Towards Linguistic Competence*

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Three streams of activity

Problems of linguistic discrimination and inequality simmer now, and may come to a boil in the next decade, yet most American linguistics is irrelevant to American society. In this respect, this article might have as its subtitle, 'The coming crisis in American linguistics'.

The shape and outcome of the crisis will depend on three streams of activity — on whether they converge, and if they do, when. One stream is within social science, and here I shall single out sociology; one is within linguistics; one is within socio-political life.

Sociology. A general trend in the social sciences is the attention to language and communication. Anthropology has long included work that dealt seriously with language; indeed, in the United States modern linguistics has its origin partly in anthropology. Psychologists have found that they can acquire sufficient expertise in linguistic tools to use them, and have done so to the extent that they partly shape the development of linguistics itself. Sociologists have mostly studied language in ways that did not require linguistics (movements of linguistic nationalism, language policy, language choice — societal or individual), and have discussed language without particulars beyond words. (One can study social movements, bureaucracies, and switching from Spanish to English, and expatiate on the importance of 'language' and 'meaning', without linguistics). That branch of sociology known as 'ethnomethodology' now confronts some of the concrete features of speech, but its contribution remains tied to programmatic assumptions not all can share. It is not helpful to be told again and again that 'indexicality' makes every use of words irreparably problematic (especially when this is an exaggeration), or, somewhat contrarily, that a conversational rule gleaned from English is effectively universal (es-

pecially when this is not true). A major motivation seems to be to expose sociology, not social exploitation, and to reduce the modern world-system to transcribable encounters. Nevertheless, there are valuable findings, and some indications of critical analysis of both linguistics and society. Still, no American sociology department, so far as I know, has hired a linguist to aid in its program of training. Such knowledgeable integration as occurs is due to the valiant efforts of a few individual sociologists (e.g., Cicourel, Fishman, Goffman, Grimshaw). As with other disciplines, the influence of linguistics seems to be felt more readily in analogy than in analysis (Cf. Gouldner 1974).

Please note that I make no plea for any school of linguistics, and indeed, ask sociologists not to admire and emulate, but to criticize the theory and social role of linguistics. Sociologists should make use of linguistic tools for their own purposes. In so doing, they can enlarge and transform what we know as language. The question is: will a sufficient body of sociologists acquire and use that competence?

The importance of this question becomes clear when we consider the other two streams of activity.

Linguistics. Three efforts share attention at the center of the linguistic stage. The older of the three efforts is that to establish a formal model of grammar. In the 1930s and 1940s an independent discipline of linguistics arose in the United States around the development of formal models in phonology, morphology, and syntactic surface structure. In the 1950s and 1960s, models of syntax have been greatly deepened, and linked increasingly with semantics. The famous name of course is Chomsky, but the last decade has seen increasing dissatisfaction with Chomsky's models, and outright rejection of them by many. An outlook known as 'generative semantics' has developed, considered by some successor to Chomsky's mantle. Many associated with this group reach out beyond the grammar of the sentence toward social life, through study of speech acts, deixis, conversational postulates, pragmatics, and the like, but on a methodological basis that precludes adequacy. On the one hand, work is kept as much as possible within the scope and format of grammar. The force of utterances as social acts (commands, requests, and the like), for example, may be explained in terms of 'underlying' verbs that are postulated only to be deleted. A true analysis of utterances as means of social acts would begin with social acts themselves. On the other hand, a methodological bias inherited from Chomsky limits sources of data to introspection and personal experience, and encourages easy generalizing, even universalizing, from these. Universal foundations of interaction are announced that unwittingly project the manners of middle-class American conversation between friendly equals.

A third group of linguistics pursue analysis of variation along lines establish-hed by Labov. This work has revitalized dialectology in the United States, and has brought new insight to the identification of social groups amid the apparent heterogeneity of urban speech. The emphasis on objective evidence, and convergent lines of proof, is particularly healthy. Still, the methodology is to be described as field work, more than as ethnography. The evidence sought in the field is an answer to questions within a model of linguistic change, not of speaking; an interview schedule is the usual instrument, and social characteristics are confined usually to a few standard parameters. As a result, only a portion of the socially organized characteristics of speech come into view. One learns at an entirely new level of relevance and accuracy whether and how often people use linguistic features, not much about the role of language in their lives.

This work does bring ethnicity and class into view, sometimes in a penetrating way. None of the three efforts takes account of the culture-specific roles of writing, and literacy.

Somewhat to the side, located more in anthropology and folklore, is work called 'ethnography of speaking', or 'ethnography of communication'. It involves active analysis of social relationships and events, and makes patterns and purposes of speech an explicit part of social inquiry. Its limited results so far are already a healthy corrective to facile generalization, and open up the basis for a systematic theory of speaking.

Socio-political life. The third stream of activity goes on outside the academy. It consists of the gradual mobilization of ethnic and minority groups around questions of language. This process began in the last decade with Black English, and is underway now notably with regard to Spanish. It is increasingly evident in Native American (Indian) communities, and, in San Francisco, among the Chinese. In 1968, indeed, the United States Congress passed a Bilingual Education Act, establishing the right of children to be taught in their native language. As a result of a suit brought on behalf of Chinese-speaking children in San Francisco *(Lau vs. Nichols),* the United States Supreme Court affirmed the Act.[1]

The mobilization around language goes on with little systematic knowledge on which to draw, or in terms of which to be criticized and assessed. Laymen, social scientists, and linguists alike proceed largely on the basis of received attitudes and stereotyped information. The elementary, most broadly unifying goal, is a place in schooling for a language not English. That goal is itself hard to win in the United States, and of those who accept it, only some have in mind the further goal of community maintenance of a language not English. Many who participate in bilingual education see it simply as a way

to replace some other language with English (or, say, with French, in the case of Cajun and Creole in Louisiana). Few who participate have the opportunity to transcend the class-linked perceptions and prejudices about language that are part of the cultural stratification of the country. The language problems of minority and ethnic groups, indeed of children and people generally, include the institutionalized forms of English itself, and the role that these forms play in cultural hegemony. There is little or no sign of critical analysis of this part of the total language situation from any side .

