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On Communicative Competence

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I

This paper is theoretical. One connotation of "theoretical" is "programatic"; a related connotation is that one knows too little about the subject to say something practical. Both connotations apply to this attempt to contribute to the study of the "language problems of disadvantaged children". Practical work, however, must have an eye on the current state of theory, for it can be guided or misguided, encouraged or discouraged, by what it takes that state to be. Moreover, the language development of children has particular pertinence just now for theory. The fundamental theme of this paper is that the theoretical and the practical problems converge.

It is not that there exists a body of linguistic theory that practical research can turn to and has only to apply. It is rather that work motivated by practical needs may help build the theory that we need. To a great extent programs to change the language situation of children are an attempt to apply a basic science that does not yet exist. Let me review the present stage of linguistic theory to show why this is so.

Consider a recent statement, one that makes explicit and precise an assumption that has underlain much of modern linguistics (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3):

> Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.

From the standpoint of the children we seek to understand and help, such a statement may seem almost a declaration of irrelevance. All the difficulties that confront the children and ourselves seem swept from view.

One's response to such an indication of the state of linguistic theory might be to ignore fundamental theory and to pick and choose among its products. Models of

language structure, after all, can be useful in ways not envisioned in the statements of their authors. Some linguists (e.g., Labov, Rosenbaum, Gleitman) use transformational generative grammar to study some of the ways in which a speech community is not homogeneous and in which speaker-listeners clearly have differential knowledge of a language. Perhaps, then, one ought simply to disregard how linguists define the scope of "linguistic" theory. One could point to several available models of language – Trager-Smith-Joos, tagnemic, stratificational, transformational-generative (in its MIT, Pennsylvania, Harvard and other variants), and, in England, "system-structure" (Halliday and others); remark that there are distinguished scholars using each to analyse English; regret that linguists are unable to agree on the analysis of English; and pick and choose, according to one's problem and local situation, leaving grammarians otherwise to their own devices.

To do so would be a mistake for two reasons: on the one hand, the sort of theoretical perspective quoted above *is* relevant in ways that it is important always to have in mind; on the other hand, there is a body of linguistic data and problems that would be left without theoretical insight, if such a limited conception of linguistic theory were to remain unchallenged.

The special relevance of the theoretical perspective is expressed in its representative anecdote (to use Kenneth Burke's term), the image it puts before our eyes. The image is that of a child, born with the ability to master any language with almost miraculous ease and speed; a child who is not merely molded by conditioning and reinforcement, but who actively proceeds with the unconscious theoretical interpretation of the speech that comes its way, so that in a few years and with a finite experience, it is master of an infinite ability, that of producing and understanding in principle any and all grammatical sentences of language. The image (or theoretical perspective) expresses the essential equality in children just as human beings. It is noble in that it can inspire one with the belief that even the most dispiriting conditions can be transformed; it is an indispensable weapon against views that would explain the communicative differences among groups of children as inherent, perhaps racial.

The limitations of the perspective appear when the image of the unfolding, mastering, fluent child is set beside the real children in our schools. The theory must seem, if not irrelevant, then at best a doctrine of poignancy: poignant, because of the difference between what one imagines and what one sees; poignant too, because the theory, so powerful in its own realm, cannot on its terms cope with the difference. To cope with the realities of children as communicating beings requires a theory within which sociocultural factors have an explicit and constitutive role; and neither is the case.

For the perspective associated with transformational generative grammar, the world of linguistic theory has two parts: linguistic *competence* and linguistic *performance*. Linguistic competence is understood as concerned with the tacit knowledge of language structure, that is, knowledge that is commonly not conscious or available for spontaneous report, but necessarily implicit in what the (ideal) speaker-listener can say. The primary task of theory is to provide for an explicit account of such knowledge, especially in relation to the innate structure on which it must depend. It is in terms of such knowledge that one can produce and understand an infinite set of sentences, and that language can be spoke of as "creative", as

energeia. Linguistic performance is most explicitly understood as concerned with the processes often termed encoding and decoding.

Such a theory of competence posits ideal objects in abstraction from sociocultural features that might enter into their description. Acquisition of competence is also seen as essentially independent of sociocultural features, requiring only suitable speech in the environment of the child to develop. The theory of performance is the one sector that might have a specific sociocultural content; but while equated with a theory of language use, it is essentially concerned with psychological by-products of the analysis of grammar, not, say, with social interaction. As to a constitutive role for sociocultural features in the acquisition or conduct of performance, the attitude would seem quite negative. Little or nothing is said, and if something were said, one would expect it to be depreciatory. Some aspects of performance are, it is true, seen as having a constructive role (e.g., the cycling rules that help assign stress properly to sentences), but if the passage quoted at the outset is recalled, however, and if the illustrations of performance phenomena in the chapter from which the passage comes are reviewed, it will be seen that the note struck is persistently one of limitation, if not disability. When the notion of performance is introduced as "the actual use of language in concrete situations", it is immediately stated that only under the idealization quoted could performance directly reflect competence, and that in actual fact it obviously could not. "A record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course, and so on." One speaks of primary linguistic data as "fairly degenerate in quality" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 31), or even of linguistic performance as "adulteration" of ideal competence (Katz, 1967, p. 144). While "performance" is something of a residual category for the theory, clearly its most salient connotation is that of imperfect manifestation of underlying system.

I do not think the failure to provide an explicit place for sociocultural features to be accidental. The restriction of competence to the notions of a homogeneous community, perfect knowledge, and independence of sociocultural factors does not seem just a simplifying assumption, the sort that any scientific theory must make. If that were so, then some remark to that effect might be made; the need to include a sociocultural dimension might be mentioned; the nature of such inclusion might even be suggested. Nor does the predominant association of performance with imperfection seem accidental. Certainly, any stretch of speech is an imperfect indication of the knowledge that underlies it. For users that share the knowledge, the arrangement might be thought of as efficient. And if one uses one's intuitions as to speech, as well as to grammar, one can see that what to grammar is imperfect, or unaccounted for, may be the artful accomplishment of a social act (Garfinkel, 1972), or the patterned, spontaneous evidence of problem solving and conceptual thought (John, 1967, p. 5). These things might be acknowledged, even if not taken up.

