into the understandings which the students achieve. Our interest is in the social context of cognition; speech unites the cognitive and the social. The actual (as opposed to intended) curriculum consists in the meanings enacted or realized by a particular teacher and class. In order to learn, students must use what they already know so as to give meaning to what the teacher presents to them. Speech makes available to

> reflection the processes by which they relate new knowledge to old. But this possibility depends on the social relationships, the communication system, which the teacher sets up (NIE, 1974; quoted in Cazden, 1988).

There were two separable issues that surfaced in the 1970's (see note 2). Briefly these were: (a) the relationship of differences in grammatical knowledge and language usage to their consequences on how the child is evaluated; (b) that of the differences in classroom interactional knowledge as described primarily in the work of Erickson and his students and of McDermott.

Sociolinguistics and Evaluation of Students

Apart from concentrating on research seeking to clarify the linguistic nature of dialect and language differences and their effects on cognitive processing, sociolinguists also sought to explore the effect of these differences on the interpersonal relationship between teacher and students. For example, Labov (1972), one of the pioneers in the field, always drew a distinction between linguistic variables and the evaluative reactions they evoke. It is the latter point that was his main concern in his seminal paper "The Logic of Non-standard English." The argument was made with greater political emphasis in his later study, where he goes on to review a well-known court case in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In this case, Black parents successfully sued the school system for failing to meet the educational needs of their children. This argument showed that communication problems caused by dialect differences were interactional and do not reflect cognitive difficulties or questions of referential meaning. Reviewing the empirical evidence, Labov points out:

> The School District had failed to do a number of things that would have helped to solve the problem: to provide instructional alternatives based on the unique needs of the children; . . . to provide a reading program that would diagnose the problem; . . . The full force of the complaint is best understood by considering what the School District had done for the children. It had:
>
> (a) placed or threatened to place five children in classes and programs for the mentally handicapped;
>
> (b) placed or threatened to place two of them in classes and programs for learning disabled children;
>
> (c) suspended or threatened to suspend two others from classes;
>
> (d) retained or threatened to retain in grade two others;
>
> (e) tracked three other children at lower levels of school instruction;
>
> (f) graduated two others to junior high school without preparing them to read, write and do basic arithmetic at the level required;
>
> (g) accepted labels and reports derogatory to two preschoolers.
>
> All this had been done, according to the plaintiffs, "without regard to plaintiffs' racial and linguistic background."

The Ann Arbor court case dramatically illustrates the cumulative effect that the individual normative judgments of students' linguistic abilities can have on their school careers. Implicit in the plaintiffs' argument are assumptions that low evaluations from as early in

schooling as preschool classes, or unjustified placement in low-ability reading groups or remedial programs, constitutes a handicap which becomes increasingly difficult to overcome as the child moves through school. Although sociolinguistic analysis concentrates on the study of verbal forms, Labov's discussion suggests that what is important about these forms is not their function in conveying referential content but the effect that a child's language usage patterns can have on treatment in school. It is evident from the above that while learning is ultimately a matter of the child's individual ability, it is not that ability in absolute terms that is important but rather how it is displayed within the interactional environment of the classroom and how it is evaluated and judged in relation to the school system's assumptions.

The following example from the work of Piestrup (1973) illustrates these issues and raises some additional problems:

> . . . the children were seated around a large table constructing sentences to show they understood words printed on cards. The teacher's attempt to elicit a grammatically acceptable rendering of "A boy *win* a race" resulted in a new example of how to use the word "win."
>
> Class: 'Win'
> T: Who can give me a sentence with 'win'?
> C1: A boy win a race.
> T: A boy *win* a race?
> C2: I know teacher.
> C3: I know teacher.
> T: Hmm, that sounds—
> C4: Teacher, I know one.
> T: —Can you say that a little better, so it sounds—I understand what you mean, but Erndalyn, what, how would you say that?
> C5: The win' blew the hat off my frien' head.
> T: Ok, that's what 'win' sounds like, huh. But this is the kind of 'win' when we, when you beat somebody else, when you win a race, OK? The other word, I'll show you how it's spelled. What word is this, Erndalyn? (Teacher writes 'win' and 'wind.') OK? And this is the kind of 'win' that we're talking about. This has a—
> C: 'D'.
> T: What's on the end?
> C6: A silent 'd'.
> T: A 'd'. It's hard to hear.
> C6,7: It's a silent 'd'!
> T: Well, it's not really, really, silent, but it's just really hard to hear. It's there. Sometimes we can say it so we can hear it. Can you hear the name of it? Did you hear the 'd' then? And we usually, sometimes we usually don't say it, but it's there, so Erndalyn, what does this, make a sentence with this kind of 'win'.
> C5: I, I, I mean, I, I can win th' race. I win the race.
> C7: I know.
> T: How about, 'I will win the race'? OK?
> C5: I *will* win the race.
> T: OK, pretty good. OK, this one.

