A Tutorial on Sociolinguistics for Speech-Language Pathologists: An Appreciation of Variation

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The field of sociolinguistics provides information relevant to the field of speech-language pathology. This tutorial discusses the major research areas investigated in sociolinguistics and explains why knowledge of this field is beneficial to practicing speech-language clinicians. Clinical implications based on sociolinguistic research are provided.

Because of the applied nature of sociolinguistics, its focus on language variation in different contexts, and the issues that have been investigated in sociolinguistics over the past 30 years, the field of sociolinguistics holds great promise as a resource to practicing speech-language pathologists. This article will address sociolinguistic principles, methods, and findings, as well as discuss some applications for working with individuals with communicative disorders.

The relevance of sociolinguistics to the field of speech-language pathology is clear: both fields are concerned with language and the communication of real speakers in social contexts. Indeed, every clinical situation involves sociolinguistic issues. The process of identifying linguistic difficulties, the attitudes that both the client and the clinician bring into the therapeutic encounter, the interactional styles and strategies employed in this encounter, and even the clinical expectations about treatment are related to issues in sociolinguistics.

TOPICS IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Sociolinguistic work is unusual in that its focus is on language variation across speaking situations and across social groups; it includes the relationships between language and social factors on many levels. The focus may be on the knowledge involved in using language appropriately in different social situations, on linguistic characteristics of various social groups, or on how language use is affected by institutions and policies at the societal level.

LANGUAGE VARIATION ACROSS SITUATIONS

Published reports of the social and cultural variables that influence language have been present for many years (e.g., Ferguson, 1959; Fischer, 1958; Haas, 1944; Hymes, 1961; Joos, 1961; Labov, 1963). Approximately 20 years ago, Dell Hymes (1972) published an article that had a major impact on applied linguistic fields. He (1972) advocated the study of communicative competence, which involves a broader concept of language skills and knowledge than learning rules of grammar and vocabulary; it also involves the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in different situations and according to particular sociocultural constraints. Hymes stated that communicative competence as a concept requires that an individual acquire and use not only linguistic knowledge, but also sociocultural knowledge. Further, Hymes pointed out that “rules of use are not a late grafting” (p. 279) in the process of language development. That is, children do not learn a list of vocabulary items and grammatical rules and only later learn how and when to use them. They learn the form and content of language in the context of learning how to talk in different situations.

The concept of communicative competence as a blend of the sociocultural and linguistic knowledge that an individual needs in order to use language has had a profound influence in sociolinguistics. Hymes’ focus on cultural, social, and contextual influences on language structure and usage gave license to the study of sociocultural and contextual influences in language development, educational uses of language, and human discourse. In effect, Hymes’ “communicative competence” provided the conceptual link between linguistic structure and communicative application. This link is readily observed in the study of language variation across situations.

A large amount of sociolinguistic effort focuses on understanding how language varies in relation to one of the following aspects of the speaking situation: (a) the interactive relationship between the speaker(s) and listener(s), (b) the topic, and, (c) the nature of the event (e.g., giving a formal lecture, taking a test, playing on the playground). In the following sections some communicative phenomena are highlighted, indicating the interactions between linguistic and social factors and how these interactions result in situational variation. Discussions of clinical implications also are provided.

Variation in Expressing Communicative Intents

The dynamics between linguistic and social factors producing situational variation is illustrated in the use of lan-
guage to express communicative intents. More specifically, how does variation reveal itself when a speaker attempts to relate ideas and accomplish things through his or her language? How a speaker requests objects and actions is one example of situational variation in language use.

Requests. Requests are expressed in many different ways. Middle-class American speakers may request by using direct imperative forms, such as, “Give me a cracker,” and more indirect forms, such as questions (e.g., “Do you have any crackers?”) and hinting (e.g., “I usually have a snack at 3:00”). Adults’ use of indirect and direct forms are related in large part to the speaker’s and listener’s interactional relationship. For example, indirect forms typically are regarded as more polite and more often are used by lower status speakers when addressing higher status speakers than vice versa, and people often use more direct forms with people they know well. Adults also consider the effect of the request on the listener and use more indirect forms and persuasive forms, including explanations of special circumstances, when their request may be regarded as intrusive or burdensome (Gordon & Ervin-Tripp, 1984). For example, imagine how you would ask to borrow a quarter from a friend, versus fifty dollars.

Variation in the use of requests also has been noted in children. During the school-age years, children’s use of indirect forms of requests increases in frequency and variety (Warren-Leubecker & Bohannon, 1989). They use justifications and explanations (“I’d like to have some crackers because I missed lunch”) and show consideration of the listener’s perspective (“I know you’re busy, but could I have some crackers?”) for non-routine requests, especially when addressing listeners who are of higher status (Ervin-Tripp & Gordon, 1986). That is, children vary their requests to communicate effectively in different social and situational contexts.

Conveying feelings. Variation occurs when speakers communicate a wide range of intentions and attitudes in different situations, using different linguistic styles (Gordon & Ervin-Tripp, 1984; Gumperz, 1982). For example, a child might use imperatives when addressing a substitute teacher as a way of showing off for classmates or as a way of “testing the limits.” An adult who has a falling out with a friend or family member might use a more indirect style of address with them than usual to convey coldness and formality usually reserved for outsiders. In effect, the forms of address and other linguistic structures typically reserved for politeness or solidarity or even intimacy (i.e., pragmatic conventions) may be manipulated or even flouted to make a point regarding the interactional relationship between speaker and listener.

Clinical implications. Given this information about situational variation due to the interactional relationships, if an adult or school-age child is described as rude and demanding, assessment of communicative abilities might include investigating how the individual conveys intentions in different situations. An assessment might reveal limitations in the ability to use different forms of requests and/or difficulty recognizing contexts in which use of different types of requests would be most effective and appropriate. A client who fails to comply with indirect types of requests may not comprehend the intention the listener is trying to convey, even if the literal meaning of the utterance is understood (Rees & Shulman, 1978).

It is also important to investigate whether a client usually expresses his or her intentions (like requests) in ways expected in particular contexts and to look for evidence that the client purposefully is violating a pragmatic convention on a particular occasion. Considering the client’s agenda during an interaction can shed light on seemingly inappropriate remarks and actions (Lund & Duchan, 1993), and it can decrease the possibility of confusing a communicative manipulation for evidence of a communicative disorder.

Many violations of pragmatic conventions may be purposeful; for example, a client may not respond to some questions during an interview because he or she is annoyed with the interlocutor and chooses to ignore the question. This type of situation should be distinguished from the client’s failure to hear the questions, difficulty in learning conversational rules and obligations, or difficulty with comprehending the semantics and syntax of some types of questions. It also could result from cultural differences in ways of questioning between the client and clinician.

Variation in Verbal Performance

Another illustration of situational variation involves the differences in many aspects of verbal performance across settings. Topic, task, and characteristics of the listener all have been shown to influence children’s verbal performance, including the amount of speech and the length and complexity of utterances (e.g., Cazden, 1972; Gallagher, 1983). An example of dramatic differences in the verbal performance between settings (home and school) comes from a study done in Bristol, England (Wells, 1986). In this study children’s language development was followed for several years. Rosie, a 5-year-old girl, had developed language skills more slowly than the other children. A transcript of Rosie’s speech at home while she was cleaning house with her mother included approximately equal numbers of turns by Rosie and her mother and a discussion of whether cleaning the clock would affect how well it worked, which Rosie started by asking, “Well, shall we wash them [the clock hands] because they’re not clean enough?” (Wells, 1986, p. 95).

