
Norbert Dittmar's book Soziolinguistik was first published in Germany in 1973. This review is based on the English translation published in 1976. The original German language version of the book aimed at a European audience clearly has a different significance from its English translation whose readership has easier access to most of the sources discussed, often easier personal access to the authors themselves. In the Preface to the English edition, D. characterizes his book as 'a survey of sociolinguistics', while the jacket describes it as 'a comprehensive introduction to the field of sociolinguistics in all its aspects'. D.'s characterization is the accurate one, since the book is indeed a broad survey of sociolinguistic work, too technical to be used as an introduction to sociolinguistics.

A first glance at the content of the book reveals that the whole field has been divided according to two concepts: the Deficit Hypothesis, represented by Bernstein's theoretical exposition and the subsequent experimental work, and the Variability Concept, a label D. uses to cover the work and ideas of such diverse sociolinguists as Susan Ervin-Tripp, Joshua Fishman, Charles Ferguson, John Gumperz, Dell Hymes, William Labov, among others. The Deficit Hypothesis occupies the first three chapters while all the other proposals are left for the remaining four chapters of the book. A valuable supplement is the final annotated bibliography.

The amount of space and attention devoted to Bernstein's work relative to other trends and authors was more justified within the German context 'where sociolinguistics was going through its first, tentative stages' and where 'sociolinguistic work... was heavily oriented towards Bernstein's theory' (v). Nevertheless, D. feels that 'there seems to be ample justification for an extensive critique in English of this theory' (v). Although a critical presentation of Bernstein's theory by a practicing linguist such as D. is always interesting, in the English translation D.'s extensive coverage of the topic might have been summarized while referring to the critical evaluations already available in the English sociolinguistic literature.

The Introduction provides a guided description of the organization of the book. After a very general account of the 'Deficit Theory' as formulated by Bernstein (Ch. 1), there is a presentation and critical examination of research conducted to test Bernstein's hypothesis (Ch. 2). This second chapter is divided into sections, of which 2.2 surveys 'investigations into the intellectual capabilities of
lower-class children’, while 2.3 reports on ‘analyses of class-specific behaviour’ with a special focus on Oevermann’s research which D. judges to be ‘one of the most serious works in the context of the Deficit Hypothesis’ (57). His general, very sound, conclusion is that ‘the hypothesis of the linguistic deficit of lower-class speakers lacks substantial evidence’ (66). In section 2.4 D. discusses ‘empirical material on socialization processes specific to social class’ and comments on data from additional research. The conclusion is once more that none of these studies has presented any definitive evidence. At the end of the chapter some proposed modifications of Bernstein’s assumptions are briefly considered.

The third chapter, ‘Social consequences of the Deficit Hypothesis: function and evaluation’, is the best one in the Deficit Hypothesis section. It contains information on the Bereiter & Engelmann speech program (1966) together with an exposition of the main objections that have been raised to Bernstein’s ideas and research, complemented by a very telling quotation from Labov (1970: 26) which summarizes his refutation of the verbal deprivation theory and therefore of compensatory education. In the summary of the Marxist critique some indication might have been given about how ‘an adequate class analysis’ which ‘proceeds historically’ would be an ‘adequate explanation of socially determined forms of speech behaviour’ (98).

However, I find D.’s condemnation of Bernstein’s approach rather severe. We are all aware of the undesirable social implications of Bernstein’s sharp distinction between an elaborated and a restricted code. Readers of English will presumably not only be familiar with Bernstein’s articles but also very probably with the negative reactions he provoked among American sociolinguists. We can check the many contradictions in which Bernstein indulges trying to refute those implications, the weakness of the evidence presented so far to support his main predictions, and so forth. But during this last decade some merit has also been as signed to making these distinctions and D. relegates this view to a few bibliographic references. Although he recognizes that ‘at present there is a marked tendency to regard Bernstein’s work as a contribution to research into the communicative competence of speakers’ (28), he prefers to disregard the possible value of Bernstein’s ideas and focus on the ideological biases and the undesirable sociopolitical consequences. D. is even harsher than Labov, perhaps Bernstein’s strongest critic in the United States, who has stated that ‘Bernstein’s overall approach to language differences has the great merit of setting the problem firmly within the larger context of differences in social structure. He enlarges the significance of the usual distinction between language and speech – the abstract system vs. the use of that system – with the concise observation, “between language and speech is social structure”’ (1971: 201). Furthermore, even sociolinguists such as Gumperz and Hymes, with a clearly different ideology from Bernstein’s have underlined several important contributions made by his work (Gumperz & Hymes 1972b).
In Ch. 4 D. takes up what he calls the Variability Concept, under which he includes the rest of sociolinguistics as was already pointed out above. Here he deals with the basic concepts of sociolinguistics, its tradition within linguistics and anthropology, and the studies of languages in contact. He summarizes Weinreich's 1953 contribution and Ferguson's concept of diglossia (1959). The chapter ends with a sketchy categorization of sociolinguistic work into four areas: (1) speech variation, (2) linguistic change, (3) language acquisition, and (4) social communication.