It takes the absence of a place for sociocultural factors, and the linking of performance to imperfection, to disclose an ideological aspect to the theoretical standpoint. It is, if I may say so, rather a Garden of Eden view. Human life seems divided between grammatical competence, an ideal innately-derived sort of power, and performance, an exigency rather like the eating of the apple, thrusting the perfect speaker-hearer out into a fallen world. Of this world, where meanings may

be won by the sweat of the brow, and communication achieved in labor (cf. Bonhoffer, 1965, p. 365), little is said. The controlling image is of an abstract, isolated individual, almost an unmotivated cognitive mechanism, not, except incidentally, a person in a social world.

Any theoretical stance of course has an ideological aspect, and that aspect of present linguistic theory is not its invention. A major characteristic of modern linguistics has been that it takes structure as primary end in itself, and tends to depreciate use, while not relinquishing any of its claim to the great significance that is attached to language. (Contrast classical antiquity, where structure was a means to use, and the grammarian subordinate to the rhetor.) The result can sometimes seem a very happy one. On the one hand, by narrowing concern to independently and readily structurable data, one can enjoy the prestige of an advanced science; on the other hand, despite ignoring the social dimensions of use, one retains the prestige of dealing with something fundamental to human life.

In this light, Chomsky is quite correct when he writes that his conception of the concern of linguistic theory seems to have been also the position of the founders of modern general linguistics. Certainly if modern structural linguistics is meant, then a major thrust of it has been to define the subject matter of linguistic theory in terms of what it is not. In de Saussure's linguistics, as generally interpreted, *la langue* was the privileged ground of structure, and *la parole* the residual realm of variation (among other things). Chomsky associates his views of competence and performance with the Saussurian conceptions of langue and parole, but sees his own conceptions as superior, going beyond the conception of language as a systematic inventory of items to renewal of the Humboldtian conception of underlying processes. The Chomsky conception is superior, not only in this respect, but also in the very terminology it introduces to mark the difference. "Competence" and "performance" much more readily suggest concrete persons, situations, and actions. Indeed, from the standpoint of the classical tradition in structural linguistics, Chomsky's theoretical standpoint is at once its revitalization and its culmination. It carries to its perfection the desire to deal in practice only with what is internal to language, yet to find in that internality that in theory is of the widest or deepest human significance. No modern linguistic theory has spoken more profoundly of either the internal structure or the intrinsic human significance.

This revitalization flowers while around it emerge the sprouts of a conception that before the end of the century may succeed it. If such a succession occurs, it will be because, just as the transformational theory could absorb its predecessors and handle structural relationships beyond their grasp, so new relationships, relationships with an ineradicable social component, will become salient that will require a broader theory to absorb and handle them. I shall return to this historical conjecture at the end of this paper. Let me now sketch considerations that motivate a broader theory. And let me do this by first putting forward an additional representative anecdote.

II

As against the ideal speaker-listener, here is Bloomfield's account of one young Menomini he knew (1927, p. 437):

White Thunder, a man around forty, speaks less English than Menomini, and that is a strong indictment, for his Menomini is atrocious. His vocabulary is small; his inflections are often barbarous; he constructs sentences of a few threadbare models. He may be said to speak no language tolerably. His case is not uncommon among younger men, even when they speak but little English.

Bloomfield goes on to suggest that the commonness of the case is due, in some indirect way, to the impact of the conquering language. In short, there is here *differential competence* within a *heterogeneous speech community*, both undoubtedly shaped by acculturation. (The alternative to a constitutive role for the novel sociocultural factor is to assume that atrocious Menomini was common also before contact. If taken seriously, the assumption would still implicate sociocultural factors.) Social life has affected not merely outward performance, but inner competence itself.

Let me now review some other indications of the need to transcend the notions of perfect competence, homogeneous speech community, and independence of sociocultural features.

In her excellent article reviewing recent studies of subcultural differences in language development in the United States, Cazden (1966, p. 190) writes that one thing is clear:

> The findings can be quickly summarized: on all the measures, in all the studies, the upper socio-economic status children, however defined, are more advanced than the lower socio-economic status children.

The differences reviewed by Cazden involve enabling effects for the upper status children just as much as disabling effects for the lower status children. Moreover, given subcultural differences in the patterns and purposes of language use, children of the lower status may actually excel in aspects of communicative competence not observed or measured in the tests summarized. And among the Menomini there were not only young men like White Thunder, but also those like Red Cloud Woman, who

> speaks a beautiful and highly idiomatic Menomini... (and) speaks Ojibwa and Potawatomi fluently.... Linguistically, she would correspond to a highly educated American woman who spoke, say, French and Italian in addition to the very best type of cultivated, idiomatic English. (Bloomfield, 1927, p. 437)

There are tribes of the northeast Amazon among whom the normal scope of linguistic competence is a control of at least four languages, a spurt in active command coming during adolescence, with repertoire and perfection of competence continuing to be augmented throughout life. Here, as in much of our world, the ideally fluent speaker-listener is multilingual. (Even an ideally fluent monolingual of course is master of functional varieties within the one language.)

In this connection it should be noted that fluent members of communities often regard their languages, or functional varieties, as not identical in communicative adequacy. It is not only that one variety is obligatory or preferred for some uses, another for others (as is often the case, say, as between public occasions and personal relationships). Such intuitions reflect experience and self-evaluation as to what one can in fact do with a given variety. This sort of differential competence has nothing

to do with "disadvantage" or deficiency relative to other normal members of the community. All of them may find Kurdish, say, the medium in which most things can best be expressed, but Arabic the better medium for religious truth; users of Berber may find Arabic superior to Berber for all purposes except intimate domestic conversation (Ferguson, 1966).