There are three levels of aspiration, then, for the mobilization now under way: a place in schooling for a language not English; community maintenance of a language not English; critical analysis of the total language situation, including the forms and uses of standard English itself. Of these three, only the third would challenge radically the social order. Only the first, minimal-goal, is at all strong. And it is in danger of being undermined by a cross-cutting educational goal, acquisition of money.

Research and knowledge may be in short supply, but given political pressure, money sometimes is not. It can emerge as the dominant factor. In a school in Colorado, the availability of funds for bilingual education has led to the appointment of a special aid, who visited classrooms, seeking children to fit the new program. The criterion of selection was knowledge of Spanish; that is, knowing Spanish = having a problem. One child picked out for assignment to special education was son of a professor at the University of Colorado. By dint of struggle, the father was able to have his son released from the remedial class. His son, of course, had no problem at all with language, or anything else; both English and Spanish were normally and fluently used at home. Other children, with fathers not so knowledgeable and positioned, may not be so fortunate.

Sometimes funds are obtained by communities on their own initiative, only to find a greater part of the funds going to supervening organizations and presumed experts, who may actually exclude persons with appropriate training and skills. A major part of the mobilization must be for true community initiative and control. Still, it may be a matter of chance if appropriate aid is available to a particular community. A local teacher or official, with the best of intensions, may have quite mistaken ideas as to the nature of writing, English, an Indian language, etc., reflecting the low level of knowledge of these things that is general in the United States. The needs and desires of many communities are such, that they press ahead in any case. In some parts of the country Indians are raising issues of language discrimination at the state level (e.g., the state of Washington); state authorities then may look for help in assessing the situation, but it is hard to find.

Action outstrips knowledge in response not only to pressure, but mandate of

law. Such is the case with Spanish in New York City. The school children in certain grades must be tested for assignment to bilingual classes by the beginning of the school year last fall. Four separate tests are required, for speaking, hearing, writing, and reading. There has been no research on which to draw to design and administer such tests fairly and accurately. Yet, because of the law, no doubt tests will be given, and children assigned.

It is possible that 'bilingual' education will be judged a failure before it has been possible to discover what it might appropriately be.

If sociology, linguistics, and mobilization around issues of language proceed on their present courses, at their present rates, then it seems likely that we will have studies of bilingual education, and the other facets of linguistic inequality, that come, like studies of riots, disasters, and events in the month of May, after the fact. Social science and linguistics will have had little to contribute in advance, either to challenged institutions or to insurgents seeking remedy.

If one were to try to do something about the situation in the United States, what should one try to do?

Five tasks can be singled out:

1 — remedy the degree to which the United States is a *terra incognita* with regard to quite elementary information as to varieties of language, and values as to their use;

2 — study the processes by which something linguistic comes to be recognized, and defined as a problem;

3 — provide a comparative and historical analysis of the development of cultural hegemony through language in the United States;

4 — undertake a critique of the assumptions and roles of linguistics, and social science, with regard to language and speaking;

5 — reshape the study of language in accord with the critique, and not only as to what is done, but also as to who does it and for what ends.

I shall say something about each of these five tasks in turn.

Two pervasive needs

Let me exemplify two pervasive, elementary needs, one having to do with varieties of language, the other with values in language use. The two have an important element in common: both require a mode of work that is ethnographic.

(A) *Varieties of language.* In a situation involving a language besides English, most schools and scholars would assume that the number of ingredients (varieties of language to be known) is two. The true number is often at least four. In Native American communities, where the aboriginal language survives in

a traditional form, there will also be a more widely used vernacular variety. A local standard of English wil be found, but also a local vernacular English. This last plays a significant social role. Someone who has been away, and who returns, must take up the 'Indian English' again, or be judged snobbish. This vernacular variety may show distinctive, creative adaptions of English material to phonological, syntactic, and semantic patterns that are Indian.

There are dozens of these socially and linguistically significant varieties of Indian English in the United States. There was not a published analysis of any of them until last year; the pioneer is William Leap.[2]

Not long ago a comparison of the Indian language, Choctaw, and English, was prepared to be useful in schools with Choctaw children. The comparison was made between traditional standard Choctaw and standard English, omitting the vernacular varieties of the two languages actually used by the children (cf. Leap, cited above). Last fall a succesful doctoral dissertation was submitted for publication and considered for a prize. It analyzed language development of Pima children in Arizona, interpreting the results in terms of norms from English-speaking children in Maryland, without regard to the variety of English actually spoken locally by the Pima, and as if there were a single scale for use of English anywhere in the country.

This sort of issue arises with particular force now with regard to Spanish. There are three main groups of Spanish users in the country, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Chicanos, and the differences among their standard varieties (and their attitudes about them) pose an initial problem. The implementation of bilingual education has led to further problems. A child whose English is not standard may have been excused in the past on grounds of Spanish. Now some teachers are heard to tell Chicano children: 'I used to think your trouble was that your language was Spanish. Now I see that you don't have any language at all'. (I owe this information to Eduardo Hernandez).

