PARIS

Sociolinguistics

A critical survey of theory and application

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Translated from the German by
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Preface to the English edition

This book was meant in the first place as a source of information for German readers concerning the state of research and theory in sociolinguistics. It seemed that, in a German context, where sociolinguistics was going through its first, tentative stages, the book could fulfil a useful function, the more so since early sociolinguistic work in Germany was heavily oriented towards Bernstein's theory. In this context, an attempt at a broader, perhaps even comprehensive, survey seemed appropriate. The immediate relevance of sociolinguistic work for important and pressing social problems connected with education and underprivileged groups was a further reason to produce the original book.

When the book was completed, however, it seemed that it might also be put to good use outside the Federal Republic of Germany, and in particular in the English-speaking world. The essential developments in sociolinguistics came, and still come, from there, witness the work of Uriel Weinreich, Charles Ferguson, Joshua Fishman, Basil Bernstein, Dell Hymes, John Gumperz, and, above all, William Labov. It is natural to assume that a survey of sociolinguistics should find a public in the Anglo-Saxon world.

This book has as its two principal focal points the work of Bernstein and that of Labov. My concern with Bernstein's theory and related investigations in the first three chapters is to be seen against the background of the Federal Republic of Germany, where this theory was dominant in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Apart from these local considerations, however, there seems to be ample justification for an extensive critique in English of this theory, which has had an immense influence, not only in sociolinguistics but also, and mainly, in education.

I would like to mention that the closing chapter of the book should be seen as a very succinct and incomplete account of questions which really need a much deeper and fuller treatment. Perhaps the chapter as it stands will provide material for thought and thus lead to further work in this area. Although I considered rewriting it completely for the English edition, I finally decided against doing so: a new book would have resulted. Some constructive contributions to the solution of the problems discussed in chapter 7 should be contained in the reports, to be made available shortly, on a project on Pidgin German of foreign workers in the Federal Republic of Germany, which is at present being carried out at Heidelberg.

That the present English edition is not only a correct but also an exemplary translation is due mainly to the very detailed care given to it by Pieter Seuren. By eliminating printing errors and stylistic ambiguities, and by giving his comments on various details, he has helped to bring about essential improvements over the German edition. I am, moreover, indebted to him for numerous suggestions

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concerning points of linguistic theory. The most manifest results of these suggestions are to be found in the sections on Fishman's use of the term 'diglossia' and on Labov's description of negation in Black English Vernacular. I have gratefully incorporated his suggestions into the text of this edition. Given the intensity with which Pieter Seuren has occupied himself with problems of sociolinguistics and linguistic variation, I would like to add a personal remark. There is nothing more satisfying for an author than to find that his work is read with care, and thoroughly discussed and evaluated on its merits and demerits. This satisfaction I had when Pieter Seuren visited me in Heidelberg for a whole week to discuss the book and its translation step by step. The final result is an English edition which has been revised and improved on numerous points.

Finally, I owe a word of appreciation to Peter Sand and Kevin Whiteley, without whose great personal dedication and very hard work the translation of the book in such a short time would have been unthinkable. If, by any chance, their study of Goethe and Schiller, so highly valued at Oxford, should have suffered because of this work, let them be forgiven: any such shortcoming would be testimony to their great engagement and to the importance and relevance of sociolinguistic problems.

Konstanz—Heidelberg
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Introduction

'If linguistic research is to help as it could in transcending the many inequalities in language and competence in the world today, it must be able to analyse these inequalities. In particular, a practical linguistics so motivated would have to go beyond means of speech and types of speech community to a concern with persons, and social structure. . . .

Beyond the structure of ways of speaking, then, is the question of explanation, and beyond that, the question of liberation. . . .

The final goal of sociolinguistics . . . must be to preside over its own liquidation.'

Dell Hymes, *The scope of sociolinguistics*

'And this is where the sociolinguist faces his moral dilemma. He will perceive the ideal solution to a language problem, a solution which is certainly influenced by his liberal and moral values, and there will be very little possibility of such a solution ever being implemented by those directly faced with results—. . . the teachers, the parents and the children. What then should he do?'

Christina B. Paulston, *On the moral dilemma of the sociolinguist*

In the last decade sociolinguistics has become a powerful factor in promoting emancipation. Attempts have been and are being made to attenuate conflicts in schools and to remove the obvious inequality of opportunity of broad sections of the working classes and peripheral social groups by systematically exposing the connection between speech forms and class structure, and by application of the insights gained to specified social contexts. How this should come about, and whether it is at all possible, are the questions that have essentially motivated this work. We seek to convey the theoretical positions and empirical methods of sociolinguistics which, for reasons of educational policy, have arisen in Great Britain, in the USA and in the Federal Republic of Germany. It is our aim that these will thus be made available to a wide public for critical examination. For this reason unpublished material has been included as much as possible in this presentation.

