

Editorial Introduction:

A PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIOLINGUISTICS

This special issue of the *Kansas Journal of Sociology: Studies in Sociolinguistics* is intended to introduce sociologists to a relatively new field which has drawn on and owes much to the related field of sociology proper. Sociolinguistics treats the social and linguistic implications of variable language behavior. Language use varies across time, space, social groups (as defined by class, age, sex, culture, etc.), situations and elsewhere. Systematic, empirically-based research into language variation and its implications promises to yield insights into man as a social creature and as an individual. An interesting example of the insight possible through sociolinguistic study is William Labov's early (1963) work in Martha's Vineyard. In his "Social Motivation of a Sound Change" (*Word*, 19: 273-309) Labov demonstrates that an individual's choice between two pronunciations of the diphthong in a word like "might" indicates whether he desires to belong to the local community or to reject it. Thus, language change can be seen operating through social processes of group identification, with the behavior of the individual highly correlated to the use of a linguistic feature he himself may not be aware of. Although young, sociolinguistics has an extensive bibliography which demonstrates a wide range of thought. Practical limitations of time and space prevent this issue from being "representative." It is, however, indicative.

Speculation about the relationship between language use and social structure is no recent phenomenon. That this is so should not be surprising—for whenever modern man becomes urbanized, varying forms are brought from the countryside and into contact, leading to the development of spoken and written standard forms which their adherents see as being superior both to rural dialects and to non-standard varieties in the cities. For the most part, until the present century, speculation about intra-language variation was quite often moralistically-based self-justification for those who considered themselves standard speakers and writers. Or, in the reverse mood of self-abnegation, dialects were considered the more worthy forms of the language, uncorrupted by the artificiality of urban life. Thus, when historical linguists of the nineteenth century encountered problems in tracing the development of language forms from earlier times to their current standards, they sought to obtain forms from rural dialects thinking that the countryside would yield more "pure" data. What they found, of course, were even more complications. The dichotomy between the standard languages (of London, Paris, Rome, etc.) and dialects was (and to a great extent is) considered to be a definite one, linked to a superior-inferior judgment.

As indicated above, rural dialects were not the only variant forms of a language which came under scrutiny. In eighteenth-century England much attention was focused on the notions of good English versus bad English, standard versus non-standard. All of us who have ever had to cope with the slippery matters of usage—"hadn't ought," "shall or will," double negatives, etc.—are heirs to dicta laid down by the Bishop Lowth's, the Dr. Johnson's and other writers involved in the attempt to standardize and fix the English language. London, of course, had been in the process of developing and becoming a standard for close to four hundred years, doing so by drawing together and fusing forms from a wide variety of geographical

dialects brought from all over England, raising the resulting amalgamation to a written standard followed in time by a spoken standard. But in the eighteenth century (and of course to the present) there were still many variant forms to be heard among people of various social classes. Naturally (or so it seemed), some forms were better than others, and it happened that the better forms were those of the best people, including the writers themselves. Popular opinion today reflects the more scholarly opinion of one and two centuries ago.

During the present century, scholars known as linguistic geographers (or dialectologists) began to examine speech variation in a more systematic manner. Equipped with research into population movements and cultural change, especially-prepared questionnaires, and field workers trained in both linguistics and dialectology, they went into the field to collect geographically varying forms of a language. Not only did they find geographical variations, which they interpreted culturally as well as linguistically, but they also found much variation within an area, even within a community. Thus, when in the 1920's American linguists turned their attention to American English variations through a project known as the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada*, directed initially by Hans Kurath, they altered the European models of such studies by specifying that informants be grouped into one of three social types. With a continuing interest in social variation existing within geographical speech areas, this project continues today under the direction of Raven I. McDavid, a contributor to this issue.

During the 1940's and 1950's, anthropology, a field with close connections to American linguistic study, turned its attention to social variation in language. Cultural anthropologists such as William Bright reported on such matters as linguistic variation as a function of caste status in a village in India. Sociology, too, was contributing to the developing study of the interaction of speech and social structure through studies in the sociology of language as well as the study of social structure itself.

But it has been the last ten years which have witnessed a rapid expansion, intensification and integration of the systematic explanations of the linguistic implications of social structure (and to a certain extent, the social implications of linguistic variation). This rapidly developing field, which goes under the cover term of *sociolinguistics*, receives contributions from a number of older disciplines—principally anthropology, sociology, linguistics—but also from psychology, speech and others. Although each has had its own goals and methods, at least partial fusion appears to be inevitable.

During this past decade the above-mentioned approaches operated on the assumption that speakers who belong to a given culture learn not only the grammar of their native language but also rules of speech usage which are to be applied by differing sub-groups (defined by social status, age, sex, etc.) in appropriate situations. Much of the work in the field has been directed at the implications of this assumption. Thus, Basil Bernstein, a sociologist working in London in the early 1960's, studied lower-class and middle-class informants, formulating the concept of elaborated versus restricted code in which lower-class speakers were seen as having a restricted code which allowed fewer syntactic and conceptual complications and integrations than the middle-class elaborated code. This controversial view was adopted in modified form by a number of American educational psychologists who introduced the concept, often labeled deficit theory, into many Headstart programs.

