

**SPOKEN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:
A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE AND EDUCATIONAL
IMPLICATIONS**

Rui Manuel Cruse¹

ABSTRACT

Children in the early stages of language acquisition try several times to produce the sounds of their language as the adults around them do, and this is no small task. However, it takes considerable exposure to the language before the child comes to learn the complete control of words correct articulation. The acquisition of spoken language by the child is a slow and complex process which is basically determined by the physical environment and by the social context in which he lives. Several factors, amongst which parental influence and adults as a whole, the size of the family unit and the socio-economic level, have a profound effect in the child's language development. This and some other aspects of sociolinguistic perspective, will be analysed in the present study.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, spoken language acquisition, socio-economic factors.

RESUMO

A criança engaja-se em inúmeras tentativas para executar os sons produzidos pelos adultos e, só à custa de muito esforço consegue, finalmente, o controle completo da articulação correta das palavras. A aquisição da fala, pela criança, é um processo moroso, complexo e determinado, fundamentalmente, pelo ambiente físico e pelo contexto social onde essa criança está inserida. Vários fatores, entre os quais a influência dos pais e adultos, em geral, o tamanho da unidade familiar e o nível sócio-econômico, têm um profundo efeito no desenvol-

¹ Rui Cruse holds a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics to the Teaching of languages (PUC-São Paulo) and works as a professor and researcher for the Post-Graduate Programme in Applied Linguistics, Unisinos, RS.

vimento da linguagem da criança. Esses e outros aspectos, de cunho essencialmente sociolinguístico, serão analisados no presente trabalho.

Palavras-chave: sociolinguística, aquisição da fala, fatores sócio-econômicos.

1 INTRODUÇÃO

We are all well aware of the complex nature of language. We know how language cuts us loose from the ties of the here and now. Even at its most primitive level (... words are only names for things) it emancipates us from our specific concrete environment and opens to us dimensions of experience otherwise inaccessible. At its more complex levels it enables us to enter into relationships with others, which remove human social intercourse to a completely different plane from that of other animals.

Whereas the lower animals transfer learned behaviour to new situations only by the mechanism of primary stimulus generalization, man, through language, has infinite potentiality for transfer. As Piaget and the followers of Pavlov have pointed out, language enables the child to bring the past into juxtaposition with the present. He does this because he is able to express verbally relations between things and the operations he performs so that he can carry these forward to the new situation. Pozo (1996) states, for example, once the small child has established the idea of "left" he will be able to apply the idea in his spoken language in many different circumstances other than the ones in which the concept was originally established.

The language of the child, with its profound influence on his behaviour, has a complex history of development. The mere acquisition of the correct speech forms is in itself an immense task. The little child probably makes thousands of attempts to echo the sounds made by adults before he achieves complete control and is able to utter the words correctly at will:

In order to understand others and to be understood, the child must acquire the ability to hear and produce the sounds of his language as the adults around him do, and that is no small task. (de Villiers and de Villiers, 1979: 5)

Society as a whole and parental attitudes, in particular, are of great importance for the child engaged in the process of acquiring the spoken language. The child does not invent his own language, nor does he merely learn English,

Chinese or Portuguese. He learns, and later perhaps modifies, the Portuguese of a specific mother, of a specific social class or group in a particular town, in a particular sociolinguistic environment. Thus, his language will, in a sense, be unique in that it will contain many common elements, but will differ in some respects from the language of every other child due to some factors such as the socio-economical status, parental attitudes and social context.

Since learning to speak normally depends upon both hearing and seeing other people speaking, it is evident that a child will be severely handicapped if his eyes or ears are defective. Poor visual activity may prevent him from seeing the placing of his parents' lips when sounds are being formed, and poor hearing - particularly high tone deficiency - will make the discrimination of various consonants far more difficult. Apart from these specific physical requirements, good general health will enable him to respond actively to the stimulation he receives, and will thus facilitate learning.

2 SPEECH AND SOCIETY

Every single specialized book stresses the importance of *society* as the key educative influence in a child's process of spoken language acquisition. In fact, children brought up outside society are unlikely to be recognizably human, that is, the more removed children are from normal human company, the less adequately human they are likely to be.

