

phenomena or a *strata* instead of a *phenomenon* or a *stratum*, as well as *data* (pronounced /dædə/ rather than /deɪdə/ and used as a singular instead of a plural). Are you aware of these as recent changes in popular speech? Do you think they will become permanent changes? Why or why not? Can you think of some other recent changes, say, within the last five years or so?

3. How does social change bring about linguistic change? Can linguistic change bring about social change? Explain.
4. What factors help to slow down linguistic change?

Language, society and culture

The largest unit of analysis ordinarily considered by sociologists is the society, a unit not only larger than the community but much more, if not completely, self-sufficient. This concept is much more general and abstract than the one with which it is most often confused, namely the nation-state. The two may coincide, of course, but are not necessarily coterminous.

Traditionally, sociologists have concentrated on abstract social relations to the neglect of the political and economic aspects of society. To a considerable extent, this tendency is also manifested in much work in sociolinguistics and the sociology of language. This is particularly true of those who emphasize a microsociolinguistic focus in their work. Such work tends to focus on the formal aspects and to ignore the political and economic realities of the broader society.

Sociologists use the term *function* to refer to the consequences (whether intended or not and whether observed or not—that is, whether *manifest* or *latent*) of the actions of persons or groups. The consequences for society can be called social functions, (or *macrofunctions*), that is, the impact on the social structure resulting from the carrying out of certain socially patterned activities. There are also individual functions (or *microfunctions*) such as the resulting impact on hearer and speaker of spoken language (see section 5.1). Some scholars believe we should use the ethnographic observation of communication to discover such functions. We cannot think of the functions of language as universal since they will necessarily vary from one cultural setting to another (Mathiot and Garvin 1975:1).

Both animal cries and human speech serve the basic functions of coordinating the activities of the members of the group so that they can attain their goals. As De Laguna (1927:19–20) notes, “Men do not speak simply to relieve their feelings or to air their views but to awaken a response in their fellows and to influence their attitudes and acts. It is further the means by which men are brought into a new and momentous relationship with the external world, the very relationship which makes for them an objective order.”

Malinowski (1956:xi) suggested that the most fundamental function of speech was pragmatic, that is, to direct, control and correlate human activity. He believed all behavior must have a practical end; therefore, he emphasized the pragmatic functions at the expense of the symbolic.

It is reasonable to assume that the most fundamental, the most basic function of language is to control people's behavior. On a societal level, it might be hypothesized that the major function of language is social cooperation and control—promoting conformity to a society's norms. Language is a tool, a vehicle of the social order. It is a gross oversimplification either to identify language with communication, or to view its sole function as communication. In many instances it serves for the reflection, clarification, consolidation, or alteration of interpersonal relationships and sociocultural values. The major effect of language has been the creation of a system that made integration, social coordination and cooperation, as well as cultural cumulation and transmission, possible.

Culture is an adaptive device by which man survives in his various environments and so is language, the most obvious purpose of which is the conveying of information, including information about the situation and the speakers. This is a function which it serves in all societies. But other functions are served as well, such as to mark social identities and social statuses, establish and maintain social relationships, and to serve the expressive needs of individuals. A function performed by language in one society may be performed by a different social institution in another society. Not all societies use language or focus on it to the same extent, value it equally, or use it for the same purposes. Similarly, some societies have only one language, and some have more than one. One language might, thus, be assigned a number of different functions in one society, which are divided among more than one language in some other society. Not all languages or language varieties are capable to the same extent of fulfilling any given function. In a multilingual state, different languages may serve different functions, such as wider communication (national and international), education at different levels, and religion.

The relationships between social and linguistic variables are at the very heart of the concerns of the sociology of language. How this relationship is conceptualized bears directly on the theories that are generated and the research which is conducted in the field. Some scholars like Wolfram (1971:96) assume a direct causal relationship between social differences and linguistic differences. This is not the only conceptualization possible. There are, in fact, four different possible perspectives on this issue, that is, that social structure is dependent on language; that language is dependent upon social structure; that each is codetermining; and that both are dependent upon some third factor such as world view, the organization of the human brain, or the fundamental nature of humanity. Grimshaw (1971) has indicated that the fourth alternative is untestable and that the first two are incomplete and can be subsumed under the third and most reasonable perspective, that of mutual codetermination or mutual embeddedness. Until proven otherwise, it seems reasonable and safe to take as our basic assumption the notion that language and society influence and determine each other.

48

4.1 Human groups and language

Groups, of whatever size, tend to have their own special languages, codes, or styles, whether this consists of a few unique words shared by an intimate couple or a language which is the national patrimony of a people. Likewise, human groups usually have names, and how they are called is reflective of the linguistic system in use.

Some occupations are characterized by specialized knowledge of a particular language, as in the case of medical doctors or pharmacists who are required to know Latin or musicians Italian. Knowledge of a sacred language may be shared by religious functionaries or scholars. Knowledge of the written language may be confined to a special class of scribes, as among the ancient Egyptians or Babylonians. For other occupations, language itself is the focus of activity, as in the case of interpreters, translators, language teachers, and of course, linguists.

Many religious groups utilize a sacred language or languages for liturgy and prayer, and for the reading and study of sacred texts in that language, such as the use of Latin in Catholicism, Hebrew and Aramaic in Judaism, Arabic in Islam, Sanskrit in Hinduism, Pali in Buddhism, Coptic in the Egyptian church, and so forth. It is important to recognize that in many cases like these, people ascribe a sacred character not only to their scriptures and liturgy but frequently to the language itself. Thus, for example, ultra-orthodox Jews in Palestine in the 1880s opposed Eliezer Ben Yehuda's efforts to revive Hebrew as a spoken language, asserting that Hebrew was too sacred to be used for secular purposes. It was unthinkable, they believed, that the sacred tongue could be used to curse a dog or to tell an off-color joke. Yet Ben Yehuda's point won the day, and Hebrew eventually became the principal daily vernacular of Jewish Palestine and later Israel's national language. To this day, however, members of certain ultra-orthodox sects refuse to speak Hebrew.

A few years ago, the Catholic Church abandoned its centuries-old policy of requiring the Mass to be said in Latin. For long, this move was opposed because some leaders of the Church felt that separate national churches would emerge if Latin were abandoned as the common language of the Church. They preferred a situation where the vast majority of Church members did not understand the words of the Mass which they were required to hear. Whether the Church will become more strengthened or more divided as a result of this move is a moot point, but what is apparent is the great importance given by many institutions to a common language for purposes of continuing solidarity.