This example is of particular interest as the teacher had attended lectures on dialect differences and was following a recommendation to correct grammatical divergence and point out phonological alternants.

A simple grammatical correction resulted in confusion. A child replaced "win" with "wind" when the teacher did not accept the first sentence.

When asked the final consonant which distinguishes "wind," children chanted in an exaggerated, didactic tone, "It's a silent 'd'!" The newly invented designation seemed to fluster the teacher: "Sometimes we say it so we can hear it . . . And we usually, sometimes we usually don't say it, but it's there . . ." The child was also confused: "I, I, I mean, I, I can win th' race. I win the race."

The last sentence is grammatically similar to the original one: "The boy win a race." This time the teacher suggests an alternate form, "I will win the race." But the reason may not be clear to the child.

In a second episode, the issue is the pronunciation of final 'r':

Teachers in this group did not seem aware of dialect differences per se. . . . Episode 25 illustrates how a teacher failed to hear a correct response as if she expected to hear an incorrect or insufficient response.

C1: 'Fire.'
T: Sound.
C1: 'Fa-rr.'
T: 'Rr.'
C1: 'Rr.'
T: 'Rr.' So what is it? Fa—you don't play with it. It's what?
C1: He-o-we-fa-er.
T: Uh huh; now say it quickly. Fa—Uh huh, say it. I can't hear you.
C1: 'Fire.'
T: 'Fa-aa.'
C1: 'Fire.'
T: 'Fire,' uh huh, say it quickly.
C1: 'Fire.'
T: 'Fire,' 'fire.'
C1: 'Fire.'
T: You don't play with fire, do you?
C1: He ha - ar - dee.
T: Dee.
C1: Da.
T: Ha—what?
C1: 'Hide.'
T: Put an 's' at the end.
C1: Hides.
T: Good. He what?
C1: 'He hides.'
T: Good, hi*des*, hi*des*.
C1: Hides.
T: Uh huh.

These are striking examples of teachers trying to integrate their knowledge of the linguistic facts into their teaching approach and finding difficulties in relating the school's emphasis on phoneme segmentation to what they know to be the child's own system. They show that the instructional program of the school creates conflict both for the teacher and the student. This work illustrates that it is not really sufficient just to expose pejorative attitudes and perhaps teach teachers some linguistics to show that such classroom problems have no basis in linguistic fact. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which linguistic

variation affects the classroom learning environment and questions of how pejorative stereotyping can be avoided are still far from clear. Rather, this work suggests that a communicative rather than a linguistic perspective per se is needed.

Classroom learning as a sociolinguistic process

To appreciate here some of what is involved from a communicative rather than from a purely linguistic perspective, we must consider the larger context and role of language in communication. Consideration of this issue suggests that the communicative problems in school contexts may not be due to linguistic problems but to the contextual usage and interpretation of communicative partners such as the teacher. For example, the social situation of many American Black minorities differs in important respects from what is ordinarily associated with situations of linguistic and cultural distinctness. Along with other urban minorities, Blacks have long lived side by side in the same social environment with other English-speaking groups and have been in close contact with them. This contact has been at least as important as their linguistic history in shaping their language habits. On the one hand, the need for communication at work and in other public settings has brought about significant adaptations to the majority speech. Most adult speakers are, by now, bidialectal, that is, they control a range of styles and dialects and in their everyday speech they employ forms that are quite close to Standard English, as well as more traditional Black English forms. On the other hand, it is also true that when language use is associated with relationships of power and domination, intergroup contact can also act as a counterforce to prevent complete linguistic assimilation. Some pre-existing distinctions are thus maintained and may even be intentionally exaggerated as boundary markers or as symbols of the community's independence. This means that the fact that Black English speakers use Black English dialect features does not necessarily indicate that they do not know or understand the equivalent Standard English forms. Their language use may have other motivations as markers of in-group stylistic options. When used in a school context, Black dialect may be judged pejoratively by some. Yet, the communicative problems that may arise are usually not only matters of referential meaning as was illustrated in the Piestrup example.