A society must provide a means of communication for its members, that is, one of the essential elements for living in a society, in community with others, is a means of communication. Communication, or language, provides the society with a means of socializing its children and its members in general and a mechanism for role-taking. George H. Mead (1989) has emphasized the importance of language in understanding and taking the roles of others. In the development of the child's self it is essential to take up the attitudes of those around him, says Mead, and:

Language in its significant sense is that vocal gesture which tends to arouse in the individual the attitude which it arouses in others, and it is this perfecting of the self by the gesture which mediates the social activities that gives rise to the process of taking the role of the other. (Mead, 1989: 33)

In a developed and sophisticated society the means of communication is naturally a spoken and written language, which will differentiate into a variety of

forms according to the level of any particular group or individual. The differences in syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation of the language spoken by these various social elements are facts which the education process cannot afford to ignore. It is precisely in this particular area of social function that children can experience considerable deprivation through inarticulateness, illiteracy or the inability to go beyond a very limited vocabulary or *restricted code* (Bernstein) of language. I do not intend to elaborate in any detail here upon this question since I shall discuss the whole problem of social groups and language later on. It should, however, be noted that the current study of *sociolinguistics* is not just another academic extension of linguistics: it is the sort of 'vital' study with which every practicing teacher is concerned. In other words, the study and practice of language should be given top priority and sound language teaching should be closely linked with an understanding of the social and cultural factors as they affect individual children.

Language, thought, and culture are the touchstones which single man out from what Stones (1994) called 'the brutes', and these three can exist only in society. Any child brought up outside society (assuming that this were possible) would be in the position of the lower animals: all the characteristic features of humanity would be denied him. He would, like other animals, build up patterns of language based on condition reflexes set up in the actual concrete situation. There would be virtually no abstraction or symbolization; no past, no future. As long as society exists for the child, he is involved in its structures, its mores, its laws and its sanctions; he cannot escape its control and its interpenetration of his very consciousness.

But as soon as we have society we have the conditions appropriate to the transmission of behaviour through language from one generation to the next. The more primitive the society, the more primitive will be the language of transmission and the behaviour which are transmitted. It might well be said, however, that language and society develop hand in hand: there can be no language without society; there can be no society without language. Indeed, as Professor Stones (1994) suggests, not only is man in society: society is also in man.

As I have implied before, the young child is in a way only potentially human. He will become fully human only through social living, through making part of himself the patterns of social thinking, feeling and communicating verbally, which are characteristic of his particular social group. His language make-up will, therefore, approximate to that of his home, his society at large.

The objective of family education, in very general terms, is to provide children with the means for understanding their society and its structures, and to open up for them a way of creating 'meaning' out of their environment and their relationships. This is certainly a part of what culture implies, and from an

educational point of view it will mean, in specific terms, that the child is assisted both in 'spoken language' and 'thought' to classify and provide meaning and relationships to things, ideas and events. To proceed from a structure such as: *the apple to mommy I want the apple* is a big step for the little child. He has advanced from mere symbols or signs of identification, to concepts of willingness and meaning - at least in a simple sense.

Whatever the social background of a family, children are likely to make more rapid and lasting progress if people around them, particularly parents, read stories to them and teach them nursery rhymes, since the children in this way acquire a store-house of known language examples (Clark & Clark, 1977). In addition, it seems, according to Hatch (1985) and Ferreiro (1999), that a 'welcoming' attitude to childish questions facilitates language development. The children may need help in framing their questions accurately, and the parents may find difficulty in providing answers which are both correct and comprehensible; but it appears that those who make the effort are likely to enhance the language of their children. The problem of providing answers which are, at one and same time, both correct and comprehensible is considerable. If, for example, a very young child asks where babies come from, it would clearly be almost as foolish to discuss cell-fertilization in detail as to refer to gooseberry bushes or storks.

Just as animals are enabled, largely by instinct but also by imitation, to cope with their environments, including their relationships with other living creatures, so man is equipped to live in his society through the transmission of culture, through the educative process by means of language. I am not suggesting here that the school is the sole element in the educative process - far from it, as we shall see in my discussion of the importance of family attitudes and the local spoken language environment of the child.

3 THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

A child's language development will be encouraged if his physical environment is rich in stimulation (Aimard, 1986). As he begins to master the means of communication, the infant will progress more rapidly if there are things in and around the home which are sufficiently interesting to be worth asking questions about, and discussing. It is not easy to isolate the effects of a stimulating physical environment from other factors, since such an environment is usually found in homes where other advantages are also present: the superior language development of so many children of higher-income parents is no doubt due, in the main, to the better speech models and language habits provided by such parents,

and perhaps to an innate superior capacity for learning. But it is likely, too, that these higher-income homes will constitute a physical environment richer in objects which stimulate a child to talk, and that this factor is itself of some importance.