Sociologists make a distinction between primary groups (those which are of primary importance in the formation of personality and enculturation to society's norms, such as family, friendship groups, etc.) and secondary groups (those in which people have a less intimate, less personal involvement, such as work or organizational groups and whose influence on the development of the individual is secondary or minimal). This distinction is obviously pertinent to a discussion of language.

It is in primary groups, particularly the family, where we learn our first language or languages and the rules for their use. Primary group, socialization,

and language acquisition are all closely tied in together. At least partially because of the close, warm intimacy of the primary group, the language we learn in the context of such a group (our "mother" tongue) tends to have particularly warm associations, such that our deepest, strongest personal feelings often can be expressed adequately only in that language, in the particular variety learned in the home. Special feelings likewise may be felt for the language itself.

It is furthermore typical that if an additional language or language variety is learned, it is likely to be acquired in the context of secondary group relations: in school, army, or marketplace. The formality of the language variety will bear some relation to the formality of personal relations prevailing in the group in which the particular language variety is being used. Thus, the sociolinguist is particularly interested in the relationship between the structure and nature of groups on the one hand, and the nature and use of the linguistic varieties utilized by such groups on the other.

Studies of language acquisition have been done mainly within the confines of the nuclear family, particularly in its isolated American middle-class form. Results coming in from studies of language acquisition in various cultures, however, show remarkable consistency in the linguistic data. We know much less about the sociolinguistic rules and their use. Form of family structure would appear to be pertinent to such processes, as Bernstein claims (see 8.4 below).

One of the areas of particular concern to anthropologists for three or four decades now has been the nature of the relationship between language and the nonlinguistic aspects of the culture. The reader has undoubtedly heard, for example, that the Eskimos have many different words for kinds of snow because snow is so important to their way of life. Language and culture are very intimately related (see section 4.5).

Language has often been used as a theoretical model for culture, particularly as both phenomena are largely unconsciously patterned, though the patterning of language is easier to perceive and conceptualize. As indicated above, nonverbal language is also patterned and largely hidden from the consciousness of its users.

Sociologists appear to be content not just to ascertain cultural norms but also in a sense to establish them, as they identify various kinds of behavior as deviant from the norm. Just as the "normal" society visualized by many American social scientists is the conservative, small town, "WASP" society of the turn-of-the-century, so the linguist's labeling of a particular speech variety as "standard" and the other, related, varieties as "nonstandard" may sometimes be related to the same kind of thinking.

What is especially interesting in this connection is the relationship between "deviant" linguistic and "deviant" nonlinguistic behavior. An observer is likely to notice that "bad" children are using "bad" language, especially "bad" boys. One of the traditional reasons for avoiding "bad" language, for example, the English "four letter words," is to avoid the suspicion that the speaker might have deviant morals, as well as colorful language. Formerly a person might be greatly shocked to hear a woman use any kind of a word having sexual connotations, as supposedly reflective of something less than a perfectly chaste style of life.

Contrariwise, traditionally (and in many societies still) extremely polite language was supposedly reflective of impeccable intentions and character, although, of course, most people knew better. The farthest to which this type of deceit is carried is in international diplomacy, where the most courteous of language frequently masks the vilest of intentions and the most debased of acts.

4.2 Linguistic socialization

Linguistic socialization refers not only to the linguistic competence acquired by children (lexicon and grammar) and communicative competence (the effective, suitable use of language) but also to the beliefs and attitudes acquired by children about language.

The acquisition of basic linguistic competence is completed at a relatively early age, say four or five years, whereas most linguistic attitudes and beliefs are probably acquired much later when the children can understand more subtle concepts such as, for example, social status. A clear picture of how language relates to social class differences is ordinarily evident to the child before he reaches early adolescence.

Until fairly recently, most discussions in sociological writings of socialization were very one-sided, that is, they emphasized the child as a fairly inactive, passive recipient of the socialization process. Now it is increasingly evident from ongoing research that far from being a blank slate, a passive recipient, the child is an active, creative fashioner of his own reality and of his own being. Children reject certain aspects of their socialization and refashion others to suit themselves. None of us are just creators of our culture; we are its creators as well. Thus, the child, or rather children in groups (when left alone by adults), fashion their own original social structures, with their own norms, concepts, boundary maintenance mechanisms, and frequently secret languages. The child's creativity in devising special languages has been noted by a number of observers of children's behavior.

Children are skilled interactants; they develop skills in the social situations in which they daily find themselves. A very important part of the socialization process is the child's development of a self-concept. This development has linguistic correlates. The child will begin to use personal names or *mommy*, *daddy*, etc., which suggests that the child is growing aware of them. He must learn that his name refers to himself and that other people's names refer to them, if he is to be able to separate self from other. When pronouns such as *I* or *you* appear in the child's speech, it indicates that a sense of self is developing (Denzin 1972).

Social understanding develops in a prelinguistic stage. This prelinguistic social awareness encourages the child to attempt the acquisition of grammar because he already feels and understands the need to communicate. He acquires an awareness of what it is to accept a social world shared and known in common with others. It is now easier for him to avoid misunderstanding by others and frustration of his desires and wishes. He must express the latter in already existing ways. Because the child wishes to share his intentions with others and enter

on this question is thrown by studies of the speech of humans who were reared with animals or in isolation, that is, devoid of human contact. These so-called feral and isolated children later learned to speak to varying degrees unless they were retarded to begin with or had a hearing problem. One other point is a crucial one, namely, the existence of a developmental period in the child for initial language acquisition. It is generally believed that if the child is not exposed to some language during this crucial period, he fails to develop any sort of normal speech. But if factors are favorable, special training can offset the effect of several, perhaps even eight, years of isolation from the human community (Brown 1958:192).

Part of the problem in understanding children isolated from human contact is the difficulty of ascertaining the extent to which the child's disabilities stem from the lack of human intercourse or from some original mental retardation of an organic nature. Although some of the so-called feral and isolated children were labeled as retarded by some experts who examined them, this was contested by others. Also the amount of time the child was isolated, and during which years of his life, was ordinarily not known. It is difficult to understand how an originally retarded child could have survived under difficult conditions in the forest or jungle. What is certain is that few, if any, learned to speak with any fluency at all. Victor, for example, who was found when he was about twelve, never learned to speak more than a couple of words (Itard 1962:xii).

Davis (1947:437) concluded from the case of Isabelle that isolation up to the age of six, with failure to acquire any language and thus to grasp cultural meaning, does not preclude the subsequent acquisition of either speech or cultural meaning. In fact, the child may go through the mental stages at a rate more rapid than normal. Another child, Anna, was possibly deficient to begin with and did not receive the best training available. Furthermore, she did not live long enough after being found. When she died at age ten, about two years later, her speech was at about the two-year-old level. She talked mainly in phrases but would repeat words and try to carry on a conversation.