The fact of the matter is that Chicanos may experience as many as four varieties of Spanish alone. In Austin, Texas, the local standard is *northern Mexican* (called also 'Español formal, E. correcto, E. politico (polite), E. bueno, E. bonito, Straight Spanish). There are also *Popular Spanish* (called also Mejicano, Everyday Sp., Español, E. de East Austin, E. mocho); so-called 'Spanglish' (also called Tex-Mex, E. mocho, E. revuelto, E. mixtureado); and *Calo* (also called Pachuco talk, Barrio language, Pachuquismos, Hablar al modo loco, Vato language). (I owe this information to Lucía Elías-Olivares). A teacher may not accept the local standard as deserving that status (but consider Castilian, or in some cases, Colombian or some other non-local variety, as the only norm). If the local standard is known and accepted, other local varieties still are likely to be ignored or condemned; the child who uses them 'has no language'.[3]

The vernacular varieties of English spoken by black Americans are much better known, but the situation as a whole is perhaps no better. The difference is in the variety that has received attention; the full range remains obscured. For some black scholars, the question is, why has there been so much attention to the street vernacular to the exclusion of other varieties? Why so much fascination with the insult and obscenities of 'playing the dozens', and so little attention to the eloquence of the back preacher or minister?[4]

Similar situations obtain for the many other languages to be found in the United States. The true linguistic diversity of the country indeed is little recognized. Criteria for worldwide comparison and typology of national language situations have identified the United States as having *six* major languages: English, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Yiddish (Ferguson 1966: 321).[5] Most work with regard to these and the many other immigrant languages (apart from English) has been concerned with survival and change of Old World features, and acculturation to the New World environment and English in specific details. Relatively little has been done to identify the full range of varieties in use (including characteristic varieties of English).[6]

By and large, we are pretty ignorant. Official statistics are of little or no use. According to the 1960 census, for example, there were only 1200 native speakers of French in Louisiana, because it was presumed that a native-born American was a native speaker of English; only the foreign born were recorded with a different mother tongue.[7]

Studies, including dissertations, are made on the basis on what people say, as to the languages they use and how often they use them, but if there is one fact established in sociolinguistics, it is that people are often not able to answer such questions accurately, and, moreover, that often any answer to such a question is a statement of identity. Self-report may tell us about people's values and aspirations; it cannot be relied on to tell us about what they do. In addition, information as to the *occurrence* of a variety can be sought accurately only in terms of a prior analysis of range of varieties actually found in a community and their modes of use. The relation of varieties to situations may include 'code-switching' as a normal style. For many Chicanos, there are three broad types of situation: use Spanish, use English, use both. Finally, information as to the occurrence of a variety (or style) by itself is inadequate. Here, as elsewhere in language, one deals with *signs,* that is, with form-meaning covariation. Just as one cannot analyze the signs within a language adequately by distribution alone, without regard to meaning, so one cannot analyze adequately the signs that *are* languages that way. One must know their meanings in relation to the meanings of the contexts in which they occur. The necessary evidence of contrast among languages, varieties, styles (the test of commutation) can be gained only through ethnographic participation.

Varieties associated with ethnic identity are both important and salient. A full analysis would extend to varieties and styles associated with class and institutional structure.

(2) *Values in language use.* Many schools and persons seem to assume that communicative problems are either problems of a language, or else of personality. Children do not know English, or do not know enough of the right kind of English, or else are 'shy', 'difficult', and the like.

It is often not recognized that children may enter a classroom with cultural orientations toward appropriate uses of language that differ from those the classroom assumes. Native American children, for example, often are characterized as 'shy'. Observing a classroom in Oregon, Susan Philips found that the Indian children did indeed talk less than other children, in interaction with the teacher, but talked just as much as other children in other situations. A situation in which one person commands public rights to speak, and can command display of performance, is contrary to norms obtaining in the community from which they come, where rights to speak are typically equal in public situations, and display of performance self-initiated. (And public groups usually form a circle, rather than have one person in front).[8]

Notice that the problem is not a language other than English. The Indian children come to school as native speakers of a variety of English. Rules of language, as between teacher and children, are sufficiently alike. It is rules of speaking that are crucially different.

The issue of differences between home and school has been highlighted sometimes by broad dichotomies. We do not have to do simply with 'rich' vs. 'impoverished' verbal environments, however, or with polar orientations toward meaning ('elaborated' and 'restricted' codes), as tempting as such dichotomies may be. We have to do with something elementary, yet various: differences in use of language that are differences in values and norms of interaction. It is particularly important to note that the differences are not aligned always in the same way. The salient difference may be between Anglo and non-Anglo oriented ethnicity; one non-Anglo orientation vis-à-vis another; middle-class vis-à-vis working class; and combinations of these. In a given case it may be middleclass parents vs. working-class oriented schools, or Anglo parents vs. ethnically oriented schools. Such cultural differences vary on a number of dimensions, and form a multiplicity of types of situation, when the United States as a whole is considered.

Obviously schools have long been aware of cultural differences, and there are many programs concerned with them. What is often slighted is the 'invisible' culture (to use Philips' title) of everyday interaction, the expression through norms of speaking of values, traditional rights and duties between persons, what Goffman once called the ceremonial sphere of deference and

demeanor.[9] Teachers may be consciously respectful of explicitly religious belief and practice, yet at equal or greater cost profane an unseen ceremonial order vested in individuals.

Clearly the needed knowledge may depend on ethnographic participation, and pretty clearly, the roster of ethnographers must come to include teachers and many others not normally counted as such.

