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JAMES J. BRADAC and HOWARD GILES

Social and Educational Consequences of Language Attitudes

I denna artikel diskuterar James Bradac och Howard Giles förhållandet mellan språkliga attityder och språkundervisning. Förf., som båda är verksamma vid University of California at Santa Barbara, har publicerat ett stort antal arbeten inom områdena Communication Studies och The Social Psychology of Language. Bland Bradacs arbeten märks *Language and Social Knowledge* (1982; tills.m. C. Berger). Han är vidare redaktör för tidskriften *Human Communication Research*. Giles är tills.m. P.F. Powesland författare till den viktiga monografien *Speech Style and Social Evaluation* (1975) och, tills.m. W.P. Robinson, redaktör för den nya *Handbook of Language and Social Psychology* (1990). Giles är också redaktör för *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*.

Language has both referential and communicative functions that teachers often focus upon for instructional purposes. This is understandable because the ability to refer to ideas and events in face-to-face or mediated communication, using a precise vocabulary and complex syntax, is uniquely and powerfully human. This is the part of language that allows us to "stand reality on its head"—to use a phrase of Jerome Bruner's. But there is another function of language in social contexts which, despite its importance, many teachers may tend to ignore when instructing students—this can be called the attributional function. The idea here is that that the phonological, syntactic, and lexical levels of language carry information allowing hearers to make inferences about speaker attributes, e.g., their personality and group affiliations. And inevitably, joined to attributions are evaluations of speakers and their messages, e.g. judgements about intellectual competence and message effectiveness. Researchers investigating links among language, attribution, and evaluation typically describe themselves as studying "language attitudes" (see Ryan & Giles, 1982, as the most comprehensive treatment of the subject matter to date). It is an extensive research tradition having its roots in an array of disciplines and is currently witnessing many rich developments in empirical and methodological focus as well as theory construction.

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Attitudes towards language or dialect are likely to affect hearers' behaviour especially when speakers are encountered for the first time, where an initial impression is being formed, and hearers have very little information about the speakers. Accordingly, we use speakers' language (as well as nonverbal behaviours) as a basis for forming hypotheses about their personal traits and social background. The formation of such hypotheses allows hearers to reduce uncertainty about speakers even though these hypotheses may in actuality be highly inaccurate.

An interesting possibility that will be developed below is that students' language attitudes may facilitate or inhibit their learning of a second language/dialect. Thus, Swedish students' attitudes toward English or rather, toward one or another of the varieties of English, may affect how quickly and thoroughly they learn this language. Their attitudes toward English may have other consequences also; for example, such attitudes may lead to stereotypical (and thus potentially incorrect) attributions about and evaluations of persons the students hear speaking this language. And students who learn and speak English as a second language may themselves be the object of stereotyping. It may be useful for language teachers to intervene in this stereotyping process. Before discussing these particular points, we will introduce the general concept of language attitudes and some of the more important findings emerging from social scientific research on this concept.

Components of Language Attitudes

During the last two decades, many empirical studies have demonstrated that language variation is associated with variation in attitudes toward speakers, and this fact has been demonstrated across a diverse group of cultures (see Bradac, 1990 for a recent overview and for more details for what follows including citations for specific studies). It appears that there are two primary evaluative dimensions of language attitudes, namely, "status" (labelled by some "socio-intellectual status" or "competence") and "solidarity" (labelled by others "sociability" and "attractiveness"). Each of these dimensions has two poles—one focused on the individual speaker (e.g., personal attractiveness and intellectual competence) and the other on the speaker's group affiliations (e.g., hearer solidarity vis-a-vis these groups and group status or prestige) and a variety of factors can make one or the other of these poles salient in a given situation. Thus, a person hearing a stranger speak for the first time may infer that he or she is attractive but not very high in status or, in another case, high in prestige and from a different social milieu. But specifically, what is it about the stranger's speech or language that triggers this sort of inference? There are many possibilities.

Informative Linguistic Features

In various cultures of the world there are styles of speech that adhere to norms of politeness and appropriateness and other styles that violate them. Of course, language norms will not have universal force for all social groups within a culture, but they may be widely shared. For example, in the U.S. use of obscenity in public situations is often viewed negatively, although there are special contexts where this is tolerated or even applauded (e.g., inclusion of death metaphors in a persuasive message, is often evaluated positively when the communicator is male or seen as holding a position of high authority). Another widely stigmatized form entails the use of low lexical diversity or, conversely, high lexical redundancy. Hence, speakers who frequently repeat words and phrases, perhaps through a low use of synonyms, may be downgraded on competence and status. Similarly, speakers who use many hedges ("I kind of like it") and hesitations ("I... uh... like it"), exhibiting a "low-power" style, may be evaluated negatively on competence-related traits.