In contrast, Rosie’s longest utterance in a transcript of an interaction with one of her teachers was, “Miss, I done it,” which she said repeatedly when showing her teacher a completed project. Her responses to a series of teacher questions in the same interaction included repeating, “Miss, I done it,” which seemed unrelated to the teacher’s questions, giving minimal one- and two-word answers and making no response to some of the questions.

A pattern of less frequent speaking, fewer initiations, and less complex language use at school than at home also was found in the Bristol study group data (Wells, 1986), indicating that Rosie’s pattern of using more complex language at home was similar to patterns among her peers, even though the peers were developing language skills more
quickly than Rosie. These data illustrate how important it is to find out how our clients speak in different situations, rather than assuming that a sample from one setting is sufficient for the assessment of communication skills. Similar findings and implications have been available for years from sociolinguistic research. From the early work of Bernstein (1960) to the more recent data collected by Milroy (1987), it is clear that the situational context affects verbal performance across many speech-language parameters.

Clinical implications. Situational variability is a factor in the performance of people with a variety of communication disorders. Three examples will illustrate this point. First, a number of studies have shown that the frequency and severity of stuttering varies with the type and size of audience (Ingram, 1984). Second, adults who are hearing impaired report using communication strategies, such as requesting clarification, more often with familiar than unfamiliar speakers (Tye-Murray, Purdy, & Woodworth, 1992). Finally, preschool children with articulation disorders show differences in intelligibility of speech and amount of speech produced when task and topic are varied within a clinical setting (Shriberg & Kwiatkowski, 1985).

Because many aspects of communication are affected by the task, topic, and audience characteristics, contexts for assessment and intervention must be chosen carefully with these effects in mind. In addition to thinking of contexts in terms of physical characteristics, such as the amount of noise and distractions in the environment, the social context also must be considered. Gallagher (1983) describes a pre-assessment planning procedure to determine the types of contexts that will be used to collect language samples. These decisions are based on information provided by the child's parents regarding the situations in which the child's speaking is "typical" and the situations in which the child's "best" speaking occurs. Decisions as to which sampling contexts will be most useful must be made for each client because there is individual variability in the influences of context on language use (Gallagher, 1983). In addition, data suggest that children from different socioeconomic and cultural groups may respond very differently to similar assessment situations (Cazden, 1972; Heath, 1983; Westby, 1990a,b). Consequently, a "standard" assessment format or setting will not meet the needs of all students.

Differences in Discourse Structures

Situational variation also occurs at levels of organization higher than the sentence or utterance level—in the structuring of discourse—due primarily to the setting and the objectives of the discourse.

At the level of discourse, appropriate and effective language use involves knowledge of discourse structures and of when to use them. Data reveal that both the sequencing and the actual discourse structures used in certain events are quite variable. For example, American children typically have a "show-and-tell" period, with discourse requirements different from those of other speaking situations. In a study of a first grade classroom, children were expected to speak primarily in a monologue, to stick to one specific topic in telling the class about a special person, object, or event, and to make it clear from their wording how each statement was tied to the main topic (Michaels, 1981). These discourse characteristics differ from conversations with peers, in which fairly frequent exchanges of turns among speakers are expected, chains of associated topics occur frequently, and connections between topics often are left implicit (Westby, 1985). For example, during a conversation among three children, the topic might shift from the movie that Jimmy saw, Jurassic Park, to the dinosaur T-shirt Anne got, to a T-shirt Suzie bought at Disneyland, and so on.

Clinical implications. The variation noted in discourse structuring has a number of implications for the practicing speech-language pathologist. For example, the discourse structure of most formal, standardized tests is unlike that of typical speaking situations in our daily lives. The purpose of normed, standardized tests is to rank individuals on the basis of a sample of behavior in the testing context, not to provide information that can be translated directly to real-world performance or to treatment objectives (Hubbell, 1981; Lund & Duchan, 1993; McCauley & Swisher, 1984). Therefore, if such tests are used in assessment, it is important to recognize that how the client performs on the specific test items very likely does not correspond to how the client uses those skills in daily life. This fact has been documented by a number of researchers over the past 20 years. Prutting, Gallagher, and Mulac (1975) noted that children's use of syntactic structures from the Northwestern Syntax Screening Test (Lee, 1970) did not correspond to their use of the same structures in conversation. Similarly, many of the speech errors clients make on articulation tests may not correspond to their error patterns in conversational speech samples (Morrison & Shriberg, 1992).

Because different situations require different discourse strategies, language samples collected in different types of speaking situations are needed for assessment purposes. Sampling contexts should be chosen to examine a client's response to different discourse demands, with particular attention to concerns of the referral source. For example, if a teacher reports that Suzie hardly talks at all in the classroom, a sample of Suzie's communication in the classroom context is needed, in addition to a sample of her language in the "typical" and "best" circumstances identified by her teacher, parents, or others (Gallagher, 1983).

From an assessment perspective, this greater awareness of the situational constraints and the need to account for such variation recently has received attention across a wide range of communicative disorders (Miller, 1989; Owens, 1991). Recommendations for authentic and naturalistic observation and assessment have been proposed for clients with head injuries (Kennedy & Deruyter, 1991), aphasics (Klipp, 1991; Milroy & Perkins, 1992; Simmons, 1993), adolescents with communicative deficits (Damico, 1993), and clients with numerous other communicative impairments (Cheng, 1990; Garcia, 1992).

Discourse differences also have implications for treatment. Differences in the discourse structures noted in treatment sessions and in speaking events in other settings
may make it difficult to generalize new language and speech skills to daily life (Prutting, Bagshaw, Goldstein, Juskowitz, & Umen, 1978; Prelock, 1990; Ripich & Panagos, 1985). Clients may regard the introduction of particular grammatical forms, vocabulary, and speech sounds as a special type of talking required in the treatment room. After all, if the structure of activities and discourse in treatment differs from those at home, on the job, or in the school classroom, a client reasonably may assume that there are also special ways of forming sentences, special vocabulary words, and special ways of pronouncing words for use in the treatment room. Care must be taken to account for situational diversity and to work the potentially important variables into the treatment program. In consideration of this, a number of suggestions have been proposed for conducting intervention in naturalistic contexts (Brinton & Fujiki, 1989; Miller, 1989; Secord, 1990; Spiegel, Benjamin, & Spiegel, 1993; Tye-Murray, Purdy, & Woodworth, 1992).

Variation in Styles of Speech

A final illustration of situational variation involves the well-documented changes in speech registers or styles of speech used by speakers in different settings. An individual uses many different styles of speaking throughout the day. For example, speakers often use a special register (referred to as child-directed speech) when talking with children, another register when talking with friends, and a more formal register when giving class presentations and lectures. Registers can differ from one another in many ways (Hudson, 1980). For example, registers vary in the technicality of the language, as in speaking of a "cerebral vascular accident" versus a "stroke." As discussed earlier, degree of politeness is another dimension of speaking style that varies, depending on the familiarity and relative status of speakers.

Two major functions are served by different registers (Warren-Leubecker & Bohannon, 1989). First, register changes signal adjustments made for the listener’s cognitive and linguistic status. For example, child-directed speech typically includes adjustments in length of utterance, vocabulary, and topics that are related to the child’s language skills (Snow, 1986). Suprasegmental features, such as using a higher pitch and exaggerated intonation patterns, have been studied less systematically, but it has been suggested that prosodic adjustments may be used to gain and hold a young child’s attention (Crystal, 1986). Other features of child-directed speech, such as using diminutive terms like doggie and we, used to refer to the child, as in “Do we want our bottle,” may convey affective information and also may mark the interaction as one in which a more skilled adult is addressing a less skilled person.