Awareness of linguistic problems

Awareness, and accuracy of awareness, are fundamental problems for socio-linguistic research and theory. Labov, more than any one, has addressed them.[10] I want to consider briefly the problem of awareness, and its accuracy, in regard to institutions and agencies that act at a societal level. Such groups tend to evaluate research in terms of its relevance to a perception of 'national need'. This has always been so to a considerable extent, but seems to be increasing in tempo. Informal comparison of the situation in several countries at a recent meeting led the Committee on Sociolinguistics to resolve to make the problem of 'linguistic problems' a focus of cooperative attention.

J. Neustupny has outlined a systematic model of linguistic problems, from individual behavior to societal planning.[11] I want to consider here only the process by which something comes to be defined societally as a 'linguistic problem'. For example the *Gästarbeiter* in Germany are so defined; in the United States the medical system depends in important part on thousands of doctors and interns whose native language is not English, but this is not defined as problem. Nor is it generally defined as a problem that many patients cannot readily understand or express themselves to the medical personnel with whom they must deal, even if all concerned are native speakers of 'English'. Perhaps such aspects of the medical situation in the United States will become a focus of political attention and come to be defined as a problem. One can only observe that distinctive varieties of English existed among black citizens for generations before they became defined as a problem during the height of the civil rights movement, and that varieties of Spanish have existed among children in many schools, becoming defined as a problem only very recently.

Such questions are familiar to sociologists (I am myself indebted to Rolf Kjolseth for discussion of them), but have barely begun to impinge upon the consciousness of linguists. We must drive home the issue. It is more than a matter of anticipating public consciousness and research support. It is a question of influencing public consciousness through research. There is a theoretical as well as a practical reason. The social study of language has been little better than public opinion in recognizing the fundamental nature and

unity of its subject matter. Sociology of language tends to come to us as a congeries of topics: billingualism, language nationalism, standardization, pidgins and creoles, modes of address, etc. For the sake of a social science of language, we must deepen our ability to see particular topics as constellations, thrown up by particular circumstances, but sharing fundamental dimensions. Particular constellations of interest must be seen as aspects of a single subject, the social organization of means of speech. Choice of language in one setting may be analytically part of the same field as choice of pronoun in another; the norms governing both may be those of conveying degree of social distance. Choice of whole language in one setting may be analytically part of the same field as choice of details of pronunciation in another; the norms governing both may be those of conveying ethnic identity. And so on.

Such a conception unites the so-called 'micro' and 'macro' levels of the sociology of language. Some progress has been made toward such unity,[12] but far from enough. Little progress has been made in affecting public and political consciousness from such a basis. Progress depends on the stated goal, an understanding of the ways in which matters come to be defined as 'linguistic problems'; that in turn depends on a critical understanding of the orientations toward language of the society in which defining of problems goes on.

Analysis of hegemony

The future of the sociology of language in the United States rests in large part on its contribution to problems of education, since it is in education that consciousness of language problems comes most to the fore in that country. A comparative perspective, and a systematic history, are badly needed. The heart of the problem is suggested by Fishman (1972: 195, 1975: 1764):

'A true meeting of education and the sociology of language will enable *both* to discover why proportionately so many dialect speakers did and do seem to become readers and speakers of the standard language (and even of classical languages) in other parts of the world whereas so few seem to accomplish this in the U.S.....today (Fishman and Lueders 1972)'[13]

The heart of the matter, I suggest, is that language has been a central instrument of cultural-political hegemony in the United States. Class stratification and cultural assumptions about language converge in classrooms to reproduce the social order. A latent function of the educational system is to instill linguistic insecurity, to discriminate linguistically, to channel children in ways that have an integral linguistic component, while appearing fair and open to all, while being believed to provide equal opportunity to all. All have opportunity to acquire membership in the privileged linguistic network. If they do

not, it is their fault, not that of the school.[14]

What is usually left out of account, of course, is what the child brings to the school in linguistic competence and membership; what part of instruction is instrumentally necessary for the child, what part an instrument of class structure.

I cannot demonstrate such an analysis, although it seems true from what I have been able to learn. American scholarship has not much addressed the question. Language as an object of planning and policy has perhaps been thought to be something to be found only in Belgium and other countries, because in the United States there has been no public agency or debate. The widespread sharing of dominant cultural assumptions about language has rendered their particularity invisible.

The dominant assumptions seem to include the following:

a — everyone in the United States speaks only English, or should:

b — bilingualism is inherently unstable, probably injurious, and possibly unnatural;

c — foreign literary languages can be studied, but not foreign languages in their domestic varieties (it is one thing to study the French spoken in Paris, another to study the French spoken in Lousiana);

d — differences in language are of two kinds, right and wrong;

e — verbal fluency, noticeable style, are suspect, except as entertainment (it's what you mean that counts).[15]

We desperately need a critical social history of such assumptions, and of the social practice that has embodied them. Regarding assumptions, such history would provide a sequel to Leonard's study of eighteenth century doctrines.[16] The movement for women's liberation is beginning to direct attention to the history of certain assumptions.[17] Regarding social practice, there are studies that address the role of education in the history of the country.[18] Such literature does not address closely questions of either assumption or practice as to language. There is far to go to unite these strains of inquiry, let alone provide a basis for comparative analysis. Studies already made in other countries, however, may be helpful for the comparative perspective they bring, throwing into relief the specific characteristics of the American development.[19]

It is easy enough to find evidence of efforts to make social realities fit governing assumptions. In sectors of society under direct governmental control, notably Indian communities, a frank policy of *linguacide* (as instrument of ethnocide) was followed. Here are excerpts from an official document:

'These languages may be, and no doubt are, interesting to the philologist, but as a medium for conveying education and civilization to savages they are worse than useless; they are a means of keeping them in their savage condition by perpetuating the traditions of carnage and superstition . . . .

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'To teach the rising generation of the Sioux in their native tongue is simply to teach the perpetuation of something that can be of no benefit whatever to them. . . .