There is general agreement that social conditions reflected in the home have a profound effect upon the language development of children. As has been implied above, the higher the socio-economic level, the greater is the likelihood that parents will provide good speech models, and will have the time and inclination to converse with their children and to read to them. A number of studies have been designed to discover the relationship between language development and socio-economic status. Elliot (1982), for instance, found that nursery-school children from homes receiving relief were consistently behind children from self-supporting homes in the number of comprehensible words spoken, and in the length of sentences used; whereas Hatch (1985) observed a more rapid phoneme development in infants from professional, business, and clerical groups than in those from labouring groups.

During a White House Conference on "Early Childhood Development and Learning", held in April 1997, President Clinton showed great concern about the topic and asked how we could educate parents and others so they could take advantage of the findings. A team of researchers documented as follows:

(...) children of professionals heard 75 percent more words per hour than did the children of working-class parents, and more than three times as many words as did the children of welfare parents. The privileged kids got positive feedback two to five times as often. Tested at the age of 3, children who heard many words and had more positive experiences scored higher on standardized tests. (...) (Begley & Wingert, 1997:50)

4 'RESTRICTED CODE' VERSUS 'ELABORATED CODE'

There is no doubt that status groups are distinguishable today much more by the forms of language they use than by any particular accent. Professor Bernstein (1988) has done a considerable amount of research into this sociolinguistic problem and pointed out that speakers using what he called an '*elaborated code*' develop an orientation to the world different from that developed by speakers using a '*restricted code*'. In fact, there is a close association between a father's level of occupation and his children's spoken language achievement.

The working-class child is the one who tends to use the '*restricted code*' of language in which the individual selection and manipulation of words will be

severely restricted as well as highly predictable. Whilst the middle-class child may also use this code of language, particularly in the company of working-class children, he will not be restricted to it in the same way, and will eventually develop away from it. Some of the characteristics of the '*restricted code*' are listed below:

- the use of short sentences, which are simple in grammatical structure and uncomplicated in syntax;
- conjunctions employed are simple and repetitive, e.g. and, so, then, because;
- very few subordinate clauses are employed;
- short comments, command and questions are repeatedly used;
- there is very little competence in developing a sustained tense with sequential speech;
- information is conveyed in a disjointed and dislocated way;
- there is a limited use of adjectives and adverbs, indicating a lack of imaginative and creative power linguistically;
- there is a general inability to impersonalize or to create conditional statements by the use of such impersonal pronouns as 'it' or 'one';
- the symbolism employed is of a very low order, and there is a general incapacity to verbalize abstractions, or to express in a formal way any sort of abstract thought;
- much of the restricted code is implicit; statements and comments are expressed in a particular and unfinished manner so that the hearer is expected, or compelled, to make his own inference;
- statements are broken up with such stabilizers as, 'you see?', 'you know?', in order to gain confidence and the hearer's sympathetic acquiescence.

The middle-class child is much more likely to be brought up in an ethos of formal language, or in what Bernstein terms an '*elaborated code*'. I am concerned here with the children of parents whose occupations will be largely involved in the use of words and their precise connotations. Language will tend to be much more an individual matter, and to form the vehicle for the expression of individual personality with its opinions and qualifications. Whilst the language of the working-class child is highly predictive, that of the child of middle-class parents is not nearly so. One thing that, in my opinion, is of crucial importance, is that the child brought up in the atmosphere of the '*elaborated code*' will have available to him a language structure capable of articulating and structuring his perceptions of the world and society around him, as well as his rapidly accumulating knowledge of an increasing variety of areas of learning. Socialization involves the ability to live in society in an understanding way: the child brought up with an '*elaborated*

code' of language will be able to more competently express the meaning of his world. The characteristics of the 'elaborated code' are as follows:

- the sentence construction is more complex, introducing a greater variety of stress and logical modification. The grammatical order employed and the regulating syntax are accurate;
- a larger range of conjunctions is employed, many of them introducing a variety of subordinate clauses;
- prepositions are employed not merely to express spatial contiguity but also logical and temporal relationships;
- there is an increasing ability to impersonalize ideas, statements and opinions, by the introduction of impersonal pronouns;
- there is a richer employment of both adjectives and adverbs, indicating a greater creative linguistic ability;
- there is a greater use of subordinate clauses;
- there is a considerable use of symbolism of a higher order to discriminate and distinguish between meanings within speech sequences. There is a greater facility in the expression of abstract thought in concrete terms;
- the elaborated code is explicit; statements and comments are completed, and ideas are mediated and modified through the actual structure of the sentences;
- the child's conceptual hierarchy is gradually formulated in verbal terms in an increasingly accurate and meaningful way.