The combination of community diversity and differential competence makes it necessary not to take the presence in a community of a widespread language, say, Spanish or English, at face value. Just as one puts the gloss of a native word in quotation marks, so as not to imply that the meaning of the word is thereby accurately identified, so one should put the name of a language in quotation marks, until its true status in terms of competence has been determined. (Clearly there is need for a theoretically motivated and empirically tested set of terms by which to characterize the different kinds of competence that may be found.) In an extreme case what counts as "English" in the code repertoire of a community may be but a few phonologically marked forms (the Iwam of New Guinea). The cases in general constitute a continuum, perhaps a scale, from more restricted to less restricted varieties, somewhat crosscut by adaptation of the same inherited "English" materials to different purposes and needs. A linguist analysing data from a community on the assumption "once English, always English" might miss and sadly misrepresent the actual competence supposedly expressed by his grammar.

There is no way within the present view of linguistic competence to distinguish between the abilities of one of the pure speakers of Menomini noted by Bloomfield and those of whom White Thunder was typical. Menomini sentences from either would be referred to a common grammar. Perhaps it can be said that the competence is shared with regard to the recognition and comprehension of speech. While that would be an important (and probably true) fact, it has not been the intention of the theory to distinguish between models of competence for reception and models of competence for production. And insofar as the theory intends to deal with the "creative" aspect of language, that is, with the ability of a user to devise novel sentences appropriate to situations, it would seem to be a retrenchment, if not more, to claim only to account for a shared ability to *understand* novel sentences produced by others. In some fundamental sense, the competence of the two groups of speakers, in terms of ability to make "creative" use of Menomini, is clearly distinct. Difference in judgement of acceptability is not in question. There is simply a basic sense in which users of Menomini of the more versatile type have a knowledge (syntactic as well as lexical) that users of White Thunder's type do not. [...]

Labov has documented cases of dual competence in reception, but single competence in production, with regard to the ability of lower-class Negro children to interpret sentences in either standard or substandard phonology, while consistently using only substandard phonology in speaking themselves. An interesting converse kind of case is that in which there is a dual competence for production, a sort of "competence for incompetence" as it were. Thus among the Burundi of East Africa (Albert, 1964) a peasant may command the verbal abilities stressed and valued in the culture but cannot display it in the presence of a herder or other superior. In such cases appropriate behavior is that in which "their words are haltingly delivered, or run on uncontrolled, their voices are loud, their gestures wild, their figures of speech ungainly, their emotions freely displayed, their words and sentences clumsy." Clearly

behavior is general to all codes of communication, but it attaches to the grammatical among them.

Such work as Labov's in New York City, and examples such as the Burundi, in which evidence for linguistic competence co-varies with interlocutor, point to the necessity of a social approach even if the goal of description is a single homogeneous code. Indeed, much of the difficulty in determining what is acceptable and intuitively correct in grammatical description arises because social and contextual determinants are not controlled. By making explicit the reference of a description to a single use in a single context, and by testing discrepancies and variations against differences of use and context, the very goal of not dealing with diversity can be achieved – in the limited, and only possible, sense in which it can be achieved. The linguist's own intuitions of underlying knowledge prove difficult to catch and to stabilize for use (and of course are not available for languages or varieties he does not himself know). If analysis is not to be reduced to explication of a corpus, or debauch into subjectivity, then the responses and judgements of members of the community whose language is analysed must be utilized – and not merely informally or *ad hoc*, but in some explicit, systematic way. In particular, since every response is made in some context, control of the dependence of judgements and abilities on context must be gained. It may well be that the two dimensions found by Labov to clarify phonological diversity – social hierarchy of varieties of usage, and range (formal to informal) of "contextual styles", together with marking for special functions (expressivity, clarity, etc.) will serve for syntactic diversity as well. Certainly some understanding of local criteria of fluency, and conditions affecting it, is needed just insofar as the goal is to approximate an account of ideal fluency in the language in question. In sum, if one analyses the language of a community as if it should be homogeneous, its diversity trips one up around the edges. If one starts with analysis of the diversity, one can isolate the homogeneity that is truly there.

Clearly work with children, and with the place of language in education, requires a theory that can deal with a heterogeneous speech community, differential competence, the constitutive role of sociocultural features – that can take into account such phenomena as White Thunder, socioeconomic differences, multilingual mastery, relativity of competence in "Arabic", "English", etc., expressive values, socially determined perception, contextual styles and shared norms for the evaluation of variables. Those whose work requires such a theory know best how little of its content can now be specified. Two things can be said. First, linguistics needs such a theory too. Concepts that are unquestioningly postulated as basic to linguistics (speaker-listener, speech community, speech act, acceptability, etc.) are, as we see, in fact sociocultural variables, and only when one has moved from their postulation to their analysis can one secure the foundations of linguistic theory itself. Second, the notion of competence may itself provide the key. Such comparative study of the role of language as has been undertaken shows the nature and evaluation of linguistic ability to vary cross-culturally; even what is to count as the same language, or variety, to which competence might be related, depends in part upon social factors (cf. Gumperz, 1964; Hymes, 1968a; Labov, 1966). Given, then, the assumption that the competency of users of language entails abilities and judgements relative to, and interdependent with, sociocultural features, one can see how to extend the notion to allow for this. I shall undertake this, by recasting first the representative

anecdote of the child, and then the notions of competence and performance themselves.

III

Recall that one is concerned to explain how a child comes rapidly to be able to produce and understand (in principle) any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language. Consider now a child with just that ability. A child who might produce any sentence whatever – such a child would be likely to be institutionalized: even more so if not only sentences, but also speech or silence was random, unpredictable. For that matter, a person who chooses occasions and sentences suitably, but is master only of fully grammatical sentences, is at best a bit odd. Some occasions call for being appropriately ungrammatical.