There are also "standard" and "nonstandard" dialects and accents apparent within many cultures, typically representing valued and stigmatized forms, respectively. For example, in the U.S. Standard American English is typically rated higher in status than is Black English Vernacular or southern American English or English spoken with a Mexican-American accent. In Britain, English spoken with an RP (Received Pronunciation) accent—the accent exhibited by most newscasters in London, for example—typically receives higher status ratings than does English spoken with a whole host of regional and urban accents such as Cockney, Welsh, or Birmingham.

But this stigmatization of particular dialects and accents may not generalize beyond status judgements to judgements of solidarity or attractiveness. That is, even though a dialect or accent may be downgraded on status, it may actually receive very positive ratings for solidarity. For example, this pattern of low status/high solidarity ratings was obtained for Mexican-American accented English evaluated by persons who themselves spoke Standard American English, for Black Vernacular English evaluated by persons who themselves used this Black dialect, and for English spoken with a Scottish accent evaluated by persons having an English accent. In these cases (and others), speakers using a nonstandard form were judged as not very high in prestige but nevertheless friendly, sociable, approachable, etc.

Contextual Qualifiers

Research on language attitudes indicates that evaluative reactions to language variation are strongly affected by the context or situation in which communication occurs. Indeed, some of the most inter-

esting studies conducted during the last decade examined contextual influences upon speech evaluation. For example, several studies have demonstrated that a rapid rate of speech produces relatively high ratings of intellectual competence compared to a slow speech rate. However, the negative effects of slow rate were eliminated in one study when evaluators were told beforehand that the speaker they would soon hear was talking to a naive audience about a technical topic. Apparently, the evaluators inferred that there was a need to speak slowly in this context and that the speaker was behaving intentionally, with considerable rhetorical sensitivity.

Other studies have shown that negative evaluations of stigmatized forms may be reduced if a speaker is perceived as attempting to accommodate by converging to the dialect, accent, or language of the person with whom she or he is talking. This kind of "code switching" in the direction of the other's behaviour is often viewed as a friendly and polite act. Conversely, divergent language behaviour, which moves away from the other's use of a stigmatized form, may be seen as a distancing act, as unfriendly or even rude. For example, one study found that a speaker who lowered his level of vocabulary diversity to match the diversity level of another speaker received higher ratings for competence than did a speaker who diverged from the other by raising his diversity level. Other studies suggest that *solidarity* ratings are especially likely to be affected by perceived convergence and divergence (see Coupland & Giles, 1988, for a compendium of accommodation research). But the picture emerging from recent research on speech accommodation is more complex than the one just sketched. For one thing, if the speaker who converges is perceived as having a manipulative intent or as being forced to converge by situational pressures, positive reactions to convergence are likely to diminish. Conversely, negative reactions to divergence are likely to diminish where the speaker's intent is perceived as friendly, polite or humorous. There is also some evidence that in particular contexts, e.g., a formal interview, a speaker's adherence to a valued linguistic norm, say, use of a standard accent, may be more important than whether or not the adhering behaviour is convergent or divergent.

Modelling Language Effects

Thus, phonological, lexical, and syntactic variation can trigger evaluations of speakers as individuals and representatives of groups, and such evaluations are often affected strongly by perceptions of the context in which communication occurs. In some cases a speaker's language appears to call up in the hearer's mind a category pertaining to the speaker's group membership which may in turn lead to an inference about the speaker's personality (language—>group member-

ship—>speaker personality; RP English—>British upper class—>industrious, competent, self-satisfied). In other circumstances language may trigger an inference about personality directly (language—>speaker personality) or may lead only to an inference regarding group affiliation (language—>group membership). For example, when a hearer: has a strong sense of in-group pride, believes his or her own language to have strong institutional support; and encounters a speaker representing a formidable out-group (perhaps a group competing with that in which the hearer is a member), the language—>group membership model is likely to operate. On the other hand, when the speaker is a member of a(n out-)group with which the hearer actually identifies and when the hearer has a weak in-group identity, the language—>speaker personality model will probably pertain (regardless of the local community strength of the in-group language). The upshot of this is that in some contexts persons focus upon group characteristics, while in others they focus upon characteristics that are personal, and in still other contexts they focus upon both types of characteristics (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1990).