It may well be that the basis of much misunderstanding between classes is to be found in the relative 'restriction' of the linguistic code of the unskilled worker in particular. Certainly nothing delineates the lower-working-class child so clearly as his poorer language, and no other single factor contributes so markedly to his relative failure to profit by an academic education. For many such children grow up in a small society where complex verbal procedures are unusual, where meaning is normally inferred from the context of a remark. And where gesture (coupled with such phrases as 'you know' and 'you see') replaces verbal precision. Removed from their home environment, they find themselves without the necessary linguistic equipment to express meaning accurately (Cabral, 1991).

By contrast, a middle-class child will have been encouraged by his mother and father to express his ideas and emotions verbally, and they will have given him a model to follow in that they will themselves have talked about their feelings and thoughts. As a matter of fact, the association between the level of spoken language with parental occupation is still closer where higher education is concerned Hagege (1996). The underlying reasons for this are extremely complex, but differences of income and of the parents' educational level and

attitudes are certainly among them. In De Villiers & De Villiers' (1979), opinion, potential, as distinct from realized, ability among the children of the lower classes has been masked by inadequate powers of speech. Linguistic inadequacy is closely associated with the home and social background, and this in turn affects the eliciting of intellectual potential.

The process whereby children from one social class may learn many different words and expressions, from those learnt by children from another, can lead to a confusion similar to that caused by regional differences in usage. This is especially marked when different meanings are assigned to similar words. For some children, breakfast is followed by lunch, dinner, tea and supper; for others by evenings, lunch, tea and dinner. More crucial than these vocabulary differences, however, is the fact that, generally speaking, families at the higher social levels employ more appropriate language and more soundly constructed sentences. They usually have a wider store of phrases and constructions, enabling distinctions and subtleties to be expressed.

If we accept the notion expressed by Luria and Yudovitch (1961) that speech is itself a complex of signals, which isolates perceptions and relates them to certain categories, we can see that the far richer spoken language of the middle-class child is likely to give him a much greater understanding of the world and a considerably better tool for handling it. In particular, the relatively 'elaborated code' of the middle-class child will enable him to distinguish his view of the world from other views: he will thus be less likely to assume the universal validity of his own personal experience.

5 THE INFLUENCE OF THE FAMILY: THE PARENTAL ATTITUDES

The importance of the family in general and of parental attitudes particularly to verbal usage, especially with regard to the child's place in family conversation, is extremely important but cannot be overstressed. Some parents believe that young children should be offered what is known as *baby-talk* or *motherese*, whereas such talk appears in fact to be confusing to a child when he later meets the correct word or expression. This baby-talk takes two main forms: the structure CVCV, that is, the repetition of syllables of suffixes as in 'ma-ma', 'da-da' and 'choo-choo', and the addition of suffixes as in 'doggy' and 'horsey'. There seems to be no evidence, according to the latest research (De Villiers & De Villiers, 1979), to indicate whether one form is more harmful than the other: one might guess that 'horsey' and 'doggy' would prove less confusing than the substitution

of totally different words, such as 'baa-baa' (for sheep or lamb) and 'choo-choo' and 'puf-puf' (for steam-train).

Sometimes, a parent may fail to offer a lengthy word to a child because he is himself unfamiliar with it. Yet where parents themselves employ appropriate words chosen from a wide vocabulary, even quite young children respond favourably. Stones (1994) reports a very interesting case: in one instance, an admittedly intelligent 4-year-old was observed rolling coloured plasticene into a single ball. His father remarked with a smile, "you will finish up with an undifferentiated mass". The child looked up thoughtfully and said, "I can't say that". "Say 'homogeneous' then", suggested his father, offering a slightly less accurate word which was nonetheless easier to pronounce. At this, the boy continued rolling the plasticene, murmuring "homogeneous" to himself (this example is remarkable also in showing this particular child's appreciation of his own speech difficulties, notably with regard to the pronunciation of [f] and [n] sounds).

For some researchers it is probable that the acquisition of correct speech forms follows the patterns of other learned behaviour. That is, the sounds made by the child which approximate to adult forms are reinforced by the approval of the adult, or in the early months, by the fact that they produce tangible results such as food or attention. Such sounds by virtue of the fact that they are reinforced, will be repeated, sounds which are not reinforced will be dropped and fall out of the child's repertoire. This process is somehow similar to Skinner's technique of shaping the behaviour of animals by the method of successive approximations.