The situation of other urban minority-language speakers from Latin America, Asia, or Africa has some similarities to that of American Blacks. Many of these groups continue to speak their own language at home and in their own community, yet the need for contact with the majority group in an urban environment has brought about widespread bilingualism. This in turn has led to significant reductions in the grammatical distance between the languages in question. Urban bilingual language usage, moreover, is marked by widespread code-switching, so that speakers can in fact shift from one language to another, often within one sentence. Such switching has important communicative functions and conveys meanings which in many ways are similar to those conveyed by stylistic choices in monolingual situations (Duran, 1981; Gumperz, 1982a).

The community studies suggest that it is not at all clear that the linguistic difficulties faced by bilingual children in schooling are due to a lack of grammatical knowledge of English; the problem is rather one of context-bound usage. If linguistic differences alone were at issue, we would expect children of Chinese and Japanese background to have the greatest difficulties since these grammatical systems are most different from English. But this is not the case. Statistics on school performance show that recent Chinese immigrants from Asia generally do better than those born in the U.S. This is true not only for the U.S. but also for immigrant workers in Europe, where learning difficulties are most severe for the second generation children who are themselves bilingual and not second language learners per se. In fact, research on language contact and diffusion has been responsible for revising the common preconception that the more two languages differ, the greater the

learning difficulties: there is by no means a direct one-to-one relation between language distance and social distance. Often, the closer two languages or dialects are grammatically, the greater the import of social boundaries which separate them (Gumperz, 1972). It is, therefore, unlikely that grammatical differences as such can account for the learning gap (Gumperz, 1982b). What is needed is a better understanding of the way in which language enters into interaction to affect the learning environment of the school.

In the community studies, we have the beginnings of understanding the importance of language, from a perspective different to that of the earlier linguistic research. Language here is no longer a means of conveying referential information, and dialect is problematic not because it can lead to a misunderstanding of what is said, but because language enters into the way social order is created and maintained through interaction. What it is about language which effects social ordering is not specified in these studies. What this work indicates is that discourse strategies project identity—that use could, and did, become a block to learning. This work also indicates that unless the classroom communication system could be constructively reorganized, learning would continue to be impeded. How this could be done, as a means of achieving a wider access to learning opportunities, built on initial insights from a more detailed look at the linguistic form as well as the content and social placing of the message.

Some initial suggestions on how to break into the potentially negative cycle of compounding cultural error and sociolinguistic misunderstanding come from the anthropological tradition of detailed ethnography that has focused on the specific processes of classroom learning and instruction called micro-ethnography (Erickson, 1979). Detailed studies of classroom practices highlighted (a) the subtleties of organizational regularities in classrooms created by teachers and understood and responded to by students; (b) the social order of a classroom; (c) the patterns of participation structures between students as peers and with the whole class orchestrated by the teacher. This work showed how these aspects of the communication system provided for or denied access to learning in situations in which the actual verbalized message was only one part of the total system (Erickson, 1979; Florio, 1978; Philips, 1972). Work that continued in this vein showed that the differences in instructional practices and misunderstandings between teacher and ethnically different students were mostly the product of interactional constraints, not conscious prejudice. Misunderstanding of both linguistic messages and implicit cues provided for a reinforcing of differential instruction and learning, unless these culturally-coded messages could be understood (McDermott, 1974). These studies alerted us to the communicative character of the social system of the classroom and, most importantly, the fact that access to learning opportunities is determined socio-communicatively and is not initially a matter of cognitive understanding of language differences.

This research called attention to the fact that learning is not a matter of simple information flow in which teachers' words are simply picked up by the students; rather, learning is an interactive process which depends on both the ability of teachers and students to create conversational involvement. In other words, both teachers and students must work to elicit each other's attention, and the ability to do this is constrained by the classroom socio-ecology. Although the interactional studies did not deny the importance of language in the interactional process, their main focus was on social action, not on language per se. Language usage in situations of bilingualism and bidilectalism particularly showed how sociolinguistic research made possible a paradigmatic shift towards a focus on the interactive role of language that provided new ways of relating issues of language choice to the problem of differential learning. The focus of such studies was both on the classroom and on the influence of classroom communication on the individual students and their motivation to learn.