The three models just described can be extended; for example, language—>group membership—>speaker personality—>judgement of similarity—>-uncertainty. The implication here is that, via inferences about group affiliation and personality, language elicits a judgement of similarity which affects in turn a hearer's subjective uncertainty about the speaker. ("The speaker is a nervous person; I am a nervous person also."). The "-" sign preceding uncertainty indicates an inverse relationship between uncertainty and similarity; that is, as hearers' judgements of similarity increase, their feelings of uncertainty will decrease.

Explaining Language Effects

The question can now be asked: *Why* do certain forms of language and certain styles of speech stimulate attributions about group affiliation and personal characteristics? And why do they stimulate evaluations of competence and status on the one hand, and attractiveness and solidarity on the other? In some cases, as suggested above, inferences about group membership and evaluations of the speaker will go hand in hand: X is a member of an out-group and therefore incompetent. This is the realm of social stereotypes. Hearers learn that a certain dialect, accent or language indicates that a speaker is a member of a certain group; put another way, language is "socially diagnostic", and diagnosis is a learned skill. Perhaps independently, they learn that members of this group have high or low status, etc. The explanation for the language-attribution-evaluation connection then is an associational one, where one learns that specific language features are paired with various enduring properties such as dispositions and abi-

lities. This associationist explanation is also a conventionalist explanation in that specific language cue-property connections are not assumed to be natural and inevitable but instead arbitrary and mutable from epoch or from culture to culture.

There is, however, an alternative explanation: language cues are *necessarily* connected to various properties. In terms of social evaluation this would suggest, for example, that some language forms are inherently better than other forms (perhaps more aesthetically pleasing) and the speakers using these better forms are themselves better than persons using other forms. This is sometimes labelled the "inherent value hypothesis". There is very little solid evidence in support of this non-conventionalist position although there is reason to believe that it is often embraced as folklinguistic wisdom in the community. When thinking of group-related evaluations such as status and solidarity, it is very difficult even to imagine support for this hypothesis being obtained—do some phonological features necessarily indicate high status? It is somewhat less difficult to imagine support for personal evaluations such as attractiveness and competence, although we are not aware of the existence of such support. Perhaps, for example, there is an inherent tendency for high levels of speaker disfluency to be evaluated negatively along the competence dimension because disfluency interferes with hearers' processing of messages. But this would be true only if efficient message processing is universally valued, which is probably not the case. In a culture where it is a good thing to take a lot of time to make one's point, highly disfluent speech might stimulate judgements of high speaker competence. In the realm of attributions, as opposed to evaluations, the idea of inherent or natural connections may be more plausible. For example, there may be a natural tendency for elderly persons to speak more slowly than persons who are young, so that given samples of both slow- and fast-speaking persons, there may be a slight statistical tendency for the former group to be older. Accordingly, an inference that a group of slow speakers is on the average older than a group of fast speakers may have some objective validity. But it is important to note that a slow rate does not inevitably indicate advanced age, so that an inference regarding speaker age based upon speech rate will be unreliable in the individual case.

Consequences for Student Speakers

All of the above suggests that students, whether in Sweden, Britain, or the U.S., will stimulate evaluative reactions in others on the basis of the dialects they use in both their native language and second language learned in school. Students will also react to others' dialects. It could certainly be argued that the general effect of dialect stereotyp-

ing is a negative one, both for hearer-agents and speaker-objects of stereotyping.

Speakers may be misperceived or inaccurately evaluated, which is likely to be especially damaging if their dialect is stigmatized. For their part hearers may misperceive or evaluate inaccurately, outcomes that deviate from a rational model of decision-making.

A pessimistic eye might view the dialect stereotyping process as a kind of closed system thus:

A child learns a stigmatized dialect—>She exhibits this dialect in interaction with speakers of a valued dialect (e.g., teachers)—>These speakers make an inference of low status and competence—>They behave toward the user of the stigmatized dialect in ways that imply low competence, etc.—>She internalizes this behaviour, forms a negative self-image, and experiences hostility—>She withdraws from all but ritual interactions with these speakers—>The speakers of the valued dialect withdraw—>Limited interaction in a climate of hostility perpetuates stereotypical beliefs and maintains dialectal separateness—>Her negative self-image inhibits attempts to demonstrate competence, to exert influence, etc., at least with speakers of the valued dialect—>This inhibition reinforces the valued-dialect speakers' belief that she is low in competence, etc.—>The stigmatized dialect is learned by her children—>∞.