Curtiss et al. (1974) have reported on the linguistic development of a child, "Genie," who had spent her entire life completely isolated in a small room, receiving only minimal care. She was physically punished if she made any sounds. Ever since the time she was discovered by authorities in 1970 at the age of 13, a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, and linguists has been working with this unique case. She had no linguistic competence, beyond being able to respond to a few simple words. Although she was past age five, supposedly the critical age for learning a first language, Genie has made progress in learning to speak and understand. Compared with the development of other children, her vocabulary is much larger than that of children at the same stage of syntactic development. She learns new words rapidly, but her rate of syntactic development is much slower than normal, demonstrating the difference between storage of lists of elements and the rules of grammar.

Genie has remained an unsocialized person in many respects, and this is reflected in her limited knowledge of sociolinguistic rules. She is not sensitive to the range of social behavior which accompanies the actual spoken messages in the course of a conversation. She fails to acknowledge the questions, statements,

into a shared world, he accepts the norms of both syntax and vocabulary, for he realizes that the world is already shaped by others who have lived in it before.

Once the child has acquired the ideal of normative controls on a shared world, he will continue to know the world as a place that has a normative social structure. Since social rules do not have as clear detail as syntactic rules, it is only through the acquisition of the latter that the child gets the idea of the normative structure of the world shared and known with others. The first clear social norms the child becomes aware of thus are linguistic ones.

Cicourel (1970) noted that the central developmental question in childhood socialization is how adults routinely expose the child to the normative order. Adults are faced with unique communicative demands when interacting with young children. The adult employs specific simplified features of adult language to connect a specific interactive event with the child to more general notions of what is correct and possible in the adult world (Corsaro 1975). Both children and adults learn the social system at least partly because they try hard to find the significance of the linguistic variations they find. Both situations and statuses have linguistic correlates.

Piaget (1923) and Vygotsky (1962) both showed the close interrelation that exists between language, on the one hand, and the development of thought and the learning of logical categories, on the other. These two scholars, however, disagreed on the exact nature of this relationship. Piaget's fundamental thesis emphasized the idea of egocentrism dominating the language and thinking of the child. He took the stand that social life proper was nonexistent before about age seven or eight. Vygotsky takes the opposite view, having conducted experiments demonstrating that egocentric language has an organizing function in the child's social activity. It gradually changes into an inner speech which is, likewise, an organizer of behavior.

In socialization, the child not only acquires language within the social structure and through its mediation but also internalizes social reality by means of language, thus shaping both consciousness and personality structure. However, it is not language in general but a particular language and social dialect or other variety which is acquired by the child. The available linguistic repertoires are transmitted to the child by such specific social structures as institutionalized kinship systems, age groups, and educational institutions. The social reality which is internalized includes the acquisition and understanding of classification and interpretation schemes (including folk taxonomies), as well as concepts of space, time, causality, motivation, relevance, and value hierarchies. They learn what is taken for granted and what is considered to be problematic. All this is filtered and mediated through specific varieties of language.

Mackay (1973:184) believes that rather than use the term socialization, we should study adult-child interaction, which is substantively the study of cultural assimilation and theoretically the study of meaningful social interaction. Children clearly accomplish meaning through procedures of interpretation and analysis. Their interpretative competencies include the ability to reason, invent, and acquire knowledge.

The relative contribution of genetic endowment and environmental influences on linguistic development is still a matter of some controversy. Some light

(50)

requests, summons, etc. much of the time, that is, appears to be conversationally incompetent. This is most probably a result of her social and psychological deprivation. As Curtiss (1977:233) indicates, "Genie grew up in an environment devoid of verbal interaction. Never or practically never having witnessed the performance of these sociolinguistic behaviors she did not develop them."

4.3 Language acquisition

Anyone who, as an adult, has struggled to master a foreign language is likely to be dismayed by the fluency displayed by four- or five-year-old native speakers of the language, a fluency one can scarcely hope to attain. How did these children learn this difficult language so fast and so well, one might ask oneself. The answer is, of course, the same way one learned one's own. What one takes for granted in one's own case seems like a minor miracle in the foreign setting. There is, of course, no necessary connection of language with race, and any normal human child can learn any language if he* is reared in a community where it is spoken.

Before the development of generative-transformational grammar, no one really had a clear idea of how complex a language really was and, hence, how difficult the task which the child has to accomplish. The older studies compiled lists of words which given children had learned by certain ages, as if language development could be judged by vocabulary alone. Furthermore, such an approach looked at the process as involving stimulus-response imitation and memorizing, whereas the more difficult task faced by the child is syntactic in nature and involves meaning and logic.

There is currently no one theory dominant in the area of language acquisition, but four factors previously largely neglected are now being emphasized: (1) language input to the child (2) patterns of verbal interaction (3) verbal routines (4) individual differences.

The child acquires a vast amount of learning as a result of a complex interaction among maturational factors, learning strategies, and the sociocultural environment. Not all scholars agree that grammar is necessarily the best place to examine such a process. Blount (1975:586), for example, suggests that semantics, rather than transformational syntax, provides better insight into child language. As we understand early semantic development, we will be better able to study the intriguing problem of how children eventually acquire syntax.

How is a child able to deal with the necessarily abstract nature of syntactic processes? Many psycholinguists today believe that the structure of cognition of the human brain is universally such that all normal children possess a knowledge of universal grammar which is innate and which enables them to process linguistic data. As they try to make sense out of what they hear from family, friends (and nowadays from television), children organize the data of language according to their own understanding of how the language works. In other words, they devise theories of their language which they are constantly testing and revising in the light of new input. Children create their own grammar or model of the

*Concerning my use of sex-indefinite "he," see page 130.

parental language, and as the children develop and their experiences broaden, this model increasingly comes to resemble the parental language.

In addition to semantic and syntactic operations, the child has to master morphology. In English, for example, this would include such things as past tense, participles, and plurals. Such items appear to be acquired in a fixed order, probably depending on semantic and/or transformational complexity, and clearly not from the frequency of their use by parents. McNeill (1970:84) has noted that, in any given society, children are not sent to public school until they have mastered the morphology of their language. Thus, in the case of English, with a relatively simple morphology, children begin school at five or six but Russian speaking children at age seven. Readiness for school is apparently judged by mastery of the morphology.

The child must also master the sound system. Jakobson (1968) argues that all children pass through the same steps of phonological development, though at different rates. The sequence of development is universal among the languages of the world. The child begins with those sounds which are common to the languages of the world, for example /p, t, k, a/. Sounds which distinguish the child's tongue from the other languages appear only later.