In this country sociolinguists turned their attention to urban settings where social markings of speech behavior are usually quite salient. William Labov in New York City and Walt Wolfram, Ralph Fasold and Roger Shuy in Detroit used

standard sociometric techniques and devices to study language variation and its correlation to social status. Out of these and similar studies came an interest in the speech of a specific sub-group—Blacks. Work in Black English (the speech of lower-class, usually young Blacks) has been the most concentrated study of any social group. Black speech studies in New York City, Detroit, Washington, D. C., Memphis and elsewhere have yielded controversies of their own. Most notable is the disagreement between those who believe that the speech of Blacks is historically derivable in most part the same way all other American dialects are, that is, as a result of poly-dialectal English colonization, and those who hold that Black speech is derived from a creole language (a nativized *lingua franca* resulting from the fusion of two languages) brought from Africa, a base which is held to be still apparent in the speech of many Blacks. (One of the leading exponents of this position, J. L. Dillard, is a contributor to this issue.) A pedagogical consequence of the latter view is that Black English speakers should be treated, to a limited extent, as speakers of a foreign language, with special texts, drills, etc., to initiate them into written language skills and, perhaps, into spoken standard. Out of these and other urban language studies (such as Lee Pederson's in Chicago) have come an array of methodological tools forged from existing techniques of sociology, linguistic geography and the experience of the researchers themselves.

American cultural and social anthropologists have given us another strain of sociolinguistics, one referred to as ethnography of communication or ethnolinguistics, the study of the competence of intuitive knowledge of the members of a culture. John Gumperz, Dell Hymes and Joshua Fishman (a contributor to this issue) have published prolifically in this area, with some of the most powerful insights coming from studies of bilingualism, such as that of Puerto Ricans in New York City. A somewhat related issue is that of the study of creole languages (which in turn is related to the study of Black English, as indicated above). The work of David DeCamp, Derek Bickerton, Beryl Bailey and others in the somewhat special problems of creole languages has presented useful research tools (such as the implicational series techniques of arranging variable data used by James C. Woodward in this issue) and valuable insights into more conventional language situations.

And finally there is sociolinguistic research which seeks as one of its primary goals to develop insights into the linguistic process itself through the advancement of linguistic theory. This is not to say that work in the above areas is not conducive to such use—it is more a matter of emphasis on a socio-to-linguistic scale. Research in this area by such linguists as William Labov, Walt Wolfram, Ralph Fasold and C. N. J. Bailey uses variable linguistic data to help explain mechanics of historical language change and to refine standard generative linguistic theory by introducing variable rules to replace optional rules. The concept of variable rule is a controversial one as it not only introduces extra-linguistic (social) parameters into the notion of linguistic competence (the set of internalized rules every native speaker has which allows him to produce and comprehend his language) but also because it is based on statistical data, whereas in standard theory linguistic rules do or do not operate, without reference to statistical fluctuations of observed data. Linguistically-oriented sociolinguistics, moreover, like all other areas of sociolinguistics, is very firmly empirically based, whereas standard generative work is intuitive in practice as well as in theory. Recent work in this area of sociolinguistics has departed from earlier and other sociolinguistic research by asserting the primacy of linguistic data in determining social categories rather than using standard sociological breakdowns as the frame onto which linguistic data is attached.

The articles in this issue, of course, speak for themselves. They are arranged with more general articles interspersed among the more specific articles; also, when possible, articles have been arranged so that those dealing with similar topics or taking contrasting views are adjacent. Neither in fact nor intent is this special issue comprehensive or integrated; it is a sampling of the kind of work that is done under the rubric "sociolinguistics." Reid Luhman's "On Language Use and Social Structure" draws on Piaget's studies in the cognitive development of children as well as studies of bilingualism to suggest a view of social structure in which it is both marked by and defined by varying uses of linguistic structures. A more specific sociologically-oriented study is Joshua Fishman's interpretation of varieties of Yiddish as being in part a result of a creolization process in his "The Phenomenological and Linguistic Pilgrimage of Yiddish."

Raven I. McDavid and Raymond O'Cain in "Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Geography" comprehensively comment on the growing pains of the multifaceted new field of study and in the process illumine the overlapping nature and purposes of both approaches indicated in their title. J. L. Dillard's "The American Koine-Origin, Rise, and Plateau Stage" approaches the problem of the historical development of American English varieties from the perspective of a creolist, developing a *koine* theory of rapid early homogenization of English in America as opposed to the view which holds that a mixture of English dialects results in present standard and dialectal American English. James C. Woodward applies the concept of *diglossia* (different languages coexisting but used for different purposes) and the technical tool of implicational analysis to variations in the use of sign languages among the deaf. Similarly, Gerald Denning, within a context of characterizing recent sociolinguistic research, examines some linguistic consequences of Spanish-English bilingualism in Kansas.

The final two articles deal with sociolinguistics as applied to the study of Black English. From slightly different perspectives the authors reach some of the same conclusions but with important differences. Robert Hopper, arguing against earlier deficit and bi-dialectal approaches to pedagogical problems of Black English speakers, redefines the problem and suggests an alternative approach. Glendon Drake argues forcefully for social attitudes as the basic operator in the Black English situation and suggests that any approach, linguistic or otherwise, which does not take this into account will fail.

The above brief outline is intended to orient the reader of this issue who may be totally new to the field of sociolinguistics. The categories will dissolve under informed scrutiny. Goals, emphasis, and techniques vary almost directly with the individual researcher. Many more names of leading researchers could have been cited. Further areas of research that could be termed "sociolinguistic" certainly exist. Sociolinguistics is a young, developing field, where the process of sifting, winnowing, mixing and blending of goals and techniques is really just beginning. Through reading this issue, pursuing the bibliographical references in it and seeking out references to the above-cited researchers, the interested reader could quickly make himself a knowledgeable observer of a fascinating and increasingly important field of study.

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December, 1973