The second function served by changing registers is social signaling. Style variation is noted frequently when speakers who have a repertoire of styles switch between standard and nonstandard forms across situations. As with the other aspects of linguistic variation, the social signaling dimension has been the primary focus of studies that document variation between formal and informal styles. The formality of the style used is related to several socially important characteristics of the situation, including the topic, the status of addressee, and type of interaction (e.g., formal interview vs. casual conversation).

Patterns of stylistic variation include quantitative differences in how often speakers use one pronunciation as opposed to another in a different situation. For example, speakers of many varieties of English, including American and British speakers, pronounce unstressed -ing at the ends of words as in’ more often in casual conversation than in formal interviews (Labov, 1972b; Trudgill, 1974). Similarly, speakers typically will pronounce the -ing as in’ when talking with friends and family more often than when speaking to individuals with higher perceived status (e.g., a professor or judge).

Quantitative changes also have been noted in vocabulary usage. Some words, such as slang terms, are used more in casual interactions, while other words are more likely to be used in formal speaking situations. It is important to be able to use vernacular grammatical forms, pronunciations, and vocabulary in the ways our peers do. A person who is unable to use a vernacular style in casual situations has an incomplete linguistic repertoire and is likely to sound pompous, inflexible, cold, or conceited.

In reality, the use of an informal style is a composite of many co-occurring linguistic features (Ervin-Tripp, 1974). For example, in casual conversations, an English speaker from the United States will use the in’ variant when pronouncing the -ing variable; delete word final consonants, particularly plosives, in consonant clusters (e.g., “my bes(t) frien(d) Mary”); and use slang more often than in formal situations. Some glottalization and deletion of plosives after vowels is also common in casual speech. For example, when rapidly saying, “I put it on the table,” speakers are likely to glottalize or delete at least one of the t’s in put and it. Pronunciations such as “wanna” (want to), “gonna” (going to), and “hafta” (have to) also are expected in casual speech. Therefore, casual patterns of pronunciation should not be considered errors when they are used in conversational speech.

Developmental considerations. Some aspects of stylistic variation appear early in the course of development (Gleason & Perlmann, 1985). For example, preschool children use more polite forms of requests when addressing adults as opposed to peers (such as saying “please” and asking, “Could/can/may I . . . ”), and they use imperatives more when addressing younger children than when addressing peers and older children (Warren-Leubecker & Bohannon, 1989). Preschool children also vary utterance length, intonation patterns, and voice characteristics when playing different roles in pretend play (Andersen, 1990). By 3 to 4 years of age, children use the -ing pronunciation of the -ing variable more than the in’ during structured verbal tasks, as opposed to open-ended conversations (Fischer, 1958; Patterson, 1993).

During school-age years, stylistic variation becomes increasingly similar to adult patterns of variation. As noted previously, the frequency and variety of indirect request forms also increases among school-age children. Children’s
consistency of use of different registers in role-play increases, and they are able to vary syntactic structures, in addition to overall length of utterance and suprasegmental characteristics (Andersen, 1990). The overall frequency of using nonstandard versus standard variants also reaches that of adult variation patterns some time in early or late adolescence, depending on the variable and the population studied (Romaine, 1984).

**Nonstandard variants and assessment procedures.** There are definite assessment implications based on our sociolinguistic knowledge of stylistic variation. Because different regional and ethnic groups use different nonstandard variants, judgments about an articulation error pattern can be formed only by comparing the client’s speech to that of family members and peers. If we mistakenly diagnose normal sociolinguistic patterns as deviant, we have created a problem for the child, rather than identified an existing problem.

A client’s dialectal pronunciation must be considered when determining an articulation error in order to avoid mis-identifying a normal pronunciation variant as an error. If a client uses a pattern of pronunciation not common among the client’s family and peers, and the client’s speech is considered unusual by those who are familiar with the client’s dialect, the pattern can be regarded as an error pattern. In contrast, if the client alternates between two pronunciation patterns and the pattern or alternation is similar to that of family members and/or peers, the pattern should not be regarded as an error. For example, if a client sometimes deletes final plosives in consonant clusters in patterns that are consistent with other family members and peers, the pattern is simply one of normal use of nonstandard and standard variants.

The more complex cases involve clients who use nonstandard or casual variants all of the time. If a client uses only the casual form, even when his or her family and community alternate between standard and nonstandard forms, then it may be appropriate to consider the lack of the standard form as an error pattern. For example, a 6-year-old girl who always omits /t/ and /d/ in consonant clusters at the ends of words is not showing a normal sociolinguistic pattern if her parents and peers delete the sounds in conversation only part of the time and seldom do so when the consonant cluster is followed by a vowel, as in the phrase, “first of all.” This linguistic behavior exhibited by the child would warrant more in-depth investigation to determine the presence of a communicative disorder (Damico, 1991; Kovarsky, 1992).

This awareness of stylistic variation and its use in assessment is not limited to the phonological system. The same procedures should be followed when assessing grammatical patterns. A child who uses “double negatives,” such as “I don’t want no pickles,” may be using a nonstandard, but normal, grammatical form. The same is true of ain’t. Many speakers use this form, and it is generally incorrect to consider ain’t an error. While it is useful for children to learn the standard forms for use in formal contexts and in writing, normal use of nonstandard forms should not be considered evidence of a language disorder. See Wolfram (1986) for information on other pronunciation and grammatical patterns commonly found in the United States.

One way to avoid an inappropriate focus on nonstandard forms in referral and assessment procedures is to take a functional approach to assessment. For example, instead of listing types of articulation errors, grammatical problems, vocabulary limitations, and lack of specific pragmatic skills as a basis for referrals, Damico and Oller (1980) developed a language screening method that can be used by teachers to identify school-age children for referral on the basis of observations of their communicative breakdowns and inefficiencies. Pragmatic methods for analyzing conversational language samples also have been developed (e.g., Damico, 1985; Prutting & Kirchner, 1987).

**Addressing style in intervention.** There are several implications involving style variation in intervention. First, it is important in clinical work to be able to vary adjustments in linguistic and cognitive demands while using voice and intonation patterns and terms of address that are appropriate to a client. For example, when addressing an adult aphasic patient, it may be helpful to use shorter utterances and to speak more slowly than usual, while avoiding a high-pitched voice, exaggerated intonation patterns, and terms of endearment, such as “sweetie.”

A second intervention implication involves the client’s speech style usage. It is important to remember that an individual’s ability to use a style of speaking appropriate to the situation should be considered in intervention. If we confine our teaching to the use of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical forms that are most appropriate for formal contexts, our clients may have difficulty in more casual interactions. Such a singular focus on formal style should be avoided. Some language intervention materials and programs for school-age children address casual peer interactions, although the focus is often on situations in which more formal and polite styles would be appropriate. See, for example, Resource of Activities for Peer Pragmatics (McConnell & Blagden, 1986), Knowing What to Say! (Mates & Flowers, 1990), Communicate (Mayo & Waldo, 1986), Case Study (Marquis & Addy-Trout, 1992), and Communication Workshop (Zakim, 1996). One advantage to most of these programs is that they have an open format for discussion, which gives the clinician and students the flexibility to modify some of the suggestions as part of discussion and role-playing activities. Intervention programs for adolescents that deal with pragmatic skills are designed primarily for use with groups of students. The group setting is important because an adult clinician is likely to have different beliefs from children and adolescents about how polite and formal a style should or should not be with peers, and a group can provide feedback. A useful modification would be to include peers without communication disorders in the intervention sessions or to test the program activities on a group of peers without communication disorders. It would be a disservice to teach children ways of interacting with peers that are ineffective or inappropriate.