The acquisition of the correct speech forms, although only one aspect of language, is undoubtedly very important, for without the ability to discriminate finely among the speech sounds of others and among his own imitations of these sounds, the child could never build up a recognizable set of speech sounds.

The importance of the opportunity for children to converse with parents and adults in general has been demonstrated repeatedly. De Villiers & De Villiers (1979) showed how adult attitudes to childish contributions might affect a child's linguistic development. They described conversation at table, differentiating adult-centred from child-centred conversation, and noting in addition that in many families children were never allowed to finish a sentence for themselves. They suggested that stammering and other speech defects might be related to these continual adult 'interruptions'. In fact, this is not surprising to most of us since we do tend to act in this way either consciously or unconsciously when it comes to interact with small children, that is, breaking systematically the continuity of children's speech.

Besides such intensive studies, evidence of the need for children to

converse with parents has come from comparisons made between only children and children from larger families, and from investigations, which have recorded the developing language of singletons, twins and triplets. No doubt part of the observed correlation between small family size and superior linguistic progress can be accounted for by the tendency of parents in the higher socio-economic groups, who may pass on greater learning capacity by inheritance, to have fewer children. But nonetheless, there is evidence that greater opportunity for conversation with adults in the case of only children has an effect. Mc Carthy (1982) found that twins used shorter sentences than singletons, and that triplets were even further retarded in this respect. It seems that children from multiple births are relatively isolated from adult contacts: they talk among themselves, and may even develop their own special 'language'. It appears, too, that where there are several children in a family, particularly in cases where they are close together in age, the parents devote more time to the discussion of language with the older children than with the younger.

Family contacts usually determine not only the extent of a child's early vocabulary, but also the meaning he associates with particular words. He is likely, initially, to accept any incorrect meanings based upon parental ignorance, and it may be many years before he has an opportunity to correct such errors. One student of mine, for instance, came up to me one day and told me that he had been a year at Foreign Trade Course (Unisinos) before he discovered that the word 'bônus' (Portuguese for bond) applied to documents of commercial/economic areas, has a meaning totally different to that current in his family (Italian descent - "buono": good).

While errors of the type mentioned above can prove confusing and even embarrassing, they are perhaps less serious than the subtle and often unconscious formation of attitudes which the particular use of certain words may encourage in children. A child hearing a parent use such words as 'wog', 'dago' or 'yid' in a particular context, may come to accept as factual the prejudices which such words imply. In the same way, 'politician' may become associated with untrustworthiness, or 'artist' with irresponsibility and licentiousness.

In some families, parental taboos are passed on to children by means of language. The discussion of God or of sex may be prohibited, or may take place in such a way that an attitude is revealed and learnt. Reference to such body functions as urination or defecation may be permitted only when cloaked in euphemism (sometimes the family expression for such functions is so unusual that it is uncomprehensible to others).

Another interesting point has to do with parental occupation which may not influence the content of the conversation (which will be heavily loaded with the

jargon of a particular job), but may also determine the imagery and figures of speech employed. When children are exposed to parents who 'talk shop', they are likely to use expressions appropriate to the parental occupation more readily than others. If a parent commonly uses a word or phrase in a very particular way, the child may come to accept this as the *only* appropriate use for the word or phrase: a Civil Servant child, for example, may associate the word 'service' only with a Civil Service; a car-mechanic's son may associate the word 'timing' only with ignition timing. Not all 'shop' talk has a deleterious effect, however, since it can give rise to vivid simile and metaphor, and may contribute to an understanding of the environment. A case was reported by Elliot (1982) where one child was heard to refer to the clouds of smoke arising from his grandfather's pipe as 'Grand-dad's exhaust'; another one, the 3-year-old son of an electrical engineer, responded to a warning about the dangerous of electricity by bending to investigate the sockets, and saying: 'It's all right, they're shuttered'.

Following the same reasoning, certain religious groups may employ direct or indirect religious references in their conversation, and in extreme cases these may border on a secret dialect which tends to set a family apart from its neighbours. To a child brought up in a family of Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, the word 'kingdom' can have a very different significance from the usual.