This is something of a caricature, no doubt, but the broad outline may be plausible. Interestingly, such a developmental model has not been proposed previously, together with all its interesting familial network and classroom implications, a useful heuristic to pursue and refine, both theoretically and empirically. Relatedly, do students—as is likely but never unveiled—have clear ideas of their different teachers', peers, and relatives' language attitudes (Jehannes Ytsma, personal communication)? At different ages, how do they deal, cognitively and communicationally, with any incongruences they believe exist between their own and significant others' language attitudes? Of course it is the case that dialects or other expressive forms are not the sole determinants of judgements of status or competence. But, as suggested above, a large body of research indicates that speech and language characteristics are important influences upon such judgements, and potentially so in educational settings even when other personal information data are available (see Edwards, 1989).

Can this system be altered? Many of us want to believe so. What are some possibilities for change?

(1) There are, inevitably, random factors that can induce change, such as the undeniable competence of a gifted person who nevertheless speaks a stigmatized dialect or language. Such random perturbations do little to induce enduring or pervasive change, for they are easily isolated cognitively ("She is an exception to the rule").

(2) More globally, agents of change can attempt to teach student speakers of a stigmatized form an alternative, valued form—this would be a kind of linguistic intervention strategy. The goal of such a strategy is to help students acquire an alternative expressive form

(beyond their native one) that may be used in some contexts to achieve the goal of appearing competent in the eyes of others. They would learn a second language or dialect and they would learn strategies for its use, as well as a rationale for these strategies.

There are some problems with sort of approach. For one thing, it tacitly acknowledges and legitimizes the superiority of one form over the other and accordingly may reinforce negative self-perceptions. Another problem is that it might *not work* for a variety of reasons, most basically because hearers may fail to perceive that student speakers are using the valued expressive form if the hearers have strong expectations that the stigmatized form will be used. There is evidence that this kind of perceptual error can occur, especially if hearers have a high need for cognitive structure and a low fear of judgmental invalidity. In other cases where use of the valued form is perceived, hearers may react negatively, viewing such use as falsely accommodative. Additionally, students may have low motivation to acquire the alternative form and parents and others may resist their acquiring it.

(3) An alternative approach is to heighten the awareness of students who use the valued form, in this case focusing upon the stereotypical basis of their beliefs about and evaluative reactions to stigmatized (and for that matter valued) forms of language. The goal would be to increase mere tolerance for linguistic diversity to a level beyond which such diversity is actually valued and to produce a realization of the potential inaccuracy of both negative and positive linguistic stereotyping. The attempt here would be to turn students into budding language scientists. This might be described as a kind of meta-linguistic training—getting students to use language to think and talk about language use. A parallel attempt could be made with student speakers of the stigmatized form, with the thought that this principled debunking of stereotyping would lead them to value their own language as much as others.

Would this sort of exceedingly rational intervention strategy work? What does “work” mean in this context? It means that students would be less likely to categorize persons along in-group/out-group lines on the basis of speech and language cues and less likely to make corresponding inferences about competence and status. It seems that this sort of intervention strategy would be less likely than the previous one to maintain or reinforce linguistic inequality—it is a more radical approach.

(4) The major alternative to linguistic or meta-linguistic intervention strategies is for change agents to alter the real power, e.g., the economic level, of a group of speakers of a stigmatized form. Over time, the increase in real power would transfer or generalize to the group’s symbolic behaviour—their language or dialect would be per-

ceived as higher in prestige or status than before the change in real power occurred. This would no doubt be desirable from the standpoint of speakers of the formerly stigmatized form. But this sort of change maintains the larger structure of valuing/stigmatizing language, although the particular linguistic forms that are valued or stigmatized differ from one time to another. And changing the real power of a whole group of persons is no simple feat.