An intervention method that may be particularly useful for increasing adolescents’ awareness and flexibility of registers is using television programs and commercials as a
basis for group discussions and projects (Bourgault, 1985). The types of language and nonverbal communication used by speakers in soap operas, situation comedies, news programs, and game shows can be used to provide diverse role models and to provide a starting point for group discussions and activities.

The programs mentioned above require students to talk about talking. A variety of metalinguistic skills increase during the school-age years (van Kleeck, 1984). Evidence that children can talk about style in specific terms appears at about 10 years of age and continues to develop during the adolescent years (Romaine, 1984). Use of intervention approaches that rely on discussions of language style may not be appropriate for younger children or for children with language skills typical of younger ages. Furthermore, the relationship between metalinguistic discussions and students' actual performance in the situations discussed is unknown. In other words, it is not known whether discussing how to tactfully tell a peer that her behavior is annoying results in a client's ability to implement the discussed behaviors in real-life situations.

**LANGUAGE VARIATION ACROSS SOCIAL GROUPS**

It is important to note that language variation does not occur only across situations, nor is it only an intra-speaker phenomenon. Patterns of language variation also exist across various types of social groups. Indeed, the investigation of social group variation has been an important focus in sociolinguistics. This section will discuss some aspects of this important research. While the following discussion will involve group differences, it is important to remember that not all members of a particular social group are alike. Consequently, although these data typically will be true for social groups, individuals within each group may vary in their linguistic performances.

**Linguistic Code Differences**

The use of linguistic forms regarded as nonstandard varies systematically across gender and socioeconomic groups. In most studies, men use more nonstandard forms than women, and people from lower socioeconomic groups use more nonstandard forms than those from higher socioeconomic groups. For example, in Labov's (1972b) New York study, women used nonstandard -ing pronunciations, deleted postvocalic r, used [d] for “th” (as in pronouncing *these* as “dese”) and deleted final consonants less often than men. In the same study, people from lower socioeconomic groups used nonstandard variants more often than those from higher socioeconomic groups. These types of gender and socioeconomic differences as evident in nonstandard variant use have been found in studies done in Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and Australia, as well as in studies of many other languages and cultures (Labov, 1990).

Language variation patterns also are associated with geographic regions and ethnic groups. Language varieties within a language are identified on the basis of clusters of particular grammatical forms, pronunciation patterns (often referred to as accent), and lexical items. Clusters of linguistic features associated with geographic regions are referred to as dialects. The more general term, language variety, is used to refer to dialects as well as clusters of linguistic features associated with specific socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic groups. For example, some African American speakers use a variety of English referred to as Black English Vernacular (BEV). Grammatical and phonological characteristics of BEV have been studied extensively since the 1960s, ranging from major studies done in Detroit (Wolfram, 1969) and New York City (Labov, 1972a) to recent studies of BEV related to clinical issues in assessment (e.g., Bleile & Wallach, 1992; Moran, 1993).

Clinical implications. Once the speech-language pathologist understands that linguistic codes systematically differ across social groups, an important assessment implication should be recognized: the use of tests of Standard American English vocabulary, grammar, and phonology to determine whether or not an individual has a language disorder is inappropriate for speakers of other dialects. Instruments designed and normed on one dialectal group typically will incorrectly identify individuals from another dialectal group as poor language users—or even as language disordered (Oller, 1979). Languages other than English also include many varieties. It is important to remember this when assessing a client who speaks another language. For example, it is inappropriate to administer a test designed for Puerto Rican speakers to a person from Mexico because there are differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar across varieties of Spanish. Additionally, there are many varieties of Spanish within a country, just as there are many varieties of English spoken within the United States. Therefore, administering a test in a particular variety of Spanish spoken in Mexico may not be appropriate for Mexicans who speak other dialects. See Damico (1991), Lund and Duchan (1993), and Taylor and Payne (1983) for discussions of considerations to note when assessing speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**Discourse and Pragmatic Differences**

The differences noted across social groupings have not been limited to linguistic codes or to language structural differences. A number of differences also have been noted in the way the linguistic structures are used and the way in which these structures may be organized above the level of the sentence or the utterance. That is, there are differences in both the pragmatic use of language and the discourse organization when one social group is compared with another.

Cultural diversity. Until recently, most of the research on
children's pragmatic and discourse skills has focused on children from middle-class homes in the United States. Therefore, the sociocultural and linguistic skills of children from only one group were widely known. There is now a growing literature on the socialization and language development of children from other cultures. For example, Heath (1983) studied working-class and middle-class White and Black children in the southeastern United States, and Ochs & Schieffelin (1984) studied children in Samoa and Polynesia. These studies have shown that cross-cultural variation in ways of interacting with children is linked to cultural differences in attitudes and beliefs about children and human nature, as well as to the types of activities in the community.

The differences between school and home in discourse structures and learning contexts are greater for some children than for others. Boggs (1972), Heath (1983), Iglesias (1985), Terrell and Hale (1992), Westby and Rouse (1985), and many others have studied differences between learning and language use at home and at school for children from many different backgrounds. Children's knowledge and experience with how language is used in different situations is specific to their culture. Consequently, some children come to school with conventions for language use that differ from those of typical classroom patterns. These differences usually involve mismatches between the home cultures of the children and the culture of the school. Although all children must learn some new rules and discourse strategies in classrooms, children from non-dominant cultures typically are faced with the greatest differences between home and school "rules" for communication and for general conduct.

One illustration of a frequent mismatch between school and home concerns discourse conventions for asking and answering questions. Asking a question can be viewed as an act of verbal control, because it obligates the addressee to respond. Among middle-class speakers in the United States, an addressee is generally expected to answer a question, unless its content is regarded as inappropriate. Not answering questions can be viewed as a strategy of resistance (Milroy, 1987).

In contrast, questions are used and interpreted in various ways, depending on the cultural setting. Indeed, asking direct questions may be considered rude in many cultures; at least the rules of questioning may be very different from those followed in the United States. The Araucanians of Chile, for example, consider it an insult to repeat a question (Hymes, 1972). Milroy cites another example from a study by Eades in which a fieldworker asking questions of an Aborigine in Queensland is answered with "Eh?" or "Beg pardon?" while statements made with a rising intonation were answered. Hymes (1972) also describes the use of answers to convey messages among the Cahinhaua of Brazil: "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" (p. 279).

In the United States, teachers ask many questions and often select who will answer the question (Mehan, 1982). In classrooms in which students have different discourse rules regarding questions and answers, communication can be problematic. For example, Boggs (1972) documented the pattern of native Hawaiian children in one-to-one, small-group, and classroom contexts when a particular child was asked a question. The child who was addressed consistently made a minimal reply, if any, while the other children chimed in with complete and often elaborate answers. Among this group of children, voluntary contributions to group discussions and stories were the norm; asking a single child to respond violated this discourse convention.

In a study of three communities within the southeastern United States, Heath (1983) found that two of the communities shared assumptions about questioning children that were consistent with classroom discourse. In a Black and White middle-class community and a nearby White working-class community, parents asked their children many pseudoquestions. Initially the parents answered the questions for the child, but later on the children replied, displaying information that the child and the questioner shared. In contrast, pseudoquestions were seldom asked of Black working-class children in another nearby community, except as a teasing type of interaction. For example, a child might be asked, "What's my name?" in order to have the child reply with a nickname that only the child called the questioner. Children from this community were not prepared for the classroom initiate-respond-evaluate sequences, with teachers asking pseudoquestions in order to have the student display shared knowledge.