We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other codes of communicative conduct (cf. Goffman, 1956, p. 477; 1963, p. 335; 1964). The internalization of attitudes towards a language and its uses is particularly important (cf. Labov, 1965, pp. 84–5, on priority of subjective evaluation in social dialect and processes of change), as is internalization of attitudes toward use of language itself (e.g. attentiveness to it) and the relative place that language comes to play in a pattern of mental abilities (cf. Cazden, 1966), and in strategies – what language is considered available, reliable, suitable for, *vis-à-vis* other kinds of code.

The acquisition of such competency is of course fed by social experience, needs, and motives, and issues in action that is itself a renewed source of motives, needs, experience. We break irrevocably with the model that restricts the design of language to one face toward referential meaning, one toward sound, and that defines the organization of language as solely consisting of rules for linking the two. Such a model implies naming to be the sole use of speech, as if languages were never organized to lament, rejoice, beseech, admonish, aphorize, inveigh (Burke, 1966, p. 13), for the many varied forms of persuasion, direction, expression and symbolic play. A model of language must design it with a face toward communicative conduct and social life.

Attention to the social dimension is thus not restricted to occasions on which social factors seem to interfere with or restrict the grammatical. The engagement of language in social life has a positive, productive aspect. There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. Just as rules of syntax can control aspects of phonology, and just as semantic rules perhaps control aspects of syntax, so rules of speech acts enter as a controlling factor for linguistic form as a whole. Linguists generally have developed a theory of levels by showing that what is the same on one level of representation has in fact two different statuses, for which a further level must be posited. The seminal example is in Sapir (1925) on phonology,

hile the major recent examples are in the work of Chomsky and Lamb. A second pect is that what is different at one level may have in fact the same status at the ther level. (Thus the two interpretations of "He decided on the floor" – the floor what he decided on/as where he decided – point to a further level at which the meness of structure is shown.) Just this reasoning requires a level of speech acts. What is grammatically the same sentence may be a statement, a command, or a equest; what are grammatically two different sentences may as acts both be requests. One can study the level of speech acts in terms of the conditions under which sentences can be taken as alternative types of act, and in terms of the conditions under which types of act can be realized as alternative types of sentence. And only from the further level of acts can some of the relations among communicative means be seen, e.g. the mutual substitutability of a word and a nod to realize an act of assent, the necessary co-occurrence of words and the raising of a hand to realize an oath.

The parallel interpretations of "he decided on the floor" and "she gave up on the floor" point to a further level at which the sameness in structure is shown.

Rules of use are not a late grafting. Data from the first years of acquisition of English grammar show children to develop rules for the use of different forms in different situations and an awareness of different acts of speech (Ervin-Tripp, personal communication). Allocation of whole languages to different uses is common for children in multilingual households from the beginning of their acquisition. Competency for use is part of the same developmental matrix as competence for grammar.

The acquisition of competence for use, indeed, can be stated in the same terms as acquisition of competence for grammar. Within the developmental matrix in which knowledge of the sentences of a language is acquired, children also acquire knowledge of a set of ways in which sentences are used. From a finite experience of speech acts and their interdependence with sociocultural features, they develop a general theory of the speaking appropriate in their community, which they employ, like other forms of tacit cultural knowledge (competence) in conducting and interpreting social life (cf. Goodenough, 1957; Searle, 1967). They come to be able to recognize, for example, appropriate and inappropriate interrogative behavior (e.g. among the Araucanians of Chile, that to repeat a question is to insult; among the Tzeltal of Chiapas, Mexico, that a direct question is not properly asked (and to be answered "nothing"); among the Cahinahua of Brazil, that a direct answer to a first question implies that the answerer has no time to talk, a vague answer that the question will be answered directly the second time, and that talk can continue).

The existence of competency for use may seem obvious, but if its study is to be established, and conducted in relation to current linguistics, then the notions of competence and performance must themselves be critically analysed, and a revised formulation provided.

The chief difficulty of present linguistic theory is that it would seem to require one to identify the study of the phenomena of concern to us here with its category of performance. The theory's category of competence, identified with the criterion of grammaticality, provides no place. Only performance is left, and its associated criterion of acceptability. Indeed, language use is equated with performance: "the theory of language use – the theory of performance" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 9).

The difficulty with this equation, and the reasons for the making of it, can be explained as follows. First, the clarification of the concept of performance offered by Chomsky (1965, pp. 10–15), as we have seen, omits almost everything of sociocultural significance. The focus of attention is upon questions such as which among grammatical sentences are most likely to be produced, easily understood, less clumsy, in some sense more natural; and such questions are studied initially in relation to formal tree-structures, and properties of these such as nesting, self-embedding, multiple-branching, left-branching, and right-branching. The study of such questions is of interest, but the results are results of the psychology of perception, memory, and the like, not of the domain of cultural patterning and social action. Thus, when one considers what the sociocultural analogues of performance in this sense might be, one sees that these analogues would not include major kinds of judgement and ability with which one must deal in studying the use of language (see below under appropriateness).

Second, the notion of performance, as used in discussion, seems confused between different meanings. In one sense, performance is observable behavior, as when one speaks of determining from the data of performance the underlying system of rules (Chomsky, 1965, p. 4), and of mentalistic linguistics as that linguistics that uses performance as data, along with other data, e.g. those of introspection, for determination of competence (p. 193). The recurrent use of "actual" implies as much, as when the term is first introduced in the book in question, "actual performance", and first characterized: "performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)" (pp. 3–4). In this sense performance is "actual", competence underlying. In another sense, performance itself also underlies data, as when one constructs a performance model, or infers a performative device (e.g. a perceptual one) that is to explain data and be tested against them (p. 15); or as when, in a related sense, one even envisages the possibility of stylistic "rules of performance" to account for occurring word orders not accounted for by grammatical theory (p. 127).