Mitchell-Kernan (1974), in an early ethnographic study of the consequences of bi-dialectalism, argued that when we look at the problem of Black minority dialects from the dialect speakers' perspective, we find that dialects have an important rhetorical effect, inasmuch as they serve to symbolize and reinforce social identity. Piestrup (1973), in her analysis of teaching styles, suggests processes through which teachers can control their use and the students' use of two languages or two dialects to contribute to individuals' development of positive social identity over time, as well as show students how to structure knowledge and recode information. While suggesting that the control of two codes is a stylistic issue, not a cognitive one, Gumperz (1971) shows that code-switching in a bilingual situation is rule-governed at the level of discourse (see also Gumperz & Hernandez-Chavez, 1972). These studies suggest the complex nature of the literacy learning tasks both in and out of school for many bilingual and bidialectal children. In many ways, these studies foreshadow, at the level of sociolinguistic analysis, some of the ethnographic arguments that have recently been made for the development of school counter-cultures and cultures of resistance (see Mehan [1989] for a summary of the British work; also Macleod [1987] and Ogbu [1988]).

Schooling as a Sociolinguistic Process: The 1980's

What were the expected outcomes of this research? These studies have suggested that it is important to look at discourse rather than at grammar if we want to seek a better understanding of the role of language in learning. How do the verbal strategies and styles such as those studied in the above examples relate to the interactional patterns of "participant structures"?

Another factor which has to be considered in the schooling/literacy equation is that the nature of the school discourse varies significantly from that experienced outside of school, not as reflecting different (middle class cultural values) or as focusing on certain instructional routines, but essentially by constituting in its structure the task of schooling. School discourse is evaluative, as a study by Mehan (1979), "Learning Lessons," has shown. Since the business of schooling is to learn, integral to all discourse messages is an evaluative component. For this reason, teacher talk appears to avoid the ambiguities and implicit meanings that everyday talk and discourse outside of the classroom relies upon. Mehan's isolation of the triple, initiation/response/evaluation sequence characteristic of teacher talk has far-reaching implications for understanding not only sequences of classroom talk but also the nature of schooling as a sociolinguistic process. This is a good example of the way that sociolinguistic research has shown that what is to be learnt is often secondary to the way information is presented, leading to a hope that changing teaching styles would also make more available the content of school knowledge, whether in language or mathematical literacy.

Recent research on discourse has explored the way that teacher and students together interactively create learning environments which then shape or constrain further learning opportunities. An example of the constraints that can occur as a result of interaction between student and teacher is shown in the studies of Michaels, looking at teachers' conduct of sharing time in first grade classrooms (Michaels, 1982) or in reading lessons (Green, 1977, 1983). Such research as this has pinpointed the way in which students from different linguistic and social backgrounds bring a different set of discourse expectations into the earliest literacy tasks and showed how oral preparation for literacy is constrained by both the unconscious and unexplicated requirements of the literacy learning task in school. Neither teacher nor student are fully aware of the culturally specific character of the narrative expectations that the child brings to school and how violation or alteration of these discourse norms can be felt as both threatening and puzzling. Duran (1981), following a similar line of inquiry, looked at the ways cultural differences influence

the responses of bilingual children to narrative tasks. He explored what these differences can mean for the cognitive processing of discourse and the task of literacy learning. The deepening of our understanding of discourse processes at both the linguistic and the social level has given us more insight into some of the earlier issues of identity and instructional process and the interaction of these two in classroom learning.

More recent research on classroom discourse, described in *The Social Construction of Literacy*, has looked again at the problem of differential learning and its relation to the acquisition of literacy (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). In one of his studies of the sociolinguistic implications of reading instruction, Collins shows the discourse nature of the literacy learning task provided by teachers for children. In different teaching groups, lower-group students are presented with a word-by-word pattern of recognition strategies which provides for segmented discourse, while higher-group students are encouraged to make a discourse-level coherent pattern of strings of sentences. The strategies used with the higher group are appropriate for tests of reading competence, whereas the lower ability groups stress word and sound recognition, often to the detriment of discourse-level comprehension tasks. Such differential instruction strategies, therefore, serve to reinforce ability grouping.