6 EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS

The question posed by the majority of educators and teachers is how to apply the principle of 'restricted' and 'elaborated' codes to speech of small children when they enter nursery school at the age of 4 or 5 years old in most countries throughout the world. The problem of education, as teachers see it, is deliberately to intervene in the language habits of the working-class family in order that those individuals who have higher innate intellectual ability may be facilitated through the media of communication to realize that potential. There is also a suggestion, in this intervention or compensatory programme, of the employment of social workers who might be attached to schools in order to co-operate with working-class parents and ensure that their children are in no way disadvantaged because of their social class background.

But my question is this. Can education really compensate for society in this way? Can it, in fact, compensate for society at all? I personally believe that there are clearly limits to such compensation. The whole environment of the working class child militates against any formal sort of education, for the school demands responses, which, on the whole, are very different from those to which the child

is accustomed in the home. The child finds himself faced by a teacher who belongs to a different class from himself, and to whose speech patterns and mental concepts he is not **cued in**. I am sure most working-class children will react strongly against any attempts to improve both their speech and expression, and because of this they will find the manipulation of abstractions very difficult, if not impossible. The disjointed and naive description of concrete events will come much more easily to them than abstract analysis of ideas and concepts. They are already disadvantaged. And, moreover, the different patterns of the school and the staff may well be viewed as a criticism of those of their own home and their peer group, a criticism which they will strongly resist and which may well create an attitude of antipathy towards the school socializing influence.

In a seminar at PUC/SP on "Society and Language" Dr. Andrew Cohen (1988) stated that our first need is a culturally rich environment of the neighbourhood, the home and the school within which children can both learn and grow. In fact, the home and social class influences are stronger than those of the school and are, as a matter of fact, taken into the school. A child's home environment will fundamentally affect his perceptions, his personality development and his interpersonal relationships, and the school may well fight a losing battle in the realm of the evocation of a child's potential because of a social barrier at the level of spoken language or communication. This implies, in other words, that there is a great need for the teacher to have a thorough understanding of both the intellectual and social development of the child. According to Piaget, one of the chief tasks of education is, in fact, to provide a kind of social context, possessing a wide variety of choice of experiences, which will help the little child to initiate his spoken language activity. Once the child enters nursery school he has to be made aware that the school is an extension of society or a micro-society, in its own right, that is, the school itself is not an element separate from the total society, but an integral part of it. The child will find increasingly that the school curriculum will seek to compensate for his linguistic deficiencies and deprivations.

CONCLUSION

Language is a distinctively human activity, which makes possible the complex social relationships upon which civilized life depends. As human beings talk (or even write) about themselves and their environment, interaction between different individual becomes systematized, and cultural and social patterns emerge. Only language makes consideration of complex standpoints possible, and without it there could be no instructions and no rules for the regulation of society.

Further more, language serves other social functions: a person can talk about events distant in time and space, hence bringing them into the experience of his listener and he can gauge his listener's need for specificity or repetition and so on.

A child can only understand a particular concept provided the language used is within his comprehension. Much of the earliest communication from adult to child is in the form of facial expression and imitation. As a matter of fact, a child's response to his parents' speech suggests that he can hear and appreciate differences in sound. If the parents are associated with pleasure and reward, a child probably learns to speak by a process which involves listening to himself as he imitates parental words. Since he is likely to be further rewarded when his imitation approximates closely to the model or pattern, his own successful utterances become reinforced and learnt. But acquiring his command over language will have been a complex process, greatly influenced by the socio-economic and cultural environment in which his learning has taken place.

A child starting school will understand most of the grammatical devices and will use many of them correctly. It is well known that education is clearly concerned with the individual's life-career, profession or vocation. But curricular demands nowadays are also concerned with more than the child's future career in society; they are, as the various specialists have underlined, involved with his patterns of behaviour, his beliefs, his attitudes, and his life-style. Education from this point of view, is concerned with the child's language patterns and linguistic competence, his intellectual alertness, his capacity of making value-judgements, his creativity and his general leisure interests.

As far as his spoken language problems are concerned, the child will find increasingly that the school curriculum will seek to compensate for his linguistic deficiencies and deprivations. In this respect, schools must be involved in eliciting the child's potential in and through a wide variety of oral language exercises.

We must remember, however, that the physical environment, the speech of adults and particularly of parents are held to be a very strong reflection of children's linguistic knowledge long before they enter school. In fact, the child must internalize the base structure of a sentence revealed to him before he could understand its meaning and this is normally provided by parental utterances addressed to their children. To some extent, we may well say that a child's use of language reflects his parents' verbal style.

I have considered the question of spoken language in some detail because of its sociological crucial importance. Obviously, there are many other important questions that I can do no more than mention in an introductory work of this sort.

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