In stressing the innate capabilities of the child, the basically social nature of the acquisition process must not be lost sight of. Language is used by human beings in a social context. The child learns to speak to others before he learns to speak to himself egocentrically. Bruner (1975) claims that linguistic concepts are first realized in action. Children develop attention structures in interaction with parents, first developing the notion of predication from having their attention called to the characteristics or actions of objects. Basic case relations like agent, action, object, and recipient are first apprehended by children in observing and participating in action (especially play). They incorporate these relations and the accompanying parental comments into their language learning.

Parents simplify the phonology, syntax, and morphology used in speaking to children in certain regular ways. This makes it easier for children to figure out how the language works. This language used by parents is well designed to provide children with information about the world and about the social rules for the use of language (Gleason and Weintraub 1976).

Studies of language acquisition must pay attention to the part adults play in the process. Corsaro (1977) has identified the clarification request as a consistent feature of adult interactive styles used with children. The clarification request may consist of either a clarification marker (e.g. *what?*) or a partial repetition of the previous utterance. It may be used to clear up misunderstandings or to keep the conversation going. He records the following segment of conversation between a child (Buddy) and his father at home:

- B-F: I got this (shoebox).
 F-B: Oh, you want to buy some shoes, huh?
 B-F: Yeah.
 F-B: OK.
 B-F: I'm gonna buy some sneakers.
 F-B: Gonna buy some sneakers?
 B-F: Yeah.

Such clarifications are often required because of an absence of shared cultural interpretations. They also help the adult control the flow of the interaction. The child begins to realize that what is obvious to him is not always as obvious to others. He learns how to resolve ambiguities and develop his communicative competence.

The focus of most child language acquisition studies so far has been on knowledge of grammar inferred from the child's performance, that is, from what the child says, the situations in which the sentences are spoken, and others' reactions to them. This kind of knowledge develops in an approximately invariant form, though not at an invariant rate for all children. The primary determinants of the order of learning are the relative semantic and grammatical complexity of constructions, rather than their frequency. Children learn the simpler structures first. This knowledge is somehow used in speaking and understanding sentences.

First language learning is not, in principle, necessarily different from learning to speak a second language as an adult, whether through formal study or anthropological linguistic field methods. In the first place, the dual nature of the speaker/hearer role must be acknowledged. In both instances it is the case that a person understands more than he is able to say, that is, a person's passive knowledge is always greater than his active knowledge of a language. It is undoubtedly the case that the child must understand a particular grammatical pattern before he can produce it (Miller and Ervin 1964).

Children go through a number of stages in their linguistic development. First, there is the earliest stage when the child makes all kinds of babbling and other sounds, some of which may resemble sounds of his own or some other language, while others are found in no human language. In any case, they are not used to signal anything. In the next stage, the child utilizes certain sounds to communicate, perhaps a dozen or so, but these sounds bear little or no resemblance to any words in the adult language. In other words, the child has created his own limited, short-lived, unique language (Halliday 1975).

In the following stage the child utters single words which are recognizably modeled after adult words, but each of which evidently is equivalent in meaning to a whole sentence. This is so-called holophrastic speech. Two things are clearly evident in this connection. One is that language acquisition could not take place as it does if the child did not have the concept of a sentence at the beginning of its language learning. The second consideration is that the child's initial hypothesis is everywhere exactly the same, namely, that sentences consist of single words (McNeill 1970:2). This stage is followed by one in which sentences consist of two words and which express a surprising variety of semantic relations between the pairs of words. This indicates that the child is developing complex abstract concepts, although he lacks control of a syntactic apparatus that would allow him to express himself in adult speech forms. For example, a sentence like *Mommy shoe* might mean "That's Mommy's shoe," "Mommy, put my shoe on," or "Mommy has a shoe," depending on context. Children thus have an understanding of the adult grammar but express themselves through their own. The one and two-word stages are apparently linguistic universals.

(52)

A much-cited piece of evidence for the notion that the child constructs his own constantly revised grammar is the acquisition of the irregular plurals and irregular past verbs in English. Along with the regular forms such as "knocked" and "cats," the child learns to say "came," "ran," and "did," as well as "feet," "mice," and "teeth." Only later does he say "came," "ran," and "did," as well as "feet," "mice," and "teeth." The explanation seems to be that the child initially learns "mouses," and "tooths." The irregular forms are among the most frequently appearing forms. Later on, he analyzes the regular noun plurals and past verbs as, for example, "dog+s" or "open+ed," then generalizes the rules to all nouns and verbs, giving "mouses," "doed," etc. Only later does he realize the rule has exceptions and that irregular verbs and nouns have to be marked in his lexicon as exceptions, together with the irregular shape they take in plural or past, as the case may be (McNeill 1970:85-86).

Further evidence against the imitative model of child language acquisition includes the frequent incapability of children to repeat an inflectional or syntactic change and correction after the parent. For example, if an adult says, "Say what I say: Where can I put them?" the child may respond, "Where I can put them?". Likewise, parents frequently fail to perceive children's mistakes, or if they do, there is usually an apparent randomness of the correction of the child's speech. Furthermore, children normally fail to imitate parents' ungrammatical remarks.

There is also positive evidence for the child's active role. In a now famous study, Weir (1963) taped her infant's speech in its crib. The child spoke a great deal to itself, although there was no stimulus to provoke its response. These were monologues which the author's son addressed to himself before he went to sleep at night. The child was not imitating adult sentences but rather was experimenting with words, practicing vocabulary and grammatical paradigms. He corrected his own pronunciations and practiced substituting his small vocabulary into fixed sentence frames. Much of the material recorded by his mother bore a striking resemblance to the exercises in textbooks designed for the self-study of a foreign language. The child would utter such sequences of noun substitutions as:

What color, What color blanket, What color map, What color glass.

Noun-phrase substitutions:

There's a hat, There's another. There's hat, There's another hat.

Adjective substitutions:

Big Bob, Little Bob, Big and little, Little Bobby, Little Nancy, Big Nancy.

Verb substitutions:

Listen to microphone, Go to microphone

Pronominal substitutions:

Take the monkey, Take it, Don't take it off, Don't take the glasses off, Stop it, Stop the ball, Stop it, I go up there, I go, She go up there.

The child was practicing the language which he was learning from his parents and others.