In studying the construction of literacy as a social and communicative process, we noted that when the findings on the discourse character of learning opportunities were combined with recent sociological research on the organizational implications of grouping in classrooms (Eder, 1986; Collins, 1986), the processes through which literacy is socially constructed were more clearly revealed. We can see that learning in classrooms requires several systems or levels of meaning to interact with the organizational constraints of classroom learning environments, instructional strategies and communicatively-based evaluations and the bureaucratic requirements of schooling, for example the statewide reading tests. This research shows that, over time, a reproduction of grouping relations tends to take place from grade to grade, as patterns of instruction are functionally related to teacher-evaluated group competence and to student performances that are contextually sensitive. Mehan, Hertwick, & Meihlis (1986) studied school decision-making processes of student referral. Their research established that there are complex interactions between communicative interaction in the classroom, a teacher's evaluation of a student's behavior, and the longer-term processes of assembling a school record of demonstrable abilities. Together, these factors serve to constitute a student's school life career. In the aggregate, these careers provide for the socially-constructed reality of schooling and its outcomes, which give the substance to such phenomena as literacy rates and school-leaving test scores.

In generating such records, the decision-making processes are not subject to a simple linear process of what Mehan et al. (1986) refer to as centralized rational decision-making plans, but are informed by a variety of localized face-to-face interactional decisions influenced by all the subtlety of verbal and non-verbal cues that have been uncovered in the studies of classroom discourse. A major assumption of these studies is that better teaching practices may result from a detailed understanding of the ways by which teachers provide all manner of intentional linguistic-content information and implicit paralinguistic cues to learning. By focusing on how the interactional system is sociolinguistically created, we can provide new theoretical links between the learner, what is to be learnt, and the process of learning. Less student-teacher misunderstanding of each other's discourse patterns and sociolinguistic code would provide for a more direct transmission of knowledge as the content of what is to be learnt. It is in direct response to these assumptions that the program of research in interactional sociolinguistics is addressed.

An Interactional Perspective

As we pointed out above, studies in classroom interaction have highlighted the essentially interactive and cooperative nature of teaching and learning. For example, we have argued that in ethnically mixed classrooms, students and teachers utilize the inherent linguistic diversity of the classroom population to create environments where speech differences can be used to achieve rhetorical effects, effects that improve the effectiveness of classroom learning.

Building on these earlier insights, one of the main uses of sociolinguistics from an interactional perspective is to show in some detail how this rhetorical effectiveness is achieved. This approach to language differs from others in that it takes a communicative rather than a purely language-centered perspective. Language is seen not as an abstract grammatical and semantic system; rather, the focus is on the process of verbal communication in which culturally-based background knowledge, along with information about context, enters into an inferential process through the symbolic mediation of language to produce situated interpretations. Therefore, such an approach does not start with the assumption of linguistic form as a separable phenomenon, but with communication as an essentially dialogic process, and meaning as situationally specific.

Along with many other students of discourse, we assume that understanding in everyday encounters is, in large part, a matter of inferences that rely both on linguistic presuppositions and knowledge of the world, much of which is culture-bound and contextually specific. In addition, the processes by which we assess the validity and persuasiveness of an argument and judge the attitudes of our interlocutors are themselves culturally specific, as they assume sharing of cultural presuppositions. Although what is analyzed is the interpretation of lexical and nonlexical signs, the analytical points of departure are speech activities, treated as units of social interaction and occurring within the context of specific events, not particular linguistic forms or expressions. Our concern, then, is not with grammatically or semantically defined utterances per se, or even with speech acts, but with the context-bound processes of interpretation and speaking (Gumperz, 1982a).

Our approach to schooling processes focuses on the interplay of linguistic, contextual and social presuppositions which interact to create the conditions for classroom learning. These presuppositions, we assume, apply to interpretations made within the context of definable speech events which stand out against the background of everyday interaction. They have characteristics which can be understood and described by ethnographers and recognized by participants. Moreover, knowledge of the events and what is accomplished by them is common to groups of people; they are not occasional occurrences but have a place in the daily conduct of affairs of groups.