When one speaks of performance, then, does one mean the behavioral data of speech? or all that underlies speech beyond the grammatical? or both? If the ambiguity is intentional, it is not fruitful; it smacks more of the residual category and marginal interest.

The difficulty can be put in terms of the two contrasts that usage manifests:

1 (underlying) competence v. (actual) performance;
2 (underlying) grammatical competence v. (underlying) models/rules of performance.

The first contrast is so salient that the status of the second is left obscure. In point of fact, I find it impossible to understand what stylistic "rules of performance" could be, except a further kind of underlying competence, but the term is withheld. [...]

It remains that the present vision of generative grammar extends only a little way into the realm of the use of language. To grasp the intuitions and data pertinent to underlying competence for use requires a sociocultural standpoint. To develop that standpoint adequately, one must transcend the present formulation of the dichotomy of competence:performance, as we have seen, and the associated formulation of the judgements and abilities of the users of a language as well. To this I now turn.

IV

There are several sectors of communicative competence, of which the grammatical is one. Put otherwise, there is behavior, and, underlying it, there are several systems of rules reflected in the judgements and abilities of those whose messages the behavior manifests. (The question of how the interrelationships among sectors might be conceived is touched upon below.) In the linguistic theory under discussion, judgements are said to be of two kinds: of *grammaticality*, with respect to competence, and of *acceptability*, with respect to performance. Each pair of terms is strictly matched; the critical analysis just given requires analysis of the other. In particular, the analysis just given requires that explicit distinctions be made within the notion of "acceptability" to match the distinctions of kinds of "performance", and at the same time, the entire set of terms must be examined and recast with respect to the communicative as a whole.

If an adequate theory of language users and language use is to be developed, it seems that judgements must be recognized to be in fact not of two kinds but of four. And if linguistic theory is to be integrated with theory of communication and culture, this fourfold distinction must be stated in a sufficiently generalized way. I would suggest, then, that for language and for other forms of communication (culture), four questions arise:

1 Whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
2 Whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3 Whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4 Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails.

A linguistic illustration: a sentence may be grammatical, awkward, tactful and rare. (One might think of the four as successive subsets; more likely they should be pictured as overlapping circles.)

These questions may be asked from the standpoint of a system *per se*, or from the standpoint of persons. An interest in competence dictates the latter standpoint here. Several observations can be made. There is an important sense in which a normal member of a community has knowledge with respect to all these aspects of the communicative systems available to him. He will interpret or assess the conduct of others and himself in ways that reflect a knowledge of each (possible, feasible, appropriate), done (if so, how often). There is an important sense in which he would be said to have a capability with regard to each. This latter sense, indeed, is one many would understand as included in what would be meant by his competence. Finally, it cannot be assumed that the formal possibilities of a system and individual knowledge are identical; a system may contain possibilities not part of the present knowledge of a user (cf. Wallace, 1961b). Nor can it be assumed that the knowledge acquired by different individuals is identical, despite identity of manifestation and apparent system.

Given these considerations, I think there is not sufficient reason to maintain a terminology at variance with more general usage of "competence" and "performance" in the sciences of man, as is the case with the present equations of competence, knowledge, systemic possibility, on the one hand, and of performance, behavior, implementational constraints, appropriateness, on the other. It seems necessary to distinguish these things and to reconsider their relationship, if their investigation is to be insightful and adequate.

I should take *competence* as the most general term for the capabilities of a person. (This choice is in the spirit, if at present against the letter, of the concern in linguistic theory for underlying capability.) Competence is dependent upon both (tacit) *knowledge* and (ability for) *use*. *Knowledge* is distinct, then, both from competence (as its part) and from systemic possibility (to which its relation is an empirical matter). Notice that Cazden (1967), by utilizing what is in effect systemic possibility as a definition of competence is forced to separate it from what persons can do. The "competence" underlying a person's behavior is identified as one kind of "performance" (performance A, actual behavior being performance B). The logic may be inherent in the linguistic theory from which Cazden starts, once one tries to adapt its notion of competence to recognized facts of personal knowledge. The strangely misleading result shows that the original notion cannot be left unchanged.

Knowledge also is to be understood as subtending all four parameters of communication just noted. There is knowledge of each. *Ability for use* also may relate to all four parameters. Certainly it may be the case that individuals differ with regard to ability to use knowledge of each: to interpret, differentiate, etc. The specification of *ability for use* as part of competence allows for the role of non-cognitive factors, such as motivation, as partly determining competence. In speaking of competence, it is especially important not to separate cognitive from affective and volitive factors, so far as the impact of theory on educational practice is concerned; but also with regard to research design and explanation (as the work of Labov indicates). Within a comprehensive view of competence, considerations of the sort identified by Goffman (1967, pp. 218–26) must be reckoned with – capacities in interaction such as courage, gameness, gallantry, composure, presence of mind, dignity, stage confidence, capacities which are discussed in some detail by him and, explicitly in at least one case, as kinds of competency (p. 224).

Turning to judgements and intuitions of persons, the most general term for the criterion of such judgements would be acceptable. Quirk (1966) so uses it, and Chomsky himself at one point remarks that "grammaticalness is only one of the many factors that interact to determine acceptability" (1965, p. 11). (The term is thus freed from its strict pairing with "performance".) The sources of acceptability are to be found in the four parameters just noted, and in interrelations among them that are not well understood.

Turning to actual use and actual events, the term *performance* is now free for this meaning, but with several important reminders and provisos. The "performance models" studied in psycholinguistics are to be taken as models of aspects of ability for use, relative to means of implementation in the brain, although they could now be seen as a distinct, contributory factor in general competence. There seems, indeed, to have been some unconscious shifting between the sense in which one would speak of the performance of a motor, and that in which one would speak of

rformance of a person or actor (cf. Goffman, 1959, pp. 17–76, "Perform-") or of a cultural tradition (Singer, 1955; Wolf, 1964, pp. 75–6). Here the rmance of a person is not identical with a behavioral record, or with the rfect or partial realization of individual competence. It takes into account the raction between competence (knowledge, ability for use), the competence of rs, and the cybernetic and emergent properties of events themselves. A perform-e, as an event, may have properties (patterns and dynamics) not reducible to ms of individual or standardized competence. Sometimes, indeed, these properties e the point (a concert, play, party).