Among Warm Springs Native Americans in Oregon, silence and minimal answers to teacher questions and attempts to lead classroom discussions were common in an ethnographic study by Philips (1972). Philips found that the classroom discourse conventions were in conflict with several community norms. First, children in Warm Springs did much of their learning through observing adults at home and then privately practicing skills until they were ready to display them in public. The norms of the classroom, in contrast, expected children to "learn from their mistakes" by trying to answer questions and by having their errors corrected by the teacher or another student. This type of conflict between learning by observing at home, versus learning through extensive verbal explanations by adults and question-and-answer routines in school also has been observed among the Navajo (John, 1972).

Among the Warm Springs children, issues of control and leadership also differed between school and the community. In the community, leaders were not assigned; people chose individually to follow people who had demonstrated competence. In community events, children and adults participated to the degree they wished; each person chose whether to be actively involved or to be more a part of the "audience." Furthermore, children as young as 8 to 11 years of age had more responsibilities and more control over certain aspects of their lives than children in most middle-class communities in the United States. In contrast, teachers were delegated classroom leaders by the school system, and they expected children to view them as a leader who had authority to ask questions and to determine who would respond. Philips (1972) summarized the situation as follows:
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... [Warm Springs] Indian children fail to participate verbally in classroom interaction because the social conditions for participation to which they have become accustomed in the Indian community are lacking. The absence of these appropriate social conditions for communicative performances affects the most common and everyday speech acts that occur in the classroom. If the Indian child fails to follow an order or answer a question, it may not be because he doesn’t understand the linguistic structure of the interrogative, but rather because he does not share the non-Indian’s assumption in such contexts that use of these syntactic forms by definition implies an automatic and immediate response from the person to whom they were addressed. For these assumptions are sociolinguistic assumptions that are not shared by the Indians. (p. 392)

Phillips’ study also illustrates that the contexts in which learning occurs and the definition of a “good” learner/student differ across cultures. To be a good student in a classroom, one in which “taking risks” (i.e., guessing when an audience is present) and learning from one’s mistakes are valued, the Warm Springs children would have had to violate the usual ways of learning in their community. The same is true for test taking. As Westby (1990b) pointed out, standardized test administration assumes that the test takers automatically will answer questions asked by an adult in order to display their knowledge. Translating a test into another language or dialect does not address the fact that certain types of assessment are based on discourse conventions and cultural beliefs that are not shared by all cultural groups. Therefore, we must ask ourselves not only whether a client understands the linguistic structure of a question, but also whether the discourse conventions, role relationships, nonverbal communication patterns, and cultural experiences of the client and clinician or teacher are similar (Chamberlain & Medeiros-Landurand, 1991).

Information on patterns of language form and use associated with different ethnic and socioeconomic groups began to be applied clinically in our field in the late 1970s. Initially this information was discussed in terms of the inappropriateness of using tests developed for middle-class White children to assess the language capabilities of children from different ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups. However, the idea that language socialization is an integral part of the enculturation process, and the importance of this for intervention goals and methods, was less widely discussed (Rice, 1986). There is now a growing understanding that professionals’ values, beliefs, and attitudes about all aspects of life, including communication, education, disabilities, and general conduct, may differ greatly from those of the clients they serve. Our clients, their families, and others close to our clients must be involved whenever possible in assessment, decision making, placement, and treatment. In this way, the values and customs of our clients and the people with whom they have close relationships can be considered when the professional makes judgments or recommendations, without basing them primarily on his or her own values. Because language use is entwined with virtually every aspect of culture (Heath, 1984), cultural issues must be considered for all assessment and intervention procedures.

It is a reality of our professions that we will be working with adults and children with backgrounds very different from our own. There will not always be an article, book, or chapter on language use and socialization in the relevant culture, so we need to be equipped with methods to find out about the communicative contexts, expectations, and abilities of the clients, families, and communities we serve. Standard case history forms and interview questions are unlikely to be successful when trying to gather information about a client who is from a background dissimilar to the clinician’s. For example, the Black working-class mothers in Heath’s (1984) study believed that their role in caring for their babies was to know what the child needed and to attend to those needs. The mothers of babies did not interpret the child’s actions and vocalizations as requests or expressions of need because it was the mother’s role to identify the child’s needs. Therefore, questions concerning how a baby indicates wants (with the interviewer seeking to find out if the baby is intentionally pointing, reaching, and/or vocalizing) would not be useful for that particular community.

The ethnographic data gathering and analysis methods used in cross-cultural work on language socialization can be modified and used by clinicians. A number of recent articles describe how to collect and analyze data from participant observations, recordings of naturally occurring events, ethnographic interviews, and collections of artifacts for clinical purposes. For example, Crago and Cole (1991) give an overview of ethnographic methods; Silliman and Wilkinson (1991) describe the use of ethnographic methods in school settings; and Westby (1990a) describes ethnographic interviewing techniques, with examples from family-centered infant and toddler intervention programs. By using these methods, the clinician can gain understanding of the communication patterns that the client is involved in with others (Kovarsky, 1992) and how the client and others view the patterns, given their cultural experiences, expectations, beliefs, and values. Because these methods involve gathering data from naturally occurring contexts and because the communicative abilities, problems, needs, and patterns are identified from the perspectives of those involved, ethnographic methods yield important information for planning intervention.

In addition to the use of ethnographic methods for collecting data with the focus on a particular person (the client), a clinician who is working with people from other cultures will need to learn about the structure of at least some interactions that occur in the community. For example, mealtimes might be chosen by an audiologist as a time for a client to test the usefulness of a new hearing aid, or a speech-language pathologist might suggest that a client who stutters use mealtimes as a generalization step for practicing fluent speech. The underlying assumption being made by the clinician is that at least one other person will be present during mealtime and that conversation will occur during the meal. But not all people eat in groups, and conversation is not universally expected or encouraged at mealtimes. Thus, information from the client and family members or others close to the client is needed to identify times, places, and events in which the client will talk with others. In cases in which clinicians and clients come from fairly similar backgrounds, adaptation of Gallagher’s
(1983) pre-assessment questionnaire and good standard interview techniques (e.g., Haynes & Emerick, 1992) can be used. However, in cases in which the clinician is unfamiliar with the types and structures of speech events in the client’s life, ethnographic methods are more appropriate.

From an intervention perspective, it is possible to bridge across cultural differences by starting with discourse structures familiar to the child, and gradually moving toward discourse typical of school settings. This teaching strategy, however, should be made consciously as part of an overall plan because ad hoc changes can be a disservice to students if they are not prepared to deal with future discourse demands in school and work settings (Iglesias, 1985; Philips, 1972).

Different types of discourse demands and associated cultural assumptions must be considered in the evaluation of a client’s proficiency in learning a second language (Chamberlain & Medeiros-Landurand, 1991). An individual is likely to have sufficient skills in a second language for casual interaction with peers and for communication in many daily situations before being proficient in the complex language use required in school for academic success (Cummins, 1984). Furthermore, if the focus in teaching a second language learner has been primarily on the language code, many children will not have learned the discourse conventions needed for academic success (Iglesias, 1985). Speech-language clinicians should be aware of these issues when attempting to determine whether a language disorder exists or whether the individual is a normally developing second language learner who needs additional help in second language learning.

Information on cultural assumptions about communication and nonverbal aspects of communication in many cultures that will be useful in working with adults can be found in materials on intercultural communication. For example, Edward Hall’s books, including The Silent Language (1973) and The Dance of Life (1983), and introductory textbooks (e.g., Condon & Yousef, 1975) describe many aspects of cross-cultural differences in communication and the resulting misunderstandings that may occur in personal, business, and diplomatic dealings.