We shall endeavour to demonstrate the extension of traditional methods of linguistic description by new sociolinguistic methods for the description of speech behaviour, variation and linguistic change. We shall, moreover, attempt to establish their correlation with the social system and with interests prevailing in it. From this we derive a twofold task: to achieve a comprehensive and accurate presentation of sociolinguistic theory, method and application; and to illustrate the discrepancies existing in the field as a whole, as well as the socially-

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conditioned contradictions inherent in certain approaches. As this study is primarily intended to supply basic information, only the barest outline of criticism can be provided: further critical consideration is called for. Essentially, therefore, the terminology of the works referred to has, in principle, been retained and has been criticized mainly in those sections where our critical opinion is given.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part, chapters 1–3, deals with Basil Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis. The second part, chapters 4–7, explains the theories of the Variability Concept which are based on linguistic notions and give the impression of being, sociologically speaking, value-free. These theories, which have arisen as a result of research into the speech behaviour of ethnic minorities in the USA, are as yet relatively unknown in the Federal Republic of Germany. In conclusion, a third part contains an annotated bibliography which is intended to provide a supplement to the book as well as easy access to information on specific questions and problems of sociolinguistics.

Chapter 1 is concerned solely with the presentation of the Deficit Theory formulated by Bernstein, which gave the first impetus to an investigation of speech barriers. In chapter 2, the Deficit Hypothesis is examined empirically, with detailed critical arguments, from the point of view of linguistics, psychology and sociology. In chapter 3 we pass from a rejection of the Deficit Hypothesis on internal grounds to an assessment of its sociopolitical significance, which is most clearly visible in its application to compensatory educational programmes. Chapter 4 sets out first to expound the differences between the Deficit Hypothesis and the Variability Concept, and then goes on to illustrate some basic concepts of the latter, putting them into the context of their linguistic and anthropological tradition. On the basis of this historical perspective, chapter 5 introduces the linguistic and sociological theories which describe and explain speech variation, linguistic change, bilingualism and multilingualism, touching on the socio-political reasons for their development. This section will concentrate on a résumé of linguistic methods. Chapter 6 demonstrates their application in the study of phonology, syntax and verbal interaction. The chief methods of empirical research in linguistic survey are discussed first, followed by an account of the results of correlative and functional studies of speakers' grammatical and communicative competence. In particular we shall consider the Urban Language Studies which were carried out by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, whose most important exponent is William Labov. The discussion in chapter 7 centres upon recommendations for changing school systems that arise from these investigations. On the basis of an outline of the connection between social and educational policies in the USA, we formulate a criticism of the social categories assumed in the Variability Concept approach. We conclude that there is no essential difference between the programmes advocated by the proponents of the Deficit Hypothesis and those of the Variability Concept, given that both approaches fail in their avowed aim to eliminate social inequality. It is recognized, however, that the more cautious techniques of social adaptation of ethnic minorities to the American norm, developed in the context of the Variability Concept, represent a considerable improvement on the compensatory programmes of the Deficit Hypothesis.

Christina Paulston claims that the dilemma facing sociolinguistics is that, whilst it is able to supply idealistic solutions to sociolinguistic problems, the actual realization of its proposals still remains dependent on socioeconomic factors and on the power politics of a particular society. If one adopts her view one will agree that the central points of interest of the present work are:

1 to offer the basis for an answer to the question: What academically justifiable and socially necessary task can be assigned to sociolinguistics?
2 to convey an impression of the practical relevance of sociolinguistics, derivable from theoretical and empirical research.[1]

[1] For stimulation and criticism in compiling this book I am indebted to Peter Hartmann, Wolfgang Klein, Gudula List, Eberhard Pause, Rainer Schneewolf, Wolf-Dieter Stempel, Angelika Weyler and Dieter Wunderlich. Their comments, critical remarks and discussions have contributed to this book in many different ways. In particular I wish to thank Gisela Feurle for her comments and suggestions: she has followed the composition of the book from beginning to end. Her influence on the form of argument and presentation is unmistakable in various passages, and in particular in chapter 7.

Special thanks are due to Schwipsy, an unusual koala bear, who always looked at me with wise understanding and friendship whenever I found myself caught up in difficult formulations.

1 The Deficit Hypothesis: Bernstein's assumptions on the correlation between speech and socialization

1.1 Groundwork and orientation

This chapter deals with the theory of the British sociologist Basil Bernstein that the social success of members of a society, and their access to social privileges, is directly dependent on the degree of organization of their linguistic messages.