Ethnographers of communication have shown that speech events constitute miniature social systems that can be described in terms of associated beliefs and values, the social relationships that are enacted, norms specifying who can participate and in what capacity, and expectations about suitable topics and themes and about appropriate speech styles. Furthermore, events often terminate in outcomes that provide empirical evidence for what it was that participants intended at any prior point in the event.

Language in the classroom can be seen as part of the language of the school setting; characteristics of particular classroom situations of children of different ages are seen to occur regularly as speech routines held together through the daily practices of teachers and students; that is, there are features of these routines which are similar across all classroom contexts and some that vary as schooling progresses. Classroom ethnography studies in

different age grades, covering interaction in and out of school, show regularity in speech-event occurrences and in the norms that govern these isolable events (Gilmore & Glatthorn, 1982).

Theory of Communication as Interpersonal Inferencing

Our interest in speech events, however, is not in their structural characteristics as such. That is, we are not primarily interested in exploring participant structures, or norms of participation that exist in different cultural groups and govern the type and quantity of interaction that make up the event. Rather, what we want to show is how participants' expectations of these structures, that is, their assumptions of what an event is about and what the relevant norms are, enter into the interpretation of particular messages. We therefore draw on yet another academic tradition, the recent work in linguistic pragmatics and speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Cole & Morgan, 1975; Levinson, 1983). This work provides some basic insights into the perspective on language on which a relevant theory of interpretation must be based.

Departing from earlier traditions of semantic analysis that tended to concentrate on the relation of words to objects and concepts in the extralinguistic world, linguistic pragmatists argue that meaning must be studied at the level of discourse in terms of the communicative effect that a sender tends to produce by means of a message (Grice, 1989). Thus, the illocutionary force of what is said, rather than the propositional content, becomes the main object of analysis. It has been shown that conversationalists frequently rely on context-dependent presuppositions, as well as on other types of extralinguistic knowledge, to arrive at interpretations that often have little relation to propositional content. If, for example, the teacher in class is heard to say, "I don't see any hands," when a question has been asked, her utterance will be interpreted as a request for a show of hands and perhaps as a directive to be silent, rather than as a simple descriptive statement. In interpreting what is intended, children, apart from processing what they hear, build on knowledge of what classroom environments require and on the goal of instruction.

The indirect inferencing illustrated here is an inescapable feature of everyday communication; it is not exceptional. Successful instruction depends on it to a degree that is not ordinarily realized. Although it is the overt aim of school talk and part of our implicit notion of pedagogy that all relevant information must be explicitly lexicalized or put into words, it is also true that such explicitness can never be achieved in practice. What teachers and grammarians may see as simple, clear utterances (for example, instructions such as "Draw a line on the bottom of the page") can only be put into action with reference to a complex set of unverbalized understandings that must be negotiated in the course of classroom interaction.

Thus, the interactional approach to sociolinguistics rests upon a notion of interpretation which enables us to deal with linguistic and social aspects of language usage within a single, unified theoretical and analytical framework. This work points the way towards a more integrated approach to language, social relations, and social structuring from which a more detailed theory of how social relations enter into communication can be developed.

An ethnography of communicative situations describes the speech economy of any group or setting (Hymes, 1974), such as a school classroom or a series of classrooms within a school, by examining the patterns of events over time and space (i.e., in different settings, different schools or classrooms). However, from an interactional perspective, events as such, while a critical part of the structuring of social life, do not constitute what is most important about the whole communicative experience of participants in a school

classroom setting. It can be shown that participants' knowledge or expectation of such events play an important part in our interpretation of what transpires. We can assume that these expectations become part of the schemata or interpretive frames which channel our understanding. The degree to which schemata are known, how schematic information is signaled and learnt, and to what extent learning is a matter of sociocultural background, is crucial to our understanding of the communicative dimensions of instructional processes. Schematic knowledge thus provides the overall perspective which enables us to integrate bits of information into a coherent argument. When schematic knowledge is not shared, as is often the case in linguistically and culturally diverse settings, what seems like the same message in terms of overt propositional content may be interpreted differently by different individuals. This is how pejorative attitudes and stereotypes arise and are perpetuated in communication.