Gender differences. In addition to gender differences in use of nonstandard and standard forms, some quantitative differences between men and women in the use of various pragmatic and discourse strategies have been described. For example, Fishman (1983) found that women more often use questions, attention getters (such as, “This is really interesting”), and acknowledgments, and they initiated topics more than men in conversations between three married couples. In contrast, the men used more statements, and a higher proportion of their topic initiations were successful. Fishman argued that the strategies used by the women appeared to be motivated by the responses (or lack of responses) they received. For example, the women’s use of questions may have been motivated by the low success rate of their topic initiations.

In addition to quantitative differences in discourse strategies, men and women may differ in how they interpret the underlying message and motivations in various interactions. Tannen (1990) discusses how misunderstandings between males and females can result from differing assumptions about underlying agenda. She proposes that men typically are socialized to be concerned with achieving and communicating status in hierarchical relationships and that men formulate and interpret verbal interactions from that perspective. In contrast, she suggests that women are socialized to be more focused on establishing close relationships and non-hierarchical connections with others. Tannen argues that these differences in underlying agenda can lead to misunderstandings between men and women. For example, a woman who reminds her husband about a future dinner date might view this as a positive attempt to collaborate with him in scheduling, while the husband might view the reminder as a communication that the wife views herself as more capable of remembering and coordinating appointments.

There are many unanswered questions and controversies about the nature and causes of stylistic and discourse differences between men and women. Nonetheless, gender differences must be considered in clinical work. Our clients should be given opportunities to develop styles of speaking and listening that are appropriate to the roles they wish to play. Individuals, families, and cultures differ in their values and expectations associated with gender. Cultures vary in the types and degrees of differentiation in gender roles and communicative behavior (Chamberlain & Medeiros-Landurand, 1991; Hudson, 1980; Philips, Steele, & Tanz, 1987). In view of this diversity, it is important to learn about the norms for communication in the naturally occurring contexts of our clients’ lives. Presumably role models from our client’s lives will be more valid than the assumptions made and the models provided by the clinician.

Attitudes and Beliefs About Language Varieties

Attitudes and beliefs about language, including beliefs about varieties and styles of speech, play an important role in socialization and the judgment of one’s language system. In the process of socialization, children learn about the attitudes held by the people in their family, community, and society toward specific words, forms, styles, and varieties of languages. This is an aspect of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972).

All people speak at least one dialect or variety, and these varieties are typically equally effective from a linguistic standpoint. In fact, nonstandard dialects are as logical and rule-governed as standard dialects (Labov, 1972a). There are, however, other considerations than linguistic ones. Usually one particular variety is considered the standard variety within a society. For example, Received Pronunciation is commonly referred to as the standard variety of British English, and Standard American English (SAE) is considered the standard variety in the United States. The selection and development of a particular dialect as the standard involves complex social, political, and economic factors (PenaBola, 1981).

People in many cultures, including the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, think of standard forms as the
only "correct" way to speak (Milroy & Milroy, 1991). Non-
standard forms and dialects are commonly regarded not
only as incorrect, but also as being used by poorly edu-
cated, less intelligent speakers. These types of attitudes to-
ward nonstandard forms have been expressed by people
interviewed in a number of studies (e.g., Labov, 1972b;
Patterson, 1993).

Negative attitudes toward nonstandard varieties also are
found in studies using matched guise techniques. In these
studies, judges are asked to rate speakers on personal char-
acteristics, such as intelligence, integrity, and friendliness,
after viewing and hearing tapes of the speakers. There are
at least two samples of each speaker. In one sample the
speaker uses one style of speaking, and in another sample
the speaker uses another style. All other characteristics,
including the content of speech, are held constant. System-
atric differences in how the same speaker is rated, depend-
ing on the speech characteristics used in the recording,
have been found in many studies. Samples of speakers us-
ing nonstandard pronunciations of particular variants, non-
standard varieties such as Black English Vernacular and
Spanish-accented English, and languages of nondonominant
cultures are rated negatively on most traits compared to
ratings of the same speakers using standard pronunciations,
standard dialects, and the language of the dominant cul-
ture. Not only do raters from the dominant culture rate
samples in this way, but raters from nondonominant cultural
groups also give lower scores to the nonstandard, nondon-
imant samples on most traits (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Se-
bastian & Ryan, 1985).

Many questions about the exact nature of attitudes to-
ward nonstandard and standard varieties remain. For exam-
ple, do the ratings reflect beliefs specifically about the lan-
guage variety used in the sample, or do they represent the
rater’s beliefs about the group of speakers associated with
the variety? Given a more open-ended format, would raters
respond more positively to nondonominant, nonstandard var-
ieties? Does the context in which the samples are presented
affect the results? (Oller, 1979; Sebastian & Ryan, 1985).
Nonetheless, the consistent pattern of negative ratings of
nonstandard and nondonominant language varieties is of con-
cern to clinicians.

From a clinical perspective, referrals to clinicians may be
based on the referral source’s beliefs that a certain way of
speaking is inadequate. For example, an arrival of a new
student from another geographic region of the United
States could result in a referral from the teacher to the
speech-language pathologist because of the teacher’s nega-
tive attitudes about the student’s regional dialect. Even if
the student had excellent verbal skills, the dialectal forms
might trigger the teacher’s negative stereotypes about that
dialect and his or her evaluation of the student’s compe-
tence as a communicator and a learner. In such cases the
speech-language pathologist might provide information for
the teachers on normal sociolinguistic variation patterns.

To avoid inappropriate referrals or needless assessments
of speakers with different dialects, several strategies may
be adopted. Identification of communication disorders
among children who speak nonstandard varieties must in-
clude methods of data collection and analysis that differen-
tiate normal nonstandard variant use from error patterns
associated with linguistic disabilities (Damicco, 1991).
Users of the same linguistic variety as the client may iden-
tify variants used by normal speakers, including them-
selves, as incorrect (Labov, 1972b). Therefore, data from
all people who observe a client’s communication must be
obtained in ways that make use of general judgments about
the social appropriateness and effectiveness of a client’s
communication, while avoiding judgments based on views
that nonstandard grammatical forms and pronunciations
and use of slang are "incorrect." As mentioned in an earlier
section, using pragmatic criteria as a basis for referrals and
for identifying problematic uses of language when analyz-
ing language samples is helpful, especially if judgments of
people familiar with the child’s linguistic and cultural back-
ground are used.

Once referrals based on general judgments of communi-
cative difficulties are obtained, it may be possible to iden-
tify the specific language use, form, and content patterns
that are associated with judgments of decreased communi-
cative effectiveness. For example, a recent study compared
the phonological patterns found among African American
preschool children who were judged by African American
teachers from their community as having "trouble speak-
ing" with those they judged to have "no trouble speaking":
(Bleile & Wallach, 1992). This type of procedure may be
used when there is a large and relatively homogeneous
group of clients from a minority culture in order to learn
the patterns that are common among those regarded as nor-
mal speakers and the patterns that are found among
speakers thought to have communication difficulty within a
particular community.

Situations that require work on teacher attitudes regard-
ing nonstandard language usage can be addressed in the
schools through consultation models that can include pro-
vision of information for teachers on language varieties and
normal linguistic variation (Damicco, 1987). Another im-
portant role the speech-language pathologist in the schools
can play is to educate all students about language variation
and linguistic stereotypes (Wolfram, 1993).