He starts from the principle that the speech habits of particular social groups in the low income bracket who have little social influence (in sociological terms the lower class) differ syntactically and semantically from those of other groups, who are assured powerful and influential positions because of their material and intellectual privileges (in sociological terms the middle class). Furthermore he assumes that the differences in expression of both classes are not neutral but are assessable in relation to the actual social position involved. In this sense the lower classes may be socially handicapped as a consequence of their inadequate command of language, which is limited in comparison with that of the middle and upper classes.

Successful organization of speech messages is thus defined by the social success of its users, i.e. of the middle class.

Instead of analysing the manifest differences between the two linguistic varieties according to their various functional capabilities, the linguistic characteristics which divide the speech behaviour of the lower class from that of the middle class are interpreted as a deficit phenomenon on the basis of an *a priori* normative scale of values. That is to say, they are interpreted as precisely those linguistic attributes which lower-class speakers lack, in order to achieve the same social success as the speakers of the middle class. This central assumption that the speech of the lower class is more limited in its competence than the speech of the middle class will be termed the *deficit hypothesis* throughout. Numerous sociologists and psychologists have, in the course of the last few years, attempted to verify this hypothesis empirically.

The theory of the restricted linguistic ability of particular social groups compared with that of others was first formulated by Schatzmann and Strauss (1955), who questioned members of the lower and middle classes about their impressions and experiences directly after the occurrence of a disaster. They established that members of the lower classes were taking it for granted in their verbal accounts that the interviewers had been present at the scene of the disaster which they themselves had just witnessed. This subconscious assumption was clearly demonstrated by the fact that they never gave any explicit indication of place, circumstances and people involved to the interviewers, who had not been

present. On the contrary, they assumed these to be already known in that they used mainly nonspecific deictic particles in their referring expressions. Furthermore their verbal expressions were characterized by a display of emotion which gave rise to rapid speech and made their syntax elliptical and markedly paratactical. This gave the listener the impression that they were reliving the events of the disaster instead of giving the interviewers a comprehensive picture of what had happened.

The middle-class speakers, however, were able to do precisely this. They explained to the interviewers the events and circumstances of the disaster in a logical and chronological order, and gave detailed accounts of the people and place involved, taking into account the fact that the interviewers had not been present. The fluency of their apposite description reflected the emotional distance that they had maintained between themselves and the events observed.

Schatzmann and Strauss interpreted the difference between these two linguistic strategies in terms implying that the speakers from the lower class only conveyed their meaning implicitly, but those of the middle class did so explicitly.

This evidence together with additional observations led Bernstein in 1958 to distinguish between a 'public' language of the lower class and a 'formal' language of the middle class. In his later works (from 1962 onwards) he declared the public language to be the 'restricted' code and the formal language to be the 'elaborated' speech code. The 'restricted speech code' (approximately: limited range of linguistic expression), which is inferior to the 'elaborated speech code', capable of relatively complex and expressive linguistic organization, is considered by Bernstein to be a decisive cause of social inequality of opportunity. The theory behind Bernstein's distinction is that the different speech styles originate in the different psychological and social experiences of their speakers. He regards these experiences as being determined by membership of a particular social class.

The assertion of a dependency relation between ability of linguistic expression and sociopsychological experience is not a new one. As early as 1929 Sapir wrote that 'the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group' (Sapir 1929, 209), and Whorf took this a step further when he stated that 'the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity . . .' (Whorf 1956, 212). Whorf was of the opinion that different linguistic systems imply different social experiences. He also attempted to demonstrate this concept empirically by comparing Indian and European languages, thereby relying mainly on vocabulary and rules of grammar.

The colour adjectives are an extremely overworked example for demonstrating the dependency of thought on linguistic experiences. In different language communities the same colours are given varying verbal denotations. Thus English has only one adjective for the colour 'white', whereas the Eskimos differentiate linguistically between several shades of 'white'. The linguistic differentiation made by the Eskimos of the various shades of 'white' is clearly a result of their living conditions and their direct experiences, in particular of the daily necessity to distinguish between various types of snow.

The same correlation can be found in grammar, as in the example of the Hopi

Indians' concept of time. According to Whorf, the grammatical structure of the Hopi language does not exhibit any tenses in the way of our European languages (or any temporal adverbs or prepositions or indicators of time), which are based upon a physical concept of time. Whorf concludes from this absence of linguistic time indicators that in the life of the Hopis 'time' is not relevant to their experience.