'I sincerely hope that all friends of Indian education will unite in the good work of teaching the English language only, and discourage in every way possible the perpetuation of any Indian vernacular'.[20]

Through the country school systems have been used to impose a norm of homogeneity. The policy has gone far beyond instruction in a common national lingua franca. In New York City high schools, for example, it was required that one pass a speech test to graduate. The test included details of pronunciation: traces of phonetic habits, from Yiddish, Italian, English regional or working-class speech, or the like, were grounds for failure.

These are examples from personal inquiry. The systematic history that we need would show, I think, a widespread, consistent effort toward eradication of linguistic diversity, bolstered by belief in the inferiority of domestic varieties of language other than that officially enshrined in schools and believed to be maintained by grammarians, the best writers, and a leading class.

The assumptions of linguistic and social science

The work we need would consist of thoroughgoing analyses of language situations. A cadre of scholars to provide such work is hardly to be found. One can point to a few. Yet when a working conference on 'Comparative ethnographic analysis of patterns of speech in the United States' was held in January (sponsored by the Committee on Sociolinguistics of the SSRC, with assistance from the Committee on Linguistics and the Public Interest of the LSA), the primary problem was not to choose whom to invite, but to find any one to invite. It was difficult to identify more than a handful of people engaged in linguistically informed research relevant to American life.

Such work requires command of skills in both linguistic and social inquiry whatever the disciplinary provenience of the investigator. The dominant trends in sociology do not point much in the direction of such joint competence, nor do the trends in linguistics. As for sociologists, perhaps they mostly think that such work naturally would be done by linguists. Well, there are many linguists in the United States, but they are mostly not studying the life of language there. To a great extent, indeed, the background and domain assumptions of linguists reinforce the cultural assumptions indicated above, rather than challenge them. To a great extent, the dominant assumptions deny or discourage the kind of sociolinguistic ethnography that the language situations of the United States require.

Let me discuss ways in which assumptions in linguistics converge with cultural assumptions, according to the five cultural assumptions indicated above.

then consider the current consciousness of the field, especially as to its own history.

a — The average citizen, official, and the Census Bureau agree in assuming that a native-born American is, or should be, a speaker of English and only English.

a' — The dominant school of linguistics hasassumed that the goals of linguistic theory can be achieved by study of only one's own language, and indeed can perhaps best be achieved (one's intuitions will be pure) by monolinguals. For most American linguists, the native language of course is English. Most linguistics theory and linguistic teaching has been concerned with English.

b — Most Americans are suspicious of bilingualism.

b' — The dominant school of linguistics assumes homogeneity. Influences from other languages tend to be excluded (this has been a habit of long standing in structural linguistics, to be sure). With the exceptions of the late Uriel Weinreich, and of Einar Haugen, no prominent figure in American linguistics is associated with the study of bilingualism, and the standing of both these scholars may be due primarily to other activities.

c — Most parents and schools assume that what should be taught and attended to is the standard variety (whether English of foreign); to attend to vernacular varieties would be to inculcate or reinforce bad habits (and possibly, immorality).

c' — The assumption of formal grammar is that the goals of linguistic theory can be achieved through study of the standard language in its literary (written) form; to attend to vernacular varieties is secondary and unecessary. Just as folk conception treats vernaculars as corruptions of standards, so formal linguistics treats vernaculars as low-level deviations.

d — Most Americans, parents, teachers, university scholars, assumed that differences of language are of two kinds, right and wrong; it is assumed that the norms of English are known, or, in case of doubt, can be decided by appeal to authoritative grammars, dictionaries, and textbooks. It is the task of persons concerned with language to exclude what is wrong, imprecise, vulgar, etc., so that language that is correct, precise, proper, etc., can clearly express meaning.

d' — The assumption of formal grammar is that differences of language are of two kinds, grammatical and ungrammatical; it is assumed that the norms of English are known, or, in case of doubt, can be decided by appeal to authoritative patterns and canons of grammar itself. It is the task of the linguist to exclude what is wrong, ill-formed, ungrammatical, so that data that is right, well-formed, grammatical, can clearly reveal structure. (I cannot but observe that the current crop of formal grammarians have marked more utterances as 'not in the language' than any generation of prescriptivists before them).

e — Verbal fluency, noticeable style, are suspect, and in many circles, not properly masculine.

e' — The dominant school of linguistics assumes fluency, rather than to investigate its conditions, and has nothing against style. There may be no convergence here. One observation worth further study, however, is the preponderance of women in the 'soft' areas of linguistic inquiry, having to do with acquisition and use of language in actual settings, while professional prestige accrues mainly to those who work in the 'hard' areas of formal grammar, where use of logic and mathematics, or appeal to them, and the image of the casual, brilliant mathematical insight prevail. It may be that the study of language in the United States (and elsewhere) has its own reflection of a cultural allocation of verbal sensitivity to women.

There are further reinforcements of traditional cultural views worth noting. The first generation of structural linguists in the United States (commonly but inaccurately called 'Bloomfieldians') profoundly distrusted the teachings of the schools about language, and lay assumptions about languages, writing, and the like. One of the purposes of the movement which founded linguistics as a discipline was to change these things. Linguists shared in a critical attitude toward these aspects of their society. If sometimes extreme, it was salutory.