An additional approach to working with language variety
differences that may result in negative attitudes is to pro-
vide instruction in the standard variety so that the client
can use it in situations in which the standard is useful, such
as classroom and employment settings. ASHA guidelines
are given for teaching the standard variety to speakers of
other languages and for teaching varieties as an elective
service. The ASHA position statement (Taylor, 1986)
makes it clear that speakers with "accents" and/or limited
proficiency in English and speakers of nonstandard dialects
should not be diagnosed as having a communicative dis-
order if they are proficient in their first language or native
dialect. When working with a normally developing speaker
of a nonstandard variety, the clinician’s role is like that of a
voice coach for actors. The goal of second dialect instruc-
tion is to expand an individual’s repertoire of varieties for
use in different situations. Guidelines for services consis-
tent with this view are given by Campbell (1993).
THE FUNCTIONS OF NONSTANDARD VARIANTS

While the descriptions of language variation between different situations and social groups have dominated a large portion of sociolinguistic work in the past, the applied-linguistic field has other agendas that are typically more interesting than description. Sociolinguistics also attempts to understand why this variation occurs. That is, it attempts to discover the functions served by the variations noted across speaking situations and social groups. While this research still involves areas of debate, the following discussion can give the reader some indication of the current sociolinguistic thinking with regard to the functions that drive linguistic variation.

Style Shifting

When addressing the issue of variation across situations (intraspeaker variation), the question is why people use different pronunciations in casual and formal speech. Labov (1972b) suggested one of the earliest possible reasons. He felt that the use of formal versus casual speech was due to the amount of attention that an individual paid to his or her speaking. According to Labov, people monitor their speech carefully in situations such as formal interviews, but they monitor their speech less when speaking casually. This seemed to account for the greater use of standard forms in formal or “careful” speech than in casual speech, but it did not address why people would ever use nonstandard forms. Assuming that there is a social function for variation patterns, what role do nonstandard variants play? Why don’t people use standard variants all the time?

Audience design and accommodation. A model of stylistic variation that has been influential in recent sociolinguistic work emphasizes the effect of the speaker’s audience on style choices (Bell, 1984). The audience may consist of a single person in a face-to-face conversation or an audience of many people, as in radio broadcasting. The audience also may include those who are not being directly addressed, but who are known to be listening. For example, all the children in a classroom may be part of the audience when a teacher addresses an individual student in a class discussion. In Bell’s model, the addressee usually has the greatest influence on the speaker’s style choices, but auditors and overhears who are not directly addressed also will affect speakers’ choices. Much of the time, speakers adjust their speaking characteristics to make them more similar to the speech of the audience. For example, Bell reports data from a study in which speakers from Norwich, England, were interviewed by Peter Trudgill. Trudgill’s glottalization of /t/ in postvocalic contexts, a common nonstandard variant among British speakers, was closely related to the frequency of /t/ glottalization of the people he was interviewing. Bell also summarized the results from one of his earlier studies, in which he found that Australian broadcasters who worked for more than one station used different styles, depending on the characteristics of the audience they were addressing.

This type of style shift is consistent with accommodation theory from work in social psychology. Intraspeaker variation in the use of standard and nonstandard variants is part of a general tendency for speakers to shift various aspects of their speech to be more like the person they are talking with (Giles & Powesland, 1973). Bell (1984) suggests that certain types of interactions have come to be associated with particular types of speakers in people’s minds. Thus, when lecturing to a university class, a speaker will select a relatively formal style on the belief that university speakers use formal styles.

Accommodating to one’s audience is one type of strategy in style choice. However, patterns different from those of the audience can be used to make a point, a strategy Bell (1984) calls initiative design. For example, using a more formal style than the addressee could be done as part of assuming a role of authority. In an assessment session, a speech-language clinician might shift from use of more standard pronunciations during administration of a standardized test to a more informal style in an attempt to record a conversational language sample in a relatively relaxed atmosphere.

Both accommodation and initiative design may occur within a conversation, as illustrated by analysis of an English travel agent’s conversations with clients (Coupland, 1984). The travel agent’s overall use of local nonstandard variants correlated with each client’s use of the same variants, demonstrating accommodation to the client’s speech. However, within conversations, patterns of shifts between standard and nonstandard local variants were related to the topic. For example, the agent used a sequence of several nonstandard variants in a row when a couple for whom she was making travel arrangements confided that they would leave work early. This sequence was preceded and followed by a pattern of alternation between standard and nonstandard variants when the agent discussed making the actual arrangements for travel with the couple.

Establishing self-identity. Another type of function that nonstandard and standard variants may serve is conveying information about the speaker. Trudgill (1974) suggested that value must be attached to nonstandard forms or they would not be used. He called the value attached to nonstandard forms “covert prestige;” in contrast with the overt prestige typically expressed in people’s positive evaluations of standard variants. Trudgill suggested that nonstandard forms may be associated in people’s minds with attributes such as “toughness.” Nonstandard variants then may be valued and used because they convey attributes such as toughness within the speaker’s community, even though negative attitudes are typically overtly expressed about many nonstandard variants.

In a study of the sociolinguistic variation patterns of adolescents in Reading, England, Cheshire (1978) rated the boys on a scale of “toughness,” using information on their involvement in fights and illegal activities to assign a toughness rating of “0,” “1,” or “2.” She found that the boys’ use of nonstandard forms of have and does were related to their toughness ratings. Tough boys used nonstandard
forms such as, "We does things at school . . ." and "I has to stop in . . ." more than boys who were rated low on the toughness scale.

Several studies of adolescents in the United States have found patterns of pronunciation and use of certain grammatical forms that are associated with group membership. Labov (1972a,b) found that several adolescent gangs in Harlem showed different patterns of use of particular nonstandard forms and that degree of association with a gang was correlated with degree of nonstandard variant use. Similarly, studies of adolescents in two high schools in Illinois and Michigan also have shown that students linguistically signal association with particular peer groups (Eckert, 1991; Habick, 1991). Specifically, adolescents who are heavily involved in school-sponsored activities (termed "jocks" in one study) versus those who reject such activities (the "burnouts"), use different patterns of vowel pronunciations. In both cases, the adolescents are using pronunciations that are moving away from traditional vowel patterns in their geographic areas. In summary, studies of diverse adolescent populations indicate that use of some nonstandard forms can function as signals of personal qualities and peer group associations.

A related function of some nonstandard variants is that they represent ties to the local community. Labov (1972b) found that use of local vowel patterns in Martha's Vineyard correlated with the speakers' intention to remain in the area. Young local people who intended to stay on the island used centralized pronunciations of /ay/ and /aw/ in words such as night and now, while those who intended to leave used vowels more similar to the speech of mainlanders. Milroy (1980) found that use of some local nonstandard variants in working-class communities in Belfast was related to the degree of attachment that speakers had to the local area. People whose friends, family, and place of work, were all within the neighborhood used local variants the most, while those who had more ties outside the neighborhood used the local pronunciations less.

The combined functions of nonstandard and standard variants may signal a speaker's social choices. When standard variants are associated with (higher) status and use of local nonstandard variants are viewed as a sign of solidarity in communities, individuals' patterns of use function as a signal of social values and identity (Milroy, 1980). Individuals who wish to maintain ties to the local community may use relatively more nonstandard local variants than those who wish to participate to a greater extent in life outside the local community.