An important source of learning for any child is the feedback from his everyday speech. If he demands or questions understandably and appropriately, the desired consequences will probably ensue. Apparently the parents' understanding is not dependent on the well-formedness of children's utterances. Reinforcement is not necessary for learning, though undoubtedly it does play some role. Much more important is the child's ability to generalize, hypothesize, and process information, which he does with or without parental guidance, and which many children do in the learning of a second language on the street. Parental approval depends on the truth value of the children's statements, not on their conformity to the norms of adult grammar. Brown (1973:410) asserts that parents probably do approve of well-formed utterances and disapprove or correct the ill-formed, but there is no available evidence yet to support these ideas. In any case, children appear to assume that they will be understood if they speak at all. This assumption is largely justified in that the context of speech is obvious and parents know what the child's experience has been, so that the child's utterances are often almost redundant. Yet the child has to learn to adapt the size and complexity of his sentences to different people and changing situations. At first, he is very narrowly adapted, linguistically and in all other ways, to a very particular kind of setting (Brown 1973:167-168). As the child moves out into different social settings, he not only expands his vocabulary but also adjusts his grammar increasingly in the direction of the adult model.

M. A. K. Halliday's approach to language acquisition is more sociolinguistic than previous studies, which have had a psycholinguistic orientation (Halliday 1975). He is concerned primarily with the development of the functions of language in the child. He focuses on interaction between parent and child. The child is able to mean before he adopts words for the realization of meaning. Halliday began the study of his son Nigel at age nine months, much earlier than previous studies. Nigel created his own system. For example, a vocalization like *nananana* meant something like "I want that thing now," which was always the way he expressed that idea at that age. It satisfied the child's material needs and was the earliest function to appear in Nigel's speech.

Scholars argue about the relative importance of the role of function in language acquisition. We are not sure whether "semantic and syntactic forms are somehow derived by the child from pragmatic acts, or whether the acquisition of formal structure entails separate cognitive processes for which communication function plays largely a motivational role," (Cazden 1977:418).

A sociological perspective demands close attention to the social circumstances surrounding language acquisition. Not only must we assume a priori the importance of such factors, but we must be sure that a biased sample of social situations will not lead us to declare as universal what might be culture bound or language specific. Extant studies of the child's acquisition of grammar are very limited in their social orientation. They have been mostly studies of middle-class, eldest children and have for the most part ignored any other social context than mother and child. (The studies by Bonifacio Contreras of the acquisition of Macedonian by preschoolers in Skopje, Yugoslavia are a notable exception.)

The study of the social environment in which children are learning language will eventually help us answer some important questions. For example, we don't

know at what age children move outside the linguistic influence of their parents and fall under the dominant influence of their peer group. Most children acquire the dialect of their friends rather than their parents, but we don't know when this happens and to what extent and whether this linguistic puberty is biologically or culturally controlled (Labov 1971a:56).

As an example of the type of conclusions which can be reached by taking into account situational variables, we could mention a study of Edinburgh preschool children which showed that comparative expressions (*more, less, most, etc.*) occur much more frequently in "comparative" situations where several children are competing with each other in various tasks. It is obvious that the language of a single child at home would be less likely to show such structures (Campbell and Wales 1970:250).

Thus, as the child moves from one new situation to another, with new cultural items and new social relationships, he encounters new grammatical relationships or at least becomes increasingly aware of them. This leads the child to social circles of increasingly wider scope. He learns the way a particular vernacular is spoken in his particular family and neighborhood, then learns other varieties or styles. The middle-class child will not have to cross any social or linguistic boundaries when he goes to school, but the working-class child may have problems in this respect.

It is important not to confuse the child's version of the adult language with baby talk ("any special form of a language which is regarded by a speech community as being primarily appropriate for talking to young children and which is generally regarded as not the normal adult use of language" (Ferguson 1971:113)). Ferguson compared baby talk phenomena in Arabic, Marathi, Comanche, Gilyak, English, and Spanish and concluded that "Baby talk is a relatively stable, conventionalized part of a language, transmitted by 'natural' means of language transmission, much like the rest of the language; it is, in general, not a universal, instinctive creation of children everywhere, nor an ephemeral form of speech arising out of adult's imitation of child speech" (Ferguson 1971:114-115).

Baby-talk words most commonly refer to kin, body parts and functions, animals and basic qualities like "good," "bad," "little," and "dirty." Baby talk may be used because adults feel it is easier for the child or because they wish to foster nurturing and protective attitudes. Secondly, such attitudes lead to speaking baby talk to animals or one's lover.

Historical records show that Arabic baby talk, for example, is today much like it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that the Latin baby-talk word for "food," *papa*, is still used in contemporary Spanish and Moroccan Arabic. Sometimes adults will adopt an item of child speech, or a baby-talk word may be accepted into common speech, as, for example, *peek-a-boo* (blouse), or the common usage in American English of *bye-bye* as a frequent form of leaving, taking either face-to-face or on the telephone. Children, of course, learn baby talk from adults, adopt it as part of their own speech patterns, then drop it as they grow older and become aware of its age-graded nature.

Only after children have learned the grammatical rules and the rules for use of the language in different situations do they begin to play word games, to make

53

nonsense rhymes, and to use "secret languages" like "Pig Latin," which show that they are now exploiting the alternatives within their internalized language system. They find that a few simple transformations will produce languages that outsiders find difficult to understand, at least at first. Children do this in many different societies, both simple and complex. Thus, both in their acquisition of their native language and in the creation of their own disguised languages, children show remarkable creativity.

4.4 Acquisition of communicative competence

Linguistic socialization includes not only language acquisition, and awareness of and attitudes toward language and language differences but also what has come to be known as the acquisition of communicative competence.

By communicative competence is meant the speaker's knowledge of what is appropriate to say, how it should be said, and when in the different social situations in which he finds himself. This may be the most important linguistic ability learned by the child, that is, the ability to produce utterances which are not only grammatical but also appropriate to the linguistic and situational context. As Hymes (1974b:75) has put it,

A child from whom any and all of the grammatical sequences of a language might come with equal likelihood would be, of course, a social monster. Within the social matrix in which it acquires a system of grammar, a child acquires also a system of its use regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc.—all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them. There also develop patterns of the sequential use of language in conversation, address, standard routines, and the like. In such acquisition resides the child's sociolinguistic competence (or, more broadly, communicative competence), its ability to participate in its society as not only a speaking but also a communicating member.

As soon as the child begins to talk, he begins to express himself differently depending on the person to whom he is speaking, what kind of a situation he is in, and whatever it is he wants to say. For example, children will speak differently to adults or to other children and will frequently simplify their language in talking to younger children. Depending on the child's social situation, he may have at his disposal different styles, dialects or languages which he uses for different purposes. As he matures, his repertoire will ordinarily become more varied, although in his lifetime some varieties may increase or decrease in importance or disappear altogether.