Consequences for Student Language Learners

Apart from the issue of intervention, we can raise another issue, in this case pertaining to the motivational function of language attitudes for students learning a second language, e.g., English. At one level, students are likely to evaluate English along the dimensions of status and solidarity compared to their native language (Swedish). A positive evaluation on either dimension is likely to facilitate their learning of English, while a negative attitude is likely to inhibit this learning. These evaluations constitute primary reasons or motives which drive language acquisition. Of course, there are other motives which may operate in second language learning such as parental approval or disapproval, degree of peer support, rewards or punishments offered by teachers, and social or professional need for the second language (Gardner & Clément, 1990). Whatever, learning another language is a sociopolitical process and one which, to put no finer point on it, involves learners tasting another’s culture in their mouths and hearing themselves sound like a member of a respected or disrespected group (see Giles and Coupland, 1991), Little wonder then the existence of many “New Englishes” around the world where certain cultural communities acquiring the language infuse it with their own unique character, grammatically, lexically, and phonologically, with which they feel comfortable. Although often difficult for native English speakers back in Britain or the U.S. to deal with, English is not a linguistic monolith etched in stone awaiting acquisition but rather a constantly evolving and complex social system taking many different and legitimate forms. There is no acontextually “correct” form of English anymore than there is, despite the foregoing, a simple “standard” to be acquired (see Mobärg, 1989).

Additionally, student learners of English as a second language may have attitudes toward the various dialects of English. It has been suggested, for example, that many Swedish students may have dissimilar attitudes toward English spoken with an RP accent and English spoken with an accent that is standard American (SA). Speculating, it may be the case that for these students RP accent is higher than SA on the status and competence dimensions but lower on the dimensions of solidarity and attractiveness. If this is the case, what are the implications? We cannot be sure in the absence of research, but perhaps for

a majority of students feelings of attraction and identification are more important than feelings of superiority. If so, these students may be more highly motivated to learn SA than RP English. Conversely, they may be relatively resistant to learning English in the RP guise. If their teachers instruct in the RP mode but the students prefer SA English, there is a clear possibility for conflict (see Bell, 1982, for useful discussion of RP versus SA models affecting media language in New Zealand).

The solution, or at least a step toward a solution, may be for both teachers and students to become aware of their attitudes toward different accents, dialects, and languages. It may be desirable for students to learn both SA and RP English and to develop a rationale for use of these related but distinct forms. Students may come to realize that for self-presentational reasons it may be beneficial to use the higher status RP guise in some contexts. Teachers can clearly be enormously helpful in this regard. Actually, such help would appear to take the form of a combination of the linguistic and meta-linguistic intervention strategies described in the previous section. More specifically, students could be presented with a contextually relevant language attitude study which incorporated various accents (e.g. RP and SA) and asked to respond to them (see Ball and Giles, 1982, for methodological help in devising a rigorous exercise here). The questions might relate to the speakers' perceived personal and group attributes, the appropriateness of their voices in different contexts, how they thought other people might react to the voices, to what extent they thought the voices would have a bearing on scholastic achievement, how much listeners would wish to sound similar to speakers, whether they would be willing to co-operate with the speakers in particular circumstances, and so on. The data arising out of such a project, together with an analytical examination of the many different ways in which English is used on movies, TV and video, could then form a basis for a variety of engaging class and group discussions concerning, for instance, the validity of sociolinguistic stereotypes and prejudices; goals of self-presentation and strategies of accommodation; the ways in which the formation of impressions, perceived values and perceived language performance are affected by discursive, lexical, syntactic and phonological cues; problems of linguistic diversity and language change; gender, personality, and age of speakers and hearers as contributors to the formation of language attitudes; the importance of cognitive routes and contextual factors for language attitudes; motives and outcomes of second-language learning; to name but a few. For us, such mini-courses designed informally and creatively by teachers (and perhaps in concert) to meet local demands on the basis of a selective reading of and within the biblio-

graphy below would be of inestimable value not only in increasing student psycho-sociolinguistic sophistication in general, but in enriching and promoting the learning of second and foreign languages in particular.

Conclusion

We have indicated that across diverse cultures and ethnic groups hearers have attributional and evaluative reactions to languages, dialects, and accents. Such reactions constitute language attitudes which mediate hearers' perceptions of speech and their overt behaviour toward speakers. Thus, hearers may assign a given speaker to a social or ethnolinguistic category which may in turn call up judgements of status, competence, solidarity, or attractiveness. This is a process of stereotyping which may have consequences for both speakers and hearers in everyday life and for student learners of a second language.

We have suggested that it may be useful for teachers to intervene in the stereotyping process through the use of linguistic and meta-linguistic strategies designed to help students both learn alternative speech styles and develop awareness of their attitudes toward their own language and the languages of others. This type of intervention may have positive social consequences and positive consequences for Swedish students attempting to learn English or other non-native languages.

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