In reviving the formal insights of traditional grammar, the generation of linguists associated with Chomsky attacked the Bloomfieldian approach *in toto* and discredited its critical attitude as well. Indeed, the Chomskian approach was found comfortably compatible with traditional teaching by many. Writing is an important subject in this regard. The first generation of linguists stressed the disparity between conventional English orthography and actual pronunciation, as an obstacle to children learning to read; the Chomskian approach has found it reassuring that its own analysis of English agrees so well with orthography. (Chomsky and Halle have gone so far as to infer what can only be counted a linguistic analogue of 'racial memory', ascribing to the underlying structure of English such entities as a fricative consonant [x] (corresponding to the 'gh' spelled in words such as 'right') that has not been spoken in the standard language for centuries). Again, the first generation stressed phonetic skills, as indispensable means for recording scientifically what is actually said. Chomskians have depreciated phonetic skills, which have become almost a lost art. It is doubtful if a handful of leading grammarians today could transcribe anything actually spoken. All this reinforces the folk view that the written form is sufficient and correct, and of course also disables linguists from addressing actual social conduct.

The Bloomfieldian school stressed a cautious, inductive approach to the characteristics of individual languages, and characteristics of language in gene-

ral; the value, chastening to premature generalization, of differences among languages; the value of differences among languages for shedding light on ways of life. All this appeared to the Chomskian frame of mind as hostility to theory. The participation of the school in ethnographic modes of work was dismissed as due either to exigencies of field work or the legacy of a crippling behaviorism; that an ethnographic mode of work might be necessary for certain kinds of knowledge about language was not considered.

Generic distrust of behavior and observation, as against intuitive insight and methodological authority; the view that the only reality beyond language that matters is in the mind and brain (not in social life); the view that what matters is what is true of all languages (universals), as a concomitant perhaps of mind (rather than that what is true of particular languages, as a concomitant perhaps of history and social life) — all these aspect of a Chomskian outlook discourage sociolinguistic ethnography, discourage acquisition of the skills needed for sociolinguistic ethnography, often enough make the social order appear invisible. Societal differences appear, not as points of leverage for penetration of social reality, but as indication that 'anything is possible', that social reality is 'a blooming buzzing confusion'.

The reinforcement of cultural assumptions and prejudices, the disarming of linguistics with regard to serious problems of social life, cannot be said to have been intentional. Chomsky and others presumably did not intend to support the prejudicial role of traditional grammar in schools, the role of traditional ideas about grammar and writing in perpetuating cultural hegemony and social subordination. Yet such is the effect: just as schools need not find out how children and communities actually use language, so, on this view, neither need linguists.

Much more could be said on this subject, but let me reiterate an essential point: the use of linguistics in social science must include a critique. An unexamined acceptance of familiar forms of linguistics would be mistaken and misleading There does indeed, exist a widespread, rather consistent picture of the development and character of linguistics, deriving from the widespread success of the Chomskian outlook. Most anything one reads, whether in textbooks, learned journals, or literary reviews, most of what is said in classroom lectures, reflects this picture. It is a typical chronicle of the sort described by Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and to be assessed as such. Part of the account derives from considering the virtues (in its own eyes) of the dominant approach, and ascribing opposites to preceding work, while explaining, more or less charitably ,the failure of predecessors to understand the nature of the subject. In short, the general picture of the history of their field held by most linguists today is essentially a myth.

Sympathy for earlier work is not a call to return to it. There are aspects of

earlier work which we need to renew, but for a 'new paradigm', one that is truly a socially constituted study of language, earlier and current paradigms alike must be transcended. Indeed, from the standpoint of a 'new paradigm', Bloomfield and Chomsky are alike in certain crucial assumptions.

Both Bloomfield and Chomsky have pursued an autonomous linguistics. While both have been concerned with psychology, both have refused to base linguistics on psychology; it is psychology which is to learn from linguistics. Indeed, Chomsky can be seen as having perfected the thrust of modern linguistics toward autonomy, by setting aside social factors at every turn, and finding in the internal development of linguistic methodology itself (through formal universals) a prospect of far-reaching significance. (Chomsky's view of the significance of linguistics for man, like his view of the significance of syntax for semantics, is interpretive).

Both Bloomfield and Chomsky base analysis of structure on the 'referential' function alone, neglecting 'stylistic' (expressive, social) function. Both Bloomfield and Chomsky define speech community (the crucial social notion in modern linguistics) as equivalent to a shared language, rendering the notion of community dependent on the notion of a language, and in effect, redundant. Such a definition is also useless for work with the language situations of actual communities.

One may think that recent theory goes beyond Bloomfield in regard to notions such as 'creative aspect' of language use and 'competence'. A close reading of Bloomfield's 'A set of postulates for the science of language' (1926) will show that Bloomfield states everything that is provided for by Chomsky's notion of 'creative aspect' of language use, and perhaps a bit more (since Bloomfield does specify the relation between novel use and situation as not random, but socially constrained). A close reading of Chomsky's use of 'competence' will show that the social relevance promised by the term is not actually there. One would think a theory of competence in linguistics would refer to the ability of persons to use language. That is indeed the sense in which I myself use the term: 'linguistic competence' is taken to refer to the actual abilities of persons. In Chomsky's use, and much psycholinguistics, 'competence' is defined as that part of ability which consists of knowledge; that part of knowledge which consists of grammar; and that part of grammar which is amenable to the formalized, referentially limited, model. Actual abilities are secondary to internal considerations of simplicity and conformity. Definite persons are abstracted from in behalf of a postulated ideal speaker-hearer. This is the anthropology of Feuerbach, so to speak, not the sociology of Marx. Like the definition of 'speech community', the definition of 'competence' is used, not to get at social life, but to set it aside.

Towards a socially constituted linguistics

Of course there is some linguistically informed attention to language situations in the United States. The problem is that there is so little attention of a certain kind.