What does schematic knowledge consist of and how is it conveyed? Discourse analysts in the past have tended to treat schemata as matters of extralinguistic knowledge, that is, knowledge that speakers learn to utilize in the normal course of the language acquisition process and which all competent speakers can be said to possess. But if we take an interactional perspective on understanding as a phenomenon negotiated through conversational processes, serious questions arise as to the extent to which such knowledge is shared. Conversation of all kinds presuppose active cooperation between producers of information and listeners who provide feedback, either by means of direct responses or through alternate forms of backchannel signaling. Such cooperation cannot be taken for granted. To enlist conversational cooperation, potential speakers must induce others to cooperate; that is, they must somehow convey at least some advance information on what the outcome of the extended exchange may be. Once talk has begun, moreover, initial schemata are subject to frequent change, and such schema changes have to be negotiated in the course of the interaction. Further problems arise with the allocation of turns at speaking. Individuals do not automatically control the conversational space to present or develop an argument. They must work to retain their turn by signaling what they intend, and thus enabling others to predict where their own responses might fit in.

In this way, we can see that interpretation of all kinds, that is, in informal talk as well as in classroom instruction situations, normally seen as task-oriented activities focusing on objective—that is, fact-oriented—information transfer, depends on participants' use of signaling or, as we call them, contextualization strategies (Gumperz, 1982a; Cook-Gumperz, 1986) to establish contexts favorable to communicative effectiveness. Work on interaction in the classroom, while taking off from ethnographic observations aimed towards the isolation of key speech events in classrooms, ultimately concentrates on such interactional questions. Among other things, research focuses on the conversational processes by which definable events are established as special sequences within the stream of activities that makes up classroom talk. For classroom members, the daily movement through time, event to event, is part of the essential communicative knowledge of when an event is happening, how shifts in activity take place, how such a shift becomes a new context which tells what to expect next and how to interpret what is said. We assume that interaction in classroom settings, like verbal interaction everywhere, is guided by a process of conversational inference which relies on participants' production and perception of verbal and nonverbal cues that contextualize the stream of daily talk activity. By means of such contextualization cues, participants recognize speech activities as part of wider sequences of talk through which contexts are identifiable. In this way, schemata are created and employed by participants to frame each other's situated interpretations. Contextualization cues together form a system which creates a nexus of significations by which interaction progresses and through which moves make up specific events. Although these transitory and transitional conversational phenomena have situated

and localized interpretations, they also provide a continuing thematic thread through which participants across time build up specific inferential chains of understandings.

Thus, our task as interactional sociolinguists in modern educational settings is to chart the process by which theories of educability are put into daily practice, and to uncover the implicit theory of learning that underlies classroom strategies and that informs the teachers' practices and the schools' policies.

Conclusion: Interactional Sociolinguistics and Literacy Research

Our review of recent research suggests that changes which result from the studies of classroom language and teaching as a (socio)linguistic process may be somewhat more complex than was at first expected twenty-five years ago. The key hope then was that improved understanding of the language of interactional exchanges between teacher and student, and student and student, could guide an improvement of practice both at the interactional, at the curriculum, and at the policy level. It was expected that by creating new instructional environments one would eradicate the problems of differential learning. While some important effects can be demonstrated, particularly where researchers have worked with and influenced teachers and their classroom practices, even if only for a short period (for example, Heath, 1983), the influence of research ideas on outcomes has not been so easy to see at the level of students' after-school careers. Thus, disappointments with sociolinguistic explanations have been voiced (see Mehan, 1989). One reason may be that we considered the chain of cause and effect to be more simplistic than is actually the case. Many of the critical questions that have been asked look for immediate changes in classroom practices as the key rather than looking beyond, in a different time frame, at questions of changing pedagogies or theories of learning which can have a long-term effect on practices. The study of social interaction through language provides a perspective on learning which is sensitive to the complexities of interactive decision-making, where changes in any part of a multiple interactional system can lead to any of several consequences, each one of which forms a different social context for further actions.

The following kinds of questions suggest the need to look at wider implications of classroom language use. Can increased understanding of the communicative contexts which shape classroom literacy practices influence outcomes not only in the early grades, but also initiate changes that can be maintained in later grades? Can improvement in understanding the processes of communication be seen to influence issues of remedial literacy and to reverse differential learning of different social groups in the school, thereby breaking the cycle of class and reproduction of educability? (Macleod, 1987). If sociolinguistic research is to be seen as influencing the outcomes of schooling, that is, the ability to get to get a job or be admitted to college, these are some of the questions that need to be asked. Now to return to our theme at the beginning of this paper, why does an interactional sociolinguistic approach have a special usefulness for literacy research? To answer this general question we will propose some issues that essentially involve the use of (micro) sociolinguistic analysis.