The concept of "performance" will take on great importance, insofar as the study of communicative competence is seen as an aspect of what from another angle may be called the ethnography of symbolic forms – the study of the variety of genres, narration, dance, drama, song, instrumental music, visual art, that interrelate with speech in the communicative life of a society, and in terms of which the relative importance and meaning of speech and language must be assessed. The recent shift in folklore studies and much of anthropology to the study of these genres in terms of performances with underlying rules (e.g. Abrahams, 1967) can be seen as a reconstruction on an ethnographic basis of the vision expressed in Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. (This reconstruction has a direct application to the communicative competence of children in American cities, where identification and understanding of differences in kinds of forms, abilities, and their evaluation is essential.)

The concept of "performance" will be important also in the light of sociological work such as that of Goffman (cited above), as its concern with general interactional competence helps make precise the particular role of linguistic competence.

In both respects the interrelation of knowledge of distinct codes (verbal:non-verbal) is crucial. In some cases these interrelations will bespeak an additional level of competence (cf., e.g., Sebeok, 1959, pp. 141–2): "Performance constitutes a concurrently ordered selection from two sets of acoustic signals – in brief, codes – language and music.... These are integrated by special rules...."). In others, perhaps not, as when the separate cries of vendors and the call to prayer of a muezzin are perceived to fit by an observer of an Arabic city, but with indication of intent or plan.

The nature of research into symbolic forms and interactional competence is already influenced in important part by linguistic study of competence (for some discussion see Hymes, 1968b). Within the view of communicative competence taken here, the influence can be expected to be reciprocal.

Having stated these general recommendations, let me now review relations between the linguistic and other communicative systems, especially in terms of cultural anthropology. I shall consider both terminology and content, using the four questions as a framework.

1 Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible

This formulation seems to express an essential concern of present linguistic theory for the openness, potentiality, of language, and to generalize it for cultural systems. When systemic possibility is a matter of language, the corresponding term is of course *grammaticality.* Indeed, language is so much the paradigmatic example that

one uses "grammar" and "grammaticality" by extension for other systems of formal possibility (recurrent references to a cultural grammar, Kenneth Burke's *A Grammar of Motives*, etc.). For particular systems, such extension may well be the easiest course; it is much easier to say that something is "grammatical" with respect to the underlying structure of a body of myth, than to say in a new sense that it is "mythical". As a general term, one does readily enough speak of "cultural" in a way analogous to grammatical (Sapir once wrote of "culturalized behavior", and it is clear that not all behavior is cultural). We may say, then, that something possible within a formal system is grammatical, cultural, or, on occasion, communicative (cf. Hymes, 1967b). Perhaps one can also say uncultural or uncommunicative, as well as ungrammatical, for the opposite.

2 *Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible*

The predominant concern here, it will be recalled, has been for psycholinguistic factors such as memory limitation, perceptual device, effects of properties such as nesting, embedding, branching, and the like. Such considerations are not limited to linguistics. A parallel in cultural anthropology is Wallace's hypothesis (1961a, p. 462) that the brain is such that culturally institutionalized folk taxonomies will not contain more than twenty-six entities and consequently will not require more than six orthogonally related binary dimensions for the definitions of all terms. With regard to the cultural, one would take into account other features of the body and features of the material environment as well. With regard to the communicative, the general importance of the notion of means of implementation available is clear.

As we have seen, question 2 defines one portion of what is lumped together in linguistic theory under the heading of performance, and, correspondingly, acceptability. Clearly a more specific term is needed for what is in question here. No general term has been proposed for this property with regard to cultural behavior as a whole, so far as I know, and *feasible* seems suitable and best for both. Notice, moreover, that the implementational constraints affecting grammar may be largely those that affect the culture as a whole. Certainly with regard to the brain there would seem to be substantial identity.

3 *Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate*

As we have seen, appropriateness is hardly brought into view in the linguistic theory under discussion, and is lumped under the heading of performance, and, correspondingly, acceptability. With regard to cultural anthropology, the term *appropriate* has been used (Conklin, Frake, etc.), and has been extended to language (Hymes, 1964, pp. 39–41). "Appropriateness" seems to suggest readily the required sense of relation to contextual features. Since any judgement is made in some defining context, it may always involve a factor of appropriateness, so that this dimension must be controlled even in study of purely grammatical competence (cf. Labov, 1966). From a communicative standpoint, judgements of appropriateness may not be assignable to different spheres, as between the linguistic and the cultural; certainly, the spheres of the two will intersect. (One might think of appropriateness with regard

to grammar as the context-sensitive rules of sub-categorization and selection to which the base component is subject; there would still be intersection with the cultural.)

Judgement of appropriateness employs a tacit knowledge. Chomsky himself discusses the need to specify situations in mentalistic terms, and refers to proper notions of "what might be expected from anthropological research" (1965, p. 195, n. 5). Here there would seem to be recognition that an adequate approach to the relation between sentences and situations must be "mentalistic", entailing a tacit knowledge, and, hence, competence (in the usage of both Chomsky and this paper). But the restriction of competence (knowledge) to the grammatical prevails, so far as explicit development of theory is concerned. By implication, only "performance" is left. There is no mention of what might contribute to judgement of sentences in relation to situations, nor how such judgements might be analysed. The lack of explicitness here, and the implicit contradiction of a "mentalistic" account of what must in terms of the theory be a part of "performance" show again the need to place linguistic theory within a more general sociocultural theory.