Three kinds of attention can be distinguished. The first and oldest is a tradition of attention to the languages of ethnic and minority groups of a sort that can be called *noblesse oblige*. Since Thomas Jefferson, leading Americans have called for study of Native American languages 'before they die out'. For much of the time, the premise has been that the study of such languages is salvage of something from the past. The motives, when not sentimental, are often purely scientific. The linguist declares the inherent equality of all languages, and ignores the inequality of their speakers. He does not in fact really believe that the language he studies can be used in all the same functions as English — that would be 'unrealistic'. He does not really examine the self-serving nature of the commitment to equality in principle, the fact that the good conscience it gives him is a form of what William Willis has called 'scientific anti-racism': a commitment to equality that extends as far as the equality of all the world's culture, peoples, and languages for scientific study, but not further. Many scholars have been committed to the preservation of materials of their discipline, in effect, not to the preservation of people.

This limitation is being overcome by a number of linguists, responding to the heightened consciousness and militancy of Native American peoples themselves. The work poses new challenges that are difficult to meet: training of Native Americans themselves to work in linguistics (something existing academic programs are poorly prepared to do); preparation of materials that communicate clearly to members of the community from which they come (and which may not gain the scholar much scholarly credit); insight and advice into the revitalization of language, the prospects of obsolescent languages, the teaching of previously unwritten languages in schools (for all of which the usual academic training, and research, gives little guidance).

It remains that the study of Native American languages has had little sustained continuity, and is not sure of it now. There is not yet a single chair in the country devoted to the subject. It is likely that only the political mobilization of Native American communities themselves will provide the support needed for continuity.[21]

Much of the work with the languages of immigrant groups has been of a similar sort, waxing and waning without sustained continuity. Such work has suffered perhaps more than Native American work from the dominant assumptions of the society. Whereas Native American languages could at least be regarded as something worth scientific preservation for their exotic cha-

racter, the immigrant languages could at best be regarded as interesting for their departures from their old-country models and their curious adaptations to the new country, where anything more than sentimental attachment was involved. A sense of the positive contribution of the immigrant languages to their communities, and to the country as a whole, is more likely now, and it is indeed important to call attention to the role of such languages in shaping the general language situation of the United States, as does J. L. Dillard.[22]

There is a great deal to be done, then, simply to deal adequately with the motives that lead people to wish to preserve components of the diversity of language in the country, and to understand adequately the processes affecting them, and the roles that these varieties play.

A second kind of attention, associated with sociolinguistics itself, goes directly to varieties of language that are the focus of concern, and studies the processes of change affecting them in novel and advanced ways. Such work has been mostly concerned so far with 'Black English'. As we have seen, it has been mostly a response to a definition of a problem by others, and might be called a 'social problem' tradition. Social realities are addressed but after the fact, and in terms of the problem the realities pose for existing institutions. Thus (as noted above), the variety of English most distant from the conventional standards has received the lion's share of attention. The varieties of English used by middle-class blacks, not being an educational problem, have not been much studied — yet the selective use of 'black' features by middle-class speakers is of great social and scientific interest. Finally, the 'social problem' tradition shares with the tradition of 'noblesse oblige' interest a concentration on the language of subordinate groups. What is interesting, what is a problem, is what is different from what is dominant. The respect in which the dominant varieties of language are a problem to those who are subordinate does not come in for much consideration.

The third kind of attention — work, that would truly deserve to be called 'sociolinguistics', or 'sociology of language' — would address the role of language in the society as a whole, in a totalizing and critical way. With regard to the language situations of subordinate groups, it would look not only 'back', but 'forward'; that is, it would study and help with what such groups wish to preserve traditional means of speech, but also study and help with the non-traditional means of speech which confront such groups and with which they must deal. The study of educational, bureaucratic and other institutional forms of language is as much a contribution to contemporary Native American communities, for example, as study of the Indian languages themselves. Differential access to such forms of language, discriminatory use of them, are very real parts of the situation such communities confront.

Such work can be described as studying not only 'down', but 'up'.[23] That is,

such work would study linguistic features and practices that are part of class relationships and cultural hegemony; it would address not only the ways in which the language of the subordinate is a problem to institutions, but also the ways in which the language of institutions is a problem in itself.

Such work would broach a truly general study of the language situations of the United States. It would begin to constitute a true sociolinguistics. The central assumption would be that every social group, activity, relationship may give rise to characteristic verbal means. Of any facet of the society, one would be prepared to ask:

a — What is involved in talking like an X?

b — What is involved in talking to do Y?

That is, what is the verbal concomitant of being, or being seen to be, a certain kind of person, position? What is the verbal concomitant, of doing, or being considered to do, a certain kind of activity, work, purpose? What is the distribution of such verbal styles in the society? Who has access, who lacks it, to which? Who has commitment to which? What are the consequences for institutional outcomes, genuine culture, personal identity and integrity? What would be a rough assessment of the linguistic health of the society? What costs and benefits result from the present distribution of linguistic abilities, the present institutionalization of values, beliefs, and attitudes, regarding features and uses of language?

(I have in mind the possibility that for many Americans, particularly perhaps males in certain occupations, much of their daily speech is not a satisfaction of genuine expression of identity, but a kind of verbal 'passing'. Where, for whom, about what, is there verbal expressivity that is satisfying, rewarding? Uses of language that are felt to be integral to the self?)

Such an approach requires overcoming the separation between questions of language and questions of value that has characterized the development of modern linguistics in the United States (perhaps in a way similar to the situation of modern economics). Values have been taken as obvious, taken for granted, or else excluded on principle, so far as linguists themselves are concerned. The uses of language have been postulated as everywhere essentially equivalent, rather than investigated. Indeed, one of the central tenets of the liberalism of modern linguistics has been the essential equivalence in use of all languages studied by linguists, despite the abundant empirical evidence to the contrary. Some even think it the mark of a radical to denounce attention to differences of this sort. Inequality in speaking is to be overcome, it seems, by denying that it exists. Amidst all the costs of inequality and exploitation, language is privileged, on this view, and remains unscathed.