Future Research Issues

First, micro-sociolinguistic analysis provides a detailed view of what is required to learn literacy. The sociolinguistic study of literacy shows the many ways in which judgments about language and about speakers, hearers and readers enter into daily life. Much of the current educational policy writings about literacy present arguments as if literacy were the sum total of the test scores and other activities that concern educational policy makers and make up pedagogical systems. That literacy is grounded in actions and reactions to the daily use of language seems sometimes forgotten. Sociolinguistics reminds

us that literacy is language in use as discourse practices that are associated with textual creation and interpretation.

Second, not only are we suggesting that microanalysis is necessary to find out the differences of language used in actual situations, but we are also suggesting that there is an interweaving of spoken and written understanding of text which forms a basis for any appreciation of literacy practices in daily life. Speech practices, story-telling, and other ceremonial performances of talk provide a rhetorical rules and stylistic options that are part of the sociolinguistic uses of language that influence written texts (Tannen, 1989).

Third, an associated point is that judgments about literacy performance rest not on grammar nor on stylistic judgments alone but on the perception of language use as a form of social action. Differences of stylistic and other communicative choices are guided by a social understanding of the discourse in context. Discursive practices can be seen to shape interaction and to constrain the presentation of self. From this interactional perspective we can see that judgments made about literate performances of others are contextualized discourse decisions justified, or rather rationalized, after the fact as matters of language capability. As we have suggested above, these decisions are a matter of cues and presuppositions based on knowledge of discursive practices of one's own language applied to other interpretive situations. If matters of gatekeeping judgments can be re-examined in light of these sociolinguistic views, then decisions about literacy learning and performance can be re-evaluated.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, we return to the issue raised at the beginning of this chapter, involving the whole question of uses of other languages and dialects. As Resnick pointed out in a recent article on the history of literacy and schooling, "a language is a dialect that has an army, a navy and an air force—from a linguistic point of view." However, as Resnick goes on to say from his own perspective as a historian, "dialects encourage diversity and community but they can undermine political unity" (1990, p. 24). Throughout the history of American schooling, English has counted as the language of the nation and therefore of schooling. Schooling has been relied on to make a "people" of diverse immigrant groups. School literacy was reading and writing in English; apart from brief periods in the 1880's and 90's, no interest has been shown in dialects or alternative languages.

The ideology of school literacy is one of the rise of standard English not only as an historical legacy but as part of the continuing assumptions on which many judgments of literate performance are made. But as recent writings in bilingualism have suggested, there is a need in the end of the 20th century to rethink these traditional views on the "language of schooling" (Hakuta, 1986; Grosjean, 1983; Porter, 1990). Sociolinguistic research provides a perspective which makes possible the exploration of the relationship of different discursive practices of other languages and dialects. From this perspective, researchers continue to question not only how literacy is acquired but also how literate forms are judged in terms of social and linguistic presuppositions that are informed by stylistic choices and options in other dialects and languages, not only in standard English.

Notes

1. The effect of early sociolinguistic research, as described in what are by now generally known, basic volumes such as *Language and Social Context* (Giglioli, 1972, reprinted in 1980), *Directions in Sociolinguistics* (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972), and *Functions of Language* (Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1972), was to offer a consistent body of research findings which provided both a different perspective on language and a new agenda for educational research and which, among other things, also make significant contributions to theory.

2. There was research interest in classroom processes before the paradigm shift to the study of language as linguistic influences and interactional patterns. Methodologically, the earlier approaches focused on a rating and scaling of the content of different categories of teacher-student response and exchange. Theoretically, this approach, recently called the product-process model of classroom interaction (Flanders, 1970 [reviewed in Cazden, 1988]) focused on the informational content and the style of the verbal message given by the teacher, its reception by the student, and the effect this has on measures of the interactional patterns in the classroom, such as density and frequency of interaction between students and the teacher. The contribution of the linguistic form of the verbal message towards understanding and the linguistic nature of responses of the students were not considered. But this approach did serve to document the importance of studying the interactional patterns in classrooms and their contribution toward creating a learning environment.

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