4 *Whether (and to what degree) something is done*

The study of communicative competence cannot restrict itself to occurrences, but it cannot ignore them. Structure cannot be reduced to probabilities of occurrence, but structural change is not independent of them. The capabilities of language users do include some (perhaps unconscious) knowledge of probabilities and shifts in them as indicators of style, response, etc. Something may be possible, feasible, and appropriate and not occur. No general term is perhaps needed here, but the point is needed, especially for work that seeks to change what is done. This category is necessary also to allow for what Harold Garfinkel (in discussion in Bright, 1966, p. 323) explicates as application of the medieval principle, *factum valet*: "an action otherwise prohibited by rule is to be treated as correct if it happens nevertheless".

In sum, the goal of a broad theory of competence can be said to be to show the ways in which the systemically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce and interpret actually occurring cultural behavior. [...]

V

We spoke first of a child's competence as "in principle". Of course no child has perfect knowledge or mastery of the communicative means of his community. In particular, differential competence has itself a developmental history in one's life. The matrix formed in childhood continues to develop and change throughout life with respect both to sentence structures and their uses (cf. Labov, 1965, pp. 77, 91–2; Chomsky, 1965, p. 202) and recall the northeast Amazon situation mentioned earlier. Tanner (1967, p. 21) reports for a group of Indonesians: "Although the childhood speech patterns... foreshadowed those of the adult, they did not determine them.... For these informants it is the principle of code specialization that is the important characteristic of childhood linguistic experience, not the pattern of code specialization itself. (All are multilingual from childhood.) Not one person

interviewed reported a static linguistic history in this respect." (See now also Carroll, 1968.)

Perhaps one should contrast a "long" and a "short" range view of competency, the short range view being interested primarily in understanding innate capacities as unfolded during the first years of life, and the long range view in understanding the continuing socialization and change of competence through life. In any case, here is one major respect in which a theory of competence must go beyond the notion of ideal fluency in a homogeneous community, if it is to be applicable to work with disadvantaged children and with children whose primary language or language variety is different from that of their school; with intent to change or add, one is presupposing the possibility that competence that has unfolded in the natural way can be altered, perhaps drastically so, by new social factors. One is assuming from the outset a confrontation of different systems of competency within the school and community, and focusing on the way in which one affects or can be made to affect the other. One encounters phenomena that pertain not only to the separate structures of languages, but also to what has come to be called *interference* (Weinreich, 1953) between them: problems of the interpretation of manifestations of one system in terms of another.

Since the interference involves features of language and features of use together, one might adopt the phrase suggested by Hayes, and speak of *sociolinguistic interference*. (More generally, one would speak of *communicative interference* to allow for the role of modes of communication other than language; in this section, however, I shall focus on phenomena of language and language *per se*.)

When a child from one developmental matrix enters a situation in which the communicative expectations are defined in terms of another, misperception and misanalysis may occur at every level. As is well known, words may be misunderstood because of differences in phonological systems; sentences may be misunderstood because of differences in grammatical systems; intents, too, and innate abilities, may be misevaluated because of differences of systems for the use of language and for the import of its use (as against other modalities).

With regard to education, I put the matter some years ago in these words (Hymes, 1961, pp. 65–6):

> ...new speech habits and verbal training must be introduced, necessarily by particular sources to particular receivers, using a particular code with messages of particular forms via particular channels, about particular topics and in particular settings – and all this from and to people for whom there already exist definite patternings of linguistic routines, of personality expression via speech, of uses of speech in social situations, of attitudes and conceptions toward speech. It seems reasonable that success in such an educational venture will be enhanced by an understanding of this existing structure, because the innovators' efforts will be perceived and judged in terms of it, and innovations which mesh with it will have greater success than those which cross its grain.

The notion of sociolinguistic interference is of the greatest importance for the relationship between theory and practice. First of all, notice that a theory of sociolinguistic interference must begin with heterogeneous situations, whose dimensions are social as well as linguistic. (While a narrow theory seems to cut itself off from such situations, it must of course be utilized in dealing with them. See, for example,

Labov and Cohen (1967) on relations between standard and non-standard phonological and syntactic rules in Harlem, and between receptive and productive competence of users of the non-standard vernacular.)

Second, notice that the notion of sociolinguistic interference presupposes the notion of sociolinguistic systems between which interference occurs, and thus helps one see how to draw on a variety of researches that might be overlooked or set aside. (I have in mind for example obstacles to use of research on "second-language learning" in programs for Negro students because of the offensiveness of the term.) The notions of sociolinguistic interference and system require a conception of an *integrated theory of sociolinguistic description.* Such work as has been done to contribute to such a theory has found it necessary to start, not from the notion of a language, but from the notion of a *variety* or *code.* In particular, such a descriptive theory is forced to recognize that the historically derived status of linguistic resources as related or unrelated languages and dialects, is entirely secondary to their status in actual social relationships. Firstly, recall the need to put language names in quotes (section II). Secondly, the degree of linguistic similarity and distance cannot predict mutual intelligibility, let alone use. Thirdly, from the functional standpoint of a sociolinguistic description, means of quite different scope can be employed in equivalent roles. A striking example is that the marking of intimacy and respect served by shift of second person pronoun in French (*tu:vous*) may be served by shift of entire language in Paraguay (Guarani:Spanish). Conversely, what seem equivalent means from the standpoint of languages may have quite different roles, e.g., the elaborated and restricted codes of English studied by Bernstein (1965). In short, we have to break with the tradition of thought which simply equates one language, one culture, and takes a set of functions for granted. In order to deal with the problems faced by disadvantaged children, and with education in much of the world, we have to begin with the conception of the speech habits, or competencies, of a community or population, and regard the place among them of the resources of historically-derived languages as an empirical question. As functioning codes, one may find one language, three languages; dialects widely divergent or divergent by a hair; styles almost mutually incomprehensible, or barely detectable as different by the outsider; the objective linguistic differences are secondary, and do not tell the story. What must be known is the attitude toward the differences, the functional role assigned to them, the use made of them. Only on the basis of such a functionally motivated description can comparable cases be established and valid theory developed.