Thus, the child acquires linguistic and communicative competence, and likewise the person who would enter and participate in an alien culture, be he linguist or nonlinguist, must as a matter of course also acquire some degree of communicative as well as linguistic competence. In fact, a speaker often demonstrates his foreignness more vividly by gaps in his communicative than in his linguistic competence, as when he speaks to a bootblack as if he were addressing royalty.

An important part of the language socialization of the child is learning routines such as, for example, in the United States the appropriate use of *hi, bye-bye*, or the Halloween *trick or treat* routine: the child says, "Trick or treat," the adult responds verbally and by giving candy, and the child says, "Thank you." Parents instruct children by saying, "Say 'trick or treat,'" and "Don't forget to say 'Thank you'" (Gleason and Weintraub 1976). As Ferguson (1976) notes, "Routines are acquired differently from the rest of language in that they are explicitly taught by parents, who prompt their use with the markers *Say*, and later *What do you say?* and who ask after the occasion *What did you say?*"

Part of the child's task is mastering register and style variation (see section 6.3). The child also learns to switch from one style to another or from one language to another if he is bilingual. Children even in nursery school, for example, may take on the roles and speech characteristics of doctors, cowboys, teachers, or mothers. They may use a telegraphic style when they assume that the other person does not speak their language, and they may simplify their language in addressing a younger child. As the child grows older it becomes more and more difficult for him to make major grammatical changes. This learning of social interactional and selectional rules begins at an early age and continues, depending on the child's opportunities for interacting with significant others of varying social characteristics and in various types of situations. Such opportunities are, of course, dependent on the child's location in the social structure with reference to such characteristics as family structure, social class, ethnicity, and residential area (Grimshaw and Holden 1976).

Societies differ in their conception of children as users and learners of language. Major socialization pressure is exerted at different stages of language development. Interest in speech and speech play may be encouraged or discouraged to varying degrees, and there is great variation in the extent to which speech is a mode of reward and punishment for children. Much research is needed along these lines. We need to focus on interaction sequences such as mother-child or child-child, as the child develops his language in response to the type of communicative tasks his life style requires. He has to acquire the ability to select appropriate words, styles, and codes, as well as the rules which govern the assignment of right to speak and the selection of appropriate content. There is some evidence that acquisition of these sociolinguistic rules is subject to overgeneralization and the generation of structures different from those of adults (Cook 1973:324-325).

4.5 Cultural and linguistic relativity

The sociologist of knowledge studies how whatever passes for knowledge in a particular society or segment thereof has been produced by that society and the structures by means of which it is disseminated and controlled. By knowledge is meant not only received academic knowledge but also the common sense, everyday knowledge of the people. The sociologist strives to understand the social context of knowledge, not to evaluate its "truth" or "validity" except, of

course, within its own sphere of activity. Ethnethodologists studying how sociologists produce sociological knowledge have emphasized the great dependence of sociologists on the meaning of words—the interpretation of which, on questionnaires, for example, can vary fairly widely in a population. There may be differences in the interpretation of a particular question not immediately apparent to the linguistically unsophisticated. Thus, the sociologist is, or ought to be, interested in the principles underlying meaning in language, that is, semantics and their relation to cognition, the processes of knowing. Every sociologist should be concerned with meaning, and every sociologist of language ought to be especially concerned with the relationships between linguistic meaning and social meaning.

There are two different but related approaches to the study of the influence of language structure on cognitive processes and other symbolically mediated behavior. One approach deals with the generic function of language in shaping cognitive processes, while the other is concerned with the comparative problem of how lexical and grammatical differences among languages systematically relate to differences in the cognitive processes of their speakers. In other words, we must specify in what ways languages are alike, as well as how they differ. The notion of variation assumes some base from which phenomena vary. It is primarily the comparative problem that has held the attention of scholars.

Social scientists are in general agreement with the principle of cultural relativity, that is, the notion that cultures are to be understood in their own terms and that there are no standards by which one can evaluate some cultures as being better or worse, or higher or lower than others. An outgrowth of theories of cultural relativity is the idea of linguistic relativity—the claim that different language structures constrain the cognitive function of their speakers in different ways. The linguistic relativity view has come to be modified in recent years by the realization that not only do languages reflect more than they mold cultural values and orientation but also that the languages of the world share many more aspects of structure than was previously realized.

When we speak of cognitive organization as being constrained by linguistic structure, what we are referring to primarily is that certain aspects of the “real world” are obligatorily signalled by linguistic forms, whereas others are not. For example, some languages require that gender be marked in noun, verb, adjective, or pronoun, whereas others do not. Thus, in the former case one has to be continually on the alert to take into consideration the sex of the person speaking, spoken to or about, whereas in the other case speakers and hearers do not have their attention drawn to the fact of sexual differences. In some languages, tense may be important, that is, the verb automatically must indicate when an event took place—in the past, present, or future—and whether it happened at the same time as, or prior to, or after some other event. In other languages, time of occurrence is ignored, but the verb form indicates whether the person speaking actually witnessed the event or merely heard about it. Some languages, such as Turkish or Macedonian, make both kinds of distinction. Many analogies have been drawn between these kinds of grammatical distinctions and certain orientations in the culture of their speakers.

Generally known as the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, the postulate that the structure of the languages we speak affects the way we perceive the world about us is ordinarily attributed to the American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, but the idea goes back at least as far as the nineteenth-century German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt. As expressed by Sapir (1929:207), “Language is a guide to social reality... Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression of their society.”

Whorf (1956) believed that languages with different structures conceptualized reality differently, for example, European languages in terms of space and time but a language like Hopi in terms of events. Many of his most important points were made comparing Hopi with what he called “Standard Average European” (SAE), on the assumption that European languages did not differ among themselves significantly enough to prevent their being considered as a group. The language gap between Hopi and SAE is indeed wide, and in each case the language is congruent with the culture. Determining the direction of causality is a different matter. A few pertinent plausible examples picked at random do not constitute proof. Furthermore, the differences concern surface morphology for the most part, and Whorf does not deal with deeper levels of syntax.

If the way a language is structured forms a kind of screen or filter through which its native speakers perceive, conceptualize, and categorize the objects of the natural and social world, then it must form or help to form a people's world view. Language would function, then, not just as a device for reporting experience but also as a way of defining experience. It must direct speakers' perceptions and supply their habitual modes of analyzing experience into significant categories. Significant and formidable barriers to cross-cultural communication would then arise from differences between languages, although intercultural communication is never impossible. Actually, it is just more or less difficult, depending on the degree of difference, not so much between the languages as between the cultures concerned.