Our examples are intended to illustrate in very simplified form the principle of Whorf's relativity theory, which, in his words, claims that 'users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world' (Whorf 1956, 221). In so far as linguistic structure, therefore, determines psychological social experience, and so creates diverging systems of social linguistic meaning in different language communities, Whorf's concept of language determinism is termed 'the linguistic relativity thesis'.

In many respects there are similarities between Whorf's and Bernstein's concepts of language. Both concepts are based on the theory that different linguistic forms produce different social experience. Whorf observed these differences chiefly in different language communities, but Bernstein transfers these observations to social barriers between classes within a society. Bernstein has added a decisive theoretical supplement to Whorf's relativity thesis with his assertion that it is primarily the social structure which determines linguistic behaviour and this in turn comes full circle to reproduce the former. The reproduction of the social structure by way of linguistic behaviour is a weaker formulation of Whorf's deterministic concept; it is in this weakened form, however, that it is integrated into Bernstein's wider conceptual scheme.

What the two concepts have in common is that they postulate a close relationship between language and the shaping of experience. According to Bernstein, however, this relationship is the reproductive part of a more vital relationship, which is the determination of linguistic behaviour through the social structure. Whereas Whorf's thesis is unilateral (grammar conditions experience), Bernstein's is circular: the social structure conditions linguistic behaviour, and this reproduces social structure. At this point, one should not overlook the fact that Whorf in no way denied the influence of society on language. Thus he writes: 'Which was first: the language patterns or the cultural norms? In main they have grown up together, constantly influencing each other' (Whorf 1956, 156). In the majority of his assertions, however, Whorf clearly opted for the causal primacy of language.

Bernstein has repeatedly stressed in his works the proximity of his concept to that of Whorf. He writes in his first essay: 'In this paper the valuable work of Whorf and Sapir has been used to explore the social implications of language' (quoted in Fishman 1968b, 226). The relative language-bound experience of speakers, and therefore the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, remains present in the distinction between restricted and elaborated speech codes, which Bernstein upholds in all his works. Thus one reads in Bernstein (1971a):

'Whorf, particularly where he refers to the fashions of speaking, frames of

consistency, alerted me to the selective effect of the culture upon the patterning of grammar together with the pattern's semantic and thus cognitive significance. Whorf opened up, at least for me, the question of the deep structure of linguistically regulated communication.'

Gumperz and Hymes also refer to the similarities between Bernstein and Whorf in their introduction to Bernstein (1972b):

> 'Bernstein places his work in relation to that of Whorf. Whorf, of course, did not consider the form of social relationships, or differences in function within a single language. He did, however, specify that it was not a language as such but rather a consistent active selection of its resources, a *fashion of speaking*, that was to be studied. Bernstein's delineation of communication codes can be seen as giving Whorf's insight new life and sociological substance.' (Gumperz and Hymes 1972, 471)

Since Bernstein's concept incorporates Whorf's relativist concept of language, we shall be concerned from now on solely with Bernstein's hypotheses. This can be justified on various grounds. From an empirical point of view, both theories deal with the demonstration of a dependency relationship between language and thought on the one hand, and language and social structure on the other. Up to this point what is valid for Bernstein in respect of this question is also valid for Whorf (with limitations). Historically, Whorf's work preceded that of Bernstein and was the subject of heated debate between 1950 and 1960. There is a vast range of critical literature on the subject of Whorf's relativity thesis; we shall not, therefore, resuscitate the issue.[1]

Considerations regarding the sociopolitical impact of scientific theories also necessitate a critical presentation of Bernstein's theories and their consequences.

In the wake of the general interest and application which Bernstein's theories have received, it is necessary to present a criticism of his ideas. It is, above all, the specific practical guidelines with respect to social application which motivate a critical examination of his theoretical position. In Bernstein's case it is not possible to separate theoretical conception from sociopolitical consequences, as will later become apparent. Finally, because Bernstein gave the crucial impetus to research into the problems of language behaviour specific to social classes, we must start our account of sociolinguistics with a discussion of his work.

First of all we shall explore the general theoretical concept of speech codes. We shall then examine their genesis during socialization. Finally, we shall deal with their sociological, psychological and linguistic correlates.

Between 1958 and 1972 Basil Bernstein published approximately 30 essays (cf. the bibliography) which reflects the basis of his theory with some considerable fluctuation in his attempts at definition and in the empirical material which he adduces.

He attempted to prove early formulations of his theory by means of empirical investigation (Bernstein 1962a, b). But while his work after 1962 is chiefly

[1] For a discussion of the Whorf hypothesis see Lenneberg and Roberts 1956 (empirical verification of the hypothesis); Hartig and Kurz 1971, 56–75 (survey of literature), Kutschera 1971, 280–340 (philosophically-oriented account) and Gipper 1972 (refutation).

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