Now with regard to sociolinguistic interference among school children, much relevant information and theoretical insight can come from the sorts of cases variously labelled "bilingualism", "linguistic acculturation", "dialectology", "creolization", whatever. The value of an integrated theory of sociolinguistic description to the practical work would be that

1 it would attempt to place studies, diversely labelled, within a common analytical framework; and
2 by placing such information within a common framework, where one can talk about relations among codes, and types of code-switching, and types of interference as between codes, one can make use of the theory while perhaps avoiding

connotations that attach to such labels as "second-language learning". (I say perhaps because of course it is very difficult to avoid unpleasant connotations for any terms used to designate situations that are themselves intrinsically sensitive and objectionable.)

William Stewart's (1965, p. 11, n. 2) suggestion that some code relationships in the United States might be better understood if seen as part of a continuum of cases ranging to the Caribbean and Africa, for example, seems to me from a theoretical standpoint very promising. It is not that most code relationships in the United States are to be taken as involving different languages, but that they do involve relationships among different codes, and that the fuller series illuminates the part. Stewart has seen through the different labels of dialect, creole, pidgin, language, bilingualism, to a common sociolinguistic dimension. Getting through different labels to the underlying sociolinguistic dimensions is a task in which theory and practice meet.

Let me now single out three interrelated concepts, important to a theory of sociolinguistic description, which have the same property of enabling us to cut across diverse cases and modes of reporting, and to get to basic relationships. One such concept is that of *verbal repertoire*, which Gumperz (1964) has done much to develop. The heterogeneity of speech communities, and the priority of social relationships, is assumed, and the question to be investigated is that of the set of varieties, codes, or subcodes, commanded by an individual, together with the types of switching that occur among them. (More generally, one would assess communicative repertoire.)

A second concept is that of *linguistic routines*, sequential organizations beyond the sentence, either as activities of one person, or as the interaction of two or more. Literary genres provide obvious examples; the organization of other kinds of texts, and of conversation, is getting fresh attention by sociologists, such as Sacks, and sociologically oriented linguists, such as Labov. One special importance of linguistic routines is that they may have the property that the late English philosopher Austin dubbed *performative* (Searle, 1967). That is, the saying does not simply stand for, refer to, some other thing; it is itself the thing in question. To say "I solemnly vow" is to solemnly vow; it does not name something else that is the act of vowing solemnly. Indeed, in the circumstances no other way to vow solemnly is provided other than to do so by saying that one does so. From this standpoint, then, disability and ability with regard to language involve questions that are not about the relation between language and something else that language might stand for or influence; sometimes such questions are about things that are done linguistically or not at all. (More generally, one would analyse linguistic routines, comprising gesture, paralinguistics, etc. as well.)

A third concept is that of *domains of language behavior*, which Fishman has dealt with insightfully in his impressive work on *Language Loyalty in the United States* (1966, pp. 424–39). Again, the complexity and patterning of use is assumed, and the focus is upon "the most parsimonious and fruitful designation of the occasions on which one language (variant, dialect, style, etc.) is habitually employed rather than (or in addition to) another" (p. 428). (More generally, one would define domains of communicative behavior.)

Too often, to be sure, the significance of a sociolinguistic feature, such as a code, routine, or term or level of address, is sought by purely distributional means. The feature is traced through the set of contexts in which it can be used without regard to an intervening semantic structure. Such an approach neglects the fact that sociolinguistic features, like linguistic features, are "signs" in the classical Saussurean sense, comprising both a form and a meaning (*signifiant* and *signifié*). The difference is that one thinks of a typical linguistic sign as comprising a phonological form and a referential meaning (*chien* and the corresponding animal), whereas a sociolinguistic sign may comprise with respect to form an entire language, or some organized part of one, while meaning may have to do with an attitude, norm of interaction, or the like. (Recall the Paraguayan case of Spanish/distance:Guarani/closeness (among other dimensions).) Thus the relation between feature and context is mediated by a semantic paradigm. There is an analogue here to the representation of a lexical element in a language in terms of form (phonological features), meaning (semantic features), and context (features of syntactic selection), or, indeed, to the tripartite semiotic formula of Morris, syntactics, semantics, pragmatics, if these three can be interpreted here as analogous of form, meaning and context.

If the distributional approach neglects semantic structure, there is a common semantic approach that neglects context. It analyses the structure of a set of elements (say, codes, or terms of personal reference) by assuming one normal context. This approach (typical of much componential analysis) is equally unable to account for the range of functions a fluent user of language is able to accomplish (cf. Tyler, 1966). It is true that the value of a feature is defined first of all in relation to a set of normal contexts (settings, participants, personal relationships, topics, or whatever). But given this "unmarked" (presupposed) usage, an actor is able to insult, flatter, color discourse as comic or elevated, etc., by "marked" use of the feature (code, routine, level of address, whatever) in other contexts. Given their tacit knowledge of the normal values, hearers can interpret the nature and degree of markedness of the use.

Thus the differences that one may encounter within a community may have to do with:

1 Presence or absence of a feature (code, routine, etc.).
2 The semantic value assigned a feature (e.g., English as having the value of distance and hostility among some American Indians).
3 The distribution of the feature among contexts, and
4 The interrelations of these with each other in unmarked and marked usages.

This discussion does not exhaust the concepts and modes of analysis relevant to the sort of theory that is needed. A number of scholars are developing relevant conceptual approaches, notably Bernstein, Fishman, Gumperz, Labov (my own present formulation is indicated in Hymes, 1967a). The three concepts singled out do point up major dimensions: the capacities of persons, the organization of verbal means for socially defined purposes, and the sensitivity of rules to situations. And it is possible to use the three concepts to suggest one practical framework for use in sociolinguistic description. [...]

NOTE

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