Fishman (1960:333, 1972b:160–161) has identified four levels to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The first level involves *codifiability* and asserts that people who speak languages making lexical distinctions not made by another language or languages are therefore better able to talk about certain things than the other speakers can. Obviously, codifiability differences are related to gross cultural differences. It is easier to remember and deal with things that have a high degree of codifiability. This is enhanced if the language typically uses a single word rather than a phrase for a particular object, e.g. *cirrus* rather than *wispy, horse-tail clouds* (Brown 1958:236–237).

The second level asserts that where a language makes certain lexical distinctions not made by others, it enables their speakers more easily to perceive differences in environment. Therefore, they can remember, perceive, or learn certain nonlinguistic tasks more rapidly or completely, such as Eskimos learning the different types of snow. The third level asserts that speakers of languages with particular grammatical features are predisposed to certain cultural styles or

(5)

54 INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

emphases, e.g. the European orientation toward clocks and calendars related to the verbal tense system. This level of analysis, which relates grammatical structure to worldview, has not normally sought nor supplied independent confirmation of the existence of whatever phenomena the grammatical data are supposed to indicate. This level of analysis is frequently argued for by picking and choosing grammatical forms, cultural values, and themes which happen to be congruent with each other. There is no attempt systematically to sample either. The fourth level asserts that grammatical features facilitate or make more difficult certain nonlinguistic behaviors such as in the cognitive and perceptual areas. With reference to this last point, the Sapir-Whorf controversy in part still rages because of its application to language differences between children of different social classes à la Bernstein (see section 8.4).

If there are significant connections between language and the rest of culture, they are difficult to validate, because it is impossible to generalize about entire cultures or social classes. Furthermore, we have to explain the fact that peoples very similar in culture speak languages completely unrelated (e.g. Germans and Hungarians) and that closely related languages are frequently spoken by peoples with a very different culture e.g. Finns and Samoyeds. Or consider Islamic societies which use such widely different languages as Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Indonesian. While languages may reflect cultural concerns, they do not cause them. As Fishman (1972b:155-158) has indicated, "Although many have tried to do so, no one has successfully predicted and demonstrated a cognitive difference between two populations on the basis of the grammatical or other structural differences between their languages alone." Another difficulty making it unfeasible to categorize or typologize entire languages or entire societies in any overall fashion is the widespread bilingualism and biculturalism in most of the societies of the world. In many cases where the structural differences in the linguistic system may be great, they may be utilized by speakers who share substantially the same culture or who may appropriately make different distinctions in different settings. Although different languages categorize experience differently, it is possible for a person speaking one language to understand the distinctions made by the other. Thus, while thought may be conditioned by language, it is not determined by it.

Perhaps ultimately the hypothesis that people speaking different languages perceive the world differently can only be decided by psychological experiments. It is not possible to extrapolate directly from linguistic to cognitive data. For example, because English uses the same words (long/short) for both time and space, it is not necessarily the case that we tend to view time in spatial terms, whereas a speaker of Hopi, who has different words to refer to time and space, does not perceive them in the same fashion, as Whorf asserts.

The view that each language is equally well adapted to its particular setting assumes that each language has only one setting, each setting only one language. The converse of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is that the social and natural environment is reflected in the language. This is largely a matter of vocabulary, for those features of social life and of the natural environment which are particularly important will be represented in the lexicon, whether different kinds

of snow for the Eskimo, different aspects of the horse or camel among the Bedouin, or terms which pertain to the automobile in our own civilization. Sapir (1912:89) long ago noted that "... in actual society even the simplest environmental influence is either supported or transformed by social forces." Aspects of the environment will be reflected in the lexicon only if the people in that particular society have enough interest to make reference to it through the medium of language. It is not merely the physical environment which is reflected but the interest of the people in those environmental features.

The values current in a society may affect the language, especially by word taboos. But clearly the prohibition of the use of certain words in certain contexts is merely a special case of the notion that certain forms are appropriate in certain styles and registers and inappropriate in others. Taboo words, among others, are used for special effects. Their use in English may involve an effort very much akin to the use of magic in nonliterate societies (see section 4.7).

Since we cannot have a different word for each unique event or object, some events or objects are always assigned to different terms, while others are classed together. Each language has its own unique way of grouping or distinguishing such entities. It must not be thought that the distinctions made by languages are all necessarily arbitrary and unique. For example, the notion that color distinctions are so has been recently discredited by the studies of Berlin and Kay (1969), who have shown that all languages place the foci of their color labels at very nearly the same spots on the color spectrum. In their original presentation, Berlin and Kay claimed that if five foci are identified, for example, they will always be white, black, red, green, yellow, and if there is a sixth, it will always be blue. While languages may have different numbers of basic terms, languages with the same number of basic terms will always have the same colors. Interestingly, the sequence is correlated with technological complexity, so languages with only two terms are spoken by technologically very primitive people (for example, in New Guinea), while languages with all eleven foci (including brown, grey, pink, orange, and purple) are confined to the complex cultures of East Asia and Europe. The basic color term theory has been revised more recently in some of its details, but the basic sequence and its implications appear to be supported by the research done since their original publication (Kay 1975).

4.6 Folk taxonomies

Other than the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, perhaps the area that has received the most extensive attention of those interested in the relation between language and culture has been that of folk taxonomy. By taxonomy is meant some popularly accepted classification of plants, animals, colors, diseases, kinship terms, speech acts, or whatever. The investigator studies the principles behind the classifications which have been set up by people without regard to the principles of modern Western scientific systems. For example, in Baifin Land, Mackey

56

(1972b:135) was able to identify 21 distinctly different words for ice and snow in the local Eskimo language, some words requiring long sentences to translate into English.

All speech communities have folk taxonomies as part of their lexicons. These taxonomies are not necessarily reflections of either nature or the language but rather of locally accepted social conventions. While the native speakers may regard these taxonomies as the only possible ones for the phenomena in question and as reflecting certain self-evident truths, they are socially particularistic. Linguistic reflection of social reality, however, is likely to be only partial, as expansion, contraction, or change in the lexicon is likely to be slower than the related sociocultural changes.

Color and kinship terminologies have been the classical sources of relativist ideas. Kinship categories differ radically from one language to another, although analysis of kinship terminology is normally presented in terms of a universal or at least language-neutral set of symbols such as Fa="father," Mo="mother," Br="brother," Si="sister," So="son," Da="daughter," Hu="husband," Wi="wife." If these can be considered semantic universals of kinship, then we imply that they are also cultural universals. The analyst identifies the components of meaning which distinguish the use of one term from that of another, such as sex, collaterality, generation, relative age, etc. These dimensions can be analyzed by a technique known as componential analysis, which studies the kinship semantics of each language in its own terms (Leech 1974:247-259). Thus, while the components may be universal, they are put together according to different principles in different languages and societies. These principles are then indicative of the social structure as well as the cognitive processes of the people who speak each of the languages. Thus, for example, in Spanish *frío* means not only "uncle" but also "father's or mother's first cousin." What in English is kept separate is socially and conceptually merged in Spanish. But English also merges what many other cultures keep separate, for *uncle* can refer to FaBr, MoBr, FaSiHu or MoSiHu. In many languages, there are separate terms for relatives by blood and relatives by marriage, as well as for distinguishing those on the mother's side from those on the father's, as these are important social distinctions.