In the following three chapters many authors might have deserved more attention. In general, I find that there is not enough synthesis. Quite often a particular study is described in great detail while the main thesis of a researcher's work is not presented. Or for some authors there is only a lengthy summary of one of their articles which, even if central to their work, in no way reflects the depth and potential of their role in the field. Thus Ervin-Tripp's analysis of the components of a speech event fills many pages, Ferguson's concept of diglossia is reproduced in detail, but it can in no way be said that either Ervin-Tripp's or Ferguson's place in sociolinguistics is accurately indicated by these pages. A discussion of Hymes's model of the interaction of language and social setting is noticeably absent (Hymes 1967, 1972). Gumperz' remarkable contribution to the field is never evaluated in an overall fashion but described fragmentarily at several points throughout the book.

Chapter 5, 'Theoretical concepts of speech variation in the framework of the Variability Concept' ranges from a short outline history of the field to a section on 'sociolinguistic data within a theory of grammar', containing a long description of the different models proposed for Labov's variable rule, summaries of alternatives to the variable rule model which, except for DeCamp's (1971) and Bailey's (1969, 1971) proposals cannot be considered true options, only one page on speech acts (159-60), and a very brief presentation of 'Marxist sociolinguistics'. It is clear that D. is intimately acquainted with Labov's findings and methods and with the research that has further confirmed his initial findings, but perhaps his familiarity with the details of this form of quantitative research prevents him from placing all this information in perspective. Just one example of how the organization of the material does not aid understanding can be found in his reproduction of the different alternative models of the variable rule (Labov 1969; Cedergren & Sankoff 1974) in ten pages of difficult reading (134-43), while the notion of variable is not introduced until p. 190. The ordering of the book neither reflects the chronological development of Labov's concepts, from the discovery of correlations revealing patterns that structure heterogeneity (Labov 1966), to the incorporation of variable data in rules of grammar (Labov 1969), nor is it didactically motivated according to degrees of difficulty. I would also have expected some discussion in this long presentation as well as more criticism. For example, D. quotes Bickerton's objections (presented as shared by De-
Camp) but the reader is left to infer how 'this criticism becomes superfluous as a result of Labov's and Cedergren and Sankoff's (1974) specification of the status of variable rules' (142).

D. presents the variable rule as a mere extension of optional rules. However, he is aware of its special status: 'They [the variable rules] are neither mere statistic statements nor in any way approximations to an ideal grammar: rather, they represent a set of quantitative relations that constitute for themselves the form of the grammar' (14). But what I think has to be underlined is that variable rules are intended to capture the centrality of the variable component of language as against a discrete approach to language which views variation as data flux. Although I tend to view the variable rule more as a heuristic device than D. does, I believe it is worth pointing out that the variable rule and the methods of proof in quantitative studies provide us with significant data for our understanding of language structure. In this sense the notion of variable rule is meant to do more than 'provide an argument against the idea that linguistic rules must necessarily be of a categorical nature' (134). Furthermore, the model also implies more than incorporating 'the tendencies to apply an optional rule ... into the formal notation of the rule' (135).1

In section 5.3 D. concentrates on what he calls the 'Functional and interactional approach' to cover 'anthropological approaches ("the ethnography of speaking", Hymes 1962), studies of verbal interaction (cf. Gumperz and Hymes 1972[a]), ... and situation-oriented analysis of speech acts' (161). The section on 'Communicative competence' presents Chomsky's notions of competence and performance comparing them to a simplified rephrasing of Hymes's extension of the notion of competence. D. refers here to 'Chomsky's dichotomous judgment of utterances according to grammaticality and acceptability' (163, emphasis added). Then he adds that the analysis in a theory of communicative competence 'should decide the way in which sentences of a particular phonological and syntactic structure are regarded as functional for a given situation' (163, emphasis added). It would have been useful here to distinguish between Chomsky's concern with abstract sentences vs. Hymes's and other sociolinguists' concern with utterances. 'Utterances' or messages are context-bound tokens of the abstract sentences, analyzable only within speech events which serve complex functions.

D. refers to 'an integrated theory of sociolinguistic description, whose scope should incorporated primarily the function and secondarily the structure of language' (163). In contrasting Chomsky's theory with Hymes's view it is important to point out that Chomsky's grammar is afunctorial by definition.

1 For a thoughtful, critical discussion of the difference between optional and variable rules, the relative merits of several variable rule models and the difficulties raised by all of them, we now have available Kay & McDaniel's (1977) paper to which D. of course did not have access but which is a good example of the kind of positive critical view which I think we need at this 'state of the art'.