There is a grain of truth in this view, which I would call militant, not radical. The potentialities of language are great. It is a resource capable of transcen-

ding situations to a degree; it is a resource more within the control of people than many others. The possibilities of language should be developed politically. But the militant view of equality does not see a need for development; it sees a need only for an end to prejudice. Reality is different. Language, verbal means, like other resources of human life, become shaped to specific ends. Their adaptation to some purposes lessens or precludes their ready adaptation to others. They carry something of their history with them. It is utopian (in the negative) sense) to imagine as an ideal for communicative competence andlanguage a state of society in which anyone can say anything to anyone, in any way, a state in which there are no constraints on communication and language. Social life, social order, would be impossible. What one can do, thinking in terms of aspirations, is to envision the costs and benefits of different forms of social order, including the costs and benefits of different forms of communicative, linguistic order. I apologize for the obviousness of what I have just said. My excuse is that it is a point of view which has almost no support within the practice or theory of linguistics today.

These issues of background and domain assumptions, then, pose great obstacles to the development of the sociolinguistics that is needed. We have far to go to gain acceptance of the fundamental assumptions of a socially constituted linguistics:

that verbal means and the social matrices in which they exist are interdependent;

that the organization of verbal means must be viewed from the vantage point of social matrices;

that one must discover ways in which verbal means are organized in virtue of social matrices (using 'social matrices' here as a general term for activities, institutions, groups, etc.).

It is here that the linguistic competence we need may be dependent on the contribution of social scientists. The term 'linguistic competence', indeed, is used in two ways in my title. On the one hand, it refers to the object of study of a true sociolinguistics: the actual linguistic abilities of definite persons in a definite social life. On the other hand, it refers to the abilities that scholars must have, if they are to be able to study such competence. 'Toward linguistic competence', in this sense, refers to efforts toward a cadre of scholars competent to undertake such work.

The most promising prospect, I think, is the confluence of sociology, as a discipline in which the empirical study of American society is most developed, and in which critical perspectives are considerably developed, on the one hand, with the work in the ethnography of speaking, which so far has been mostly limited to other societies. Let me conclude with a few further comments on the contribution of this last.

The ethnography of speaking has gone through two stages. The first stage has been the development of the perspective itself, drawing on ideas of Sapir and Jakobson, so as to make the case for the qualitative study of the patterning of verbal means, beyond grammar, and for the relativity, cross-culturally, of the role and meaning of language. In other words, the first concern has been to make the case for a discipline based on the social constitution of language, with respect both to structure and function.

The second stage has been the undertaking of field studies explicitly devoted to these two questions, of structure and function of means of speech. It is striking that until the last decade cross-cultural differences in this regard had been virtually ignored. It is a rare ethnography from which one can learn much explicit about such matters. The usual comparative guides and collections are virtually useless. A set of papers based on field work devoted to these questions has just appeared this year.[24] Related papers and books are appearing.

The third stage, now broached, has several tasks:

(1) to go beyond accumulation of case studies to comparative-typological work; that is to sharpen terminology and dimensions of description, so as to place them within a generalized framework; (2) to apply the generalized framework to our own society, as part of the development of social theory; (3) to apply the principles of a critical, reflexive perspective to its own work.

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3 The state of sociolinguistic research into New World Spanish, including research in the United States, is surveyed by Lavendera (1974), with critical observations on the state of 'sociolinguistics' itself in Latin America. See Beatriz Lavendera, 'On sociolinguistic research in New World Spanish', *Language in Society* 3 (2): 247-292 (1974).

4 Cf. Richard Wright's review article, concerning *English in black and white*, by Robbins Burling, and *Language in the inner city*, by William Labov, *Language in Society* 4 (1) (1975). On an analogous Caribbean case, see Roger Abrahams,

'The training of the man of words in talking sweet', *Language in Society* 1 (1): 15-30 (1972). The state of studies of Black English is surveyed by Roger Abrahams and John Szwed, 'Black English: A review of the work', *American Anthropologist* 77.

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8 See Susan Philips, *The invisible culture.* University of Pennsylvania dissertation, 1974, and her 'Participant structures and communicative competence', in C. B. Cazden, V. P. John, and D. Hymes (eds.), *Functions of language in the classroom.* New York: Teachers Colleges Press, 1972, 370-394.

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10 I have elaborated certain of his ideas in 'Breakthrough into performance', in D. Ben-Amos and K. Goldstein (eds.), *Folklore and Communication.* The Hague: Mouton, 1975.

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13 Joshua Fishman, *The sociology of language.* Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1972; J. Fishman and Erika Lueders, 'What has the sociology of language to say to the teachers? (on teaching the standard variety to speakers of dialectal or sociological varieties)', in C. Cazden, V. John, and D. Hymes (eds.), *Functions of language in the classroom.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1972, 67-83.

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19 e.g. Georges Snyders, *La pédagogie en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965.

20 J. D. C. Atkins, Commissioner (of the Bureau of Indian Affairs), in his pamphlet, *Correspondence on the subject of teaching the vernacular in Indian schools, 1887-'88.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888, pp. 17, 25, 26.

21 An analysis of the situation, and of misconceptions as to the nature of it, is presented in my essay, 'The Americanist tradition', presented at the second Golden Anniversary symposium of the Linguistic Society of America, held in Berkeley in November 1974; it is to appear in a volume edited by Wallace Chanfe and published by Peter de Ridder.

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