4.7 Taboos and euphemisms

Words not only have referential meaning, that is, stand for certain things, persons or ideas but can evoke in themselves positive or negative attitudes. Thus, the uttering of certain words may be forbidden because they are deemed to be especially sacred, vulgar, obscene, or to refer to unpleasant matters, all as culturally defined. Of course, they are, in fact, used; otherwise they would be lost to the language.

Frazer (1922:284-305) pointed out that, in a wide range of nonliterate cultures, there is a reluctance or taboo against pronouncing a person's own name, the name of certain designated relatives, of the dead, or of royal and divine

personages. The taboo extends even to ordinary words which resemble the tabooed name. Frazer believed that this taboo was a potent factor in lexical change as many words dropped out of the local lexicon.

As cultures change, so do the linguistic taboos. Thus, note the following observations made three decades ago and certainly obsolete in many, if not most, segments of United States society, at least: "If you use the so-called 'four-letter' or taboo words in mixed company except in the lowest classes of society, you will immediately be subjected to extreme disapproval, condemnation and ostracism" (Hall 1960:20).

Unpleasant associations are unavoidable in dealing with such subjects as death, disease, crime, and punishment, as well as with the taboo-ridden subjects of sex and excretion, so the process of euphemism inevitably influences our speech. What we do is refer to something offensive or delicate in a way to make it sound more pleasant or acceptable than it really is. We replace a word having offensive connotations with another which does not overtly refer to the unpleasantness being avoided. This linguistic device enables us to live with talk about things that would otherwise shock or disturb us.

Euphemisms fall into two categories. In one, there is substitution of a word phonetically similar to the disapproved one, for example, in English:

gee whiz	Jesus
aw shucks	aw shit
goldarn	God damned

or in Spanish:

caray	carajo
ay chihuahua	ay chingado
cilanтро	culanтро

In the last example, academic Spanish *culanтро* ("coriander leaves") sounds like *culo* ("rectum"), so *cilanтро* is substituted in popular Mexican Spanish. Interestingly, fresh coriander leaves are now available in many supermarkets in the southwestern United States, where they are labelled "Mexican cilantro."

In the other category of euphemisms, an unpleasant idea is avoided by very oblique reference. Thus, originally "toilet" referred to personal grooming, and even today a woman may go to the "powder room," even when her face needs no powdering. Likewise, a person may go to the "bathroom" who doesn't need a bath or to the "restroom" when he isn't the least bit tired.

In American English, the three areas in which euphemisms seem to have flourished most abundantly are the excretory functions, sexual organs and activities, and death. A fourth area might be business, where corporations do not report "profits" but rather "earnings." But there are probably more ways to say a person has died without using the verb "die" than almost anything else. Thus, a person has "passed on," "passed away," "gone to his reward," "gone to the big roundup in the sky," "been gathered to the bosom of the Lord," etc. The reader can no doubt think of many others. One class in sociolinguistics at California

57

State University, Fullerton, succeeded in collecting more than a thousand such euphemisms for dying. Euphemisms are, of course, reflective of some very basic cultural attitudes and, therefore, of considerable sociolinguistic interest.

According to Haas (1964a:489-491), the Creek Indians in Oklahoma avoided the use of certain words of their own language when white people were around. These words were those bearing some phonetic similarity to the "four-letter" words of English. They avoided these words even though it was unlikely that a white person not knowing Creek would catch these words in the stream of Creek speech. The avoidance originated with the increase of bilingualism among the Creeks and as they came to assimilate the white man's taboos. That students studying in the United States also attempt to avoid certain Thai words resembling English obscene words, such as *phrig* "chili pepper." Among the Nootka, the English word *such* bears so close a resemblance to *Nootka/sac/* "vagina umens" that Anglo teachers cannot get their students to utter the English word under any circumstances.

The case of the use of taboo words in public protest in the United States in the 1960s was, in effect, an attack on linguistic restrictions, which symbolized the attack on the social system itself. As Labov (1971a:63) indicates, "The strength of the norms which are being challenged here is hard to overestimate. The reactions of the Kent State grand jury to the language of the students provides some evidence. It must be remembered that the violation of a norm does not destroy the norm; in fact, this behavior would lose its significance if the social sanction did not exist." It was allegedly the shouting of obscenities at the National Guard soldiers that triggered the massacre of the Kent State students in May of 1970. Some taboos are connected with the belief in the magical nature of language, that somehow words have power in themselves. Thus, in some societies a person's name is kept secret, lest one gain power over the person by being able to utter his name. People also will change their names as a result of religious conversion, ethnic assimilation, or ascension to a throne or to the Papacy. Similarly, many women now feel that by giving up their maiden name upon marrying, they are giving up some of their power. This notion was common even in the women's movement of half a century ago (Jespersen 1925:175). Cities or countries will take new names and thereby hope to acquire new identities, as when Petrograd became Leningrad or the Gold Coast became Ghana.

Another category of taboo words is that of racial and religious epithets, hurled at people to insult and degrade them. Again, like other taboo words, they are in fact uttered and live on in the language. In fact, taboo words are very much alive and recently have become the subject of a specialized publication, *Maledicta; the International Journal of Verbal Aggression* (Volume 1, Number 1, Summer 1977), published by Reinhold Aman in Waukesha, Wisconsin, with contributions by linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, folklorists, etc.

Discussion questions

1. Are there any groups to which you belong that use special languages or special forms of the language? Describe their language usage.

2. What is the relationship between the socialization and language acquisition processes?
3. Describe the major stages through which a child goes in learning his first language.
4. There is much more to child language acquisition than the child's merely imitating what he hears adults saying. Explain.
5. Explain the difference between linguistic competence and communicative competence.
6. Describe some routines which children learn other than the *hi, bye-bye* or *trick* or *treat* routines and which you have observed. Do adults learn linguistic routines also? Explain.
7. Explain the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. How strongly is it supported by empirical evidence?
8. Are you and your friends and acquaintances using more taboo words than formerly? Why do you feel this is happening? What age or sex differences do you observe in this regard?

58