Multiple social signaling functions. It appears that patterns of variation between standard and nonstandard forms are used for many purposes. Speakers can select variants to signal information about themselves, to accommodate to audience characteristics, and to communicate and create a particular atmosphere or relationship in initiative design. Therefore, patterns of variation will not be completely predictable within any given conversation, lecture, or other speaking situation. Individuals follow broad conventions in style choices, but make adjustments within interactions on the basis of what transpires during their interaction with the audience. That is, speakers make choices about which forms to use in order to communicate information about themselves, their view of the situation in which they are speaking, and their relationship to the addressee or audience as it develops over the course of an interaction (Gumperz, 1982).

For individuals to be flexible communicators, they must have a repertoire of styles and registers available. The challenge to clinicians working with individuals who have difficulty using language appropriately is to foster the development of more than one style, and to present style conventions in such a way as to facilitate flexibility. The ways individuals can use different manners of speaking to convey information about themselves should be taken into account. An adolescent may choose, for example, to use more nonstandard variants than the speech-language clinician would in conversation. If this conveys the identity that the adolescent wishes to project, it is an effective use of sociolinguistic variables.

**Code Selection**

The selection of which language to use among bilingual and multilingual speakers has many similarities to style selection. When speakers have two or more languages in common, the language used is related to the domain, which is a cluster of situational factors, including topic, setting, and the relationship between the speakers (Fishman, 1972). For example, two adult female cousins in the southwestern United States who speak Spanish and English might speak Spanish when talking about their families together in one of their homes. The situation, topic, and role relationships in that context are all consistent with a family domain, which is likely to be associated with using Spanish in the community. In contrast, both women would be more likely to use English when talking about work-related topics with bilingual co-workers in the office. The likelihood of speaking Spanish in the office would increase if one or more factors from the home domain were part of an interaction. For example, the office workers might switch to Spanish when talking about their families during a break.

A special case of functional differentiation of languages is diglossia, which occurs in some societies in which all members are bilingual or speak two distinct varieties of a language (Peñalosa, 1981). The "high" language or variety is uniformly used in more formal contexts (e.g., in literature, education, religious services, the conduct of government business), and the "low" language is used for informal talking, such as conversing with family and friends. All members of the society share these patterns of use, and the low and the high languages both are regarded positively. An example of diglossia is common in Arabic countries, where classical Arabic is the "high" variety, and the colloquial variety of Arabic is the "low" variety (Ferguson, 1972).

**Code switching** is another type of variation between two languages that has similarities to style switching. Often speakers do not use just one language during an interaction; rather, they alternate between two languages in com-
plex and nonrandom patterns. Alternations may occur within sentences, as in the following example from Poplack's (1982) study:

No tienen ni tiempo sometimes for their own kids. (They don't even have time)

Code switching frequently is regarded negatively, and it is referred to in terms that often are viewed as derogatory, such as “Spanglish.” Code switching, however, is a natural and common linguistic phenomenon among bilingual speakers of many languages (Grosjean, 1982; Langdon & Cheng, 1992). The patterns involved in code switching are an example of very complex linguistic abilities. Code switching involves observing the linguistic constraints and knowing when and where it is permissible to switch languages, in addition to knowing the rules of each language. Code switching conveys social and linguistic information that using one language only would not convey within the community (Amastae & Elias-Olivares, 1982).

In contrast with the use of first-language words and phrases by non-proficient speakers to fill in for gaps in a second language, code switching is a complex mechanism for conveying subtle meanings that is used by speakers with high proficiency in both languages (Langdon & Cheng, 1992). For example, among a group of Puerto Rican speakers in the United States, those who were less proficient in English did less code switching than bilingual speakers who were proficient in English and Spanish (Poplack, 1982).

The alternating use of two varieties also has been documented within conversations. For example, a study of Hawaiian children showed that they alternated between grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation typical of Hawaiian English and Standard American English (Purcell, 1984) partly on the basis of topic changes within conversations with peers. For example, all of the children, including those who used fewer features of Hawaiian English overall, used Hawaiian English forms during "stink talk," a Hawaiian English term for negative talk about others in their absence. Purcell used the term code shifting to refer to this type of variation. Viewed in this way, shifts in the use of nonstandard and standard forms within a variety (as with the English travel agent studied by Coupland, 1954), shifts between varieties, such as Hawaiian and Standard American English, and switches between languages are similar. In each case, speakers who share two codes or styles use alternation between the two varieties to convey nuances in meaning and atmosphere.

In clinical contexts, it is important to remember that code switching and shifting are normal sociolinguistic patterns. A proficient bilingual speaker who code switches with other bilingual speakers should be distinguished from a normal second language learner who uses his or her first language when unable to express ideas in the second language. And it is most important to distinguish both normal code switching and normal second language learners’ uses of their first language from individuals who are not proficient in either their first or second language (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

LANGUAGE ISSUES AT THE SOCIETAL LEVEL

The final application of sociolinguistics in speech-language pathology involves the work done on establishing language policies and planning activities at the societal level. There has been little discussion of language policies and institutions at the societal level in speech-language pathology. However, language policies and societal issues of language planning and language education have been studied extensively in sociolinguistics. It is important that speech-language pathologists are aware of these data and of the issues they raise because societal issues affect our professional roles and the lives of the clients we serve (Damicco, 1993). For a brief history of the profession’s views of issues involving minority groups and the social contexts in which ASHA’s policies have developed, see Taylor (1986).

In the United States, language policies concerning educational matters have been established largely on the basis of legal and legislative actions during the 1970s and 1980s (Kretschmer, 1991; Taylor, 1986). Failure to provide instruction in a language understood by the plaintiffs was ruled a violation of civil rights in 1974 in the Lau v. Nichols case. Similarly, failure to take into account language barriers for students who speak Black Vernacular English was ruled a violation of students’ civil rights in the 1978 Ann Arbor case. Placement in special education based on use of inappropriate tests has been ruled discriminatory in several cases. Minority students generally have been overrepresented in special education; however, minority students also have been underrepresented in some special education programs (Kretschmer, 1991; Taylor, 1986).

These legal rulings have influenced educational programs and policies, including language assessment practices. PL 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and its revisions, including PL 99-457, which mandates services for children with special needs who are 3 through 5 years old, require that language assessment be done in the child’s native language whenever possible. The types of bilingual programs that are provided for students also have been influenced by legal actions (Kretschmer, 1991; Taylor, 1986).

Societal attitudes toward bilingualism and minority linguistic groups also affect educational programs and policies (Kretschmer, 1991). For example, Genesee (1987) discusses attitudes toward French-English bilingualism, in which knowing two languages is regarded as an asset with the types of bilingual programs offered in Canada. He contrasts those programs with the emphasis on transitional bilingual programs in the United States, in which moving children into all-English classrooms as soon as possible is the goal. He argues that in the United States, English proficiency is valued, while bilingual proficiency is not a priority. In summary, social, economic, and political contexts affect societal values and attitudes toward bilingualism (Peñalosa, 1981), which in turn influence the development of educational policies and programs.

Societal attitudes and policies also affect the advice professionals give to clients and their families. For example, parents sometimes are advised not to speak their native lan-
guage to their children, even in cases in which the parents have limited proficiency in the second language. In fact, this advice is not supported by current research. There is evidence that proficiency in one language provides a strong basis for second language acquisition (Cummins, 1986; Perozzi, 1985). Misguided advice often is based on the unexamined attitudes that professionals share with members of society. The acquisition of such attitudes is a normal part of the socialization process, but, as specialists in communication disorders, we must be aware of the differences between advice based on our unexamined cultural beliefs and advice based on research on language proficiency and language disorders.

Negative attitudes toward the first language also may influence client and family reports of which language is spoken in the home, even after explanations of the importance of testing in the client’s more proficient language. Decisions about which language(s) to test in, therefore, should be made with caution if there is reason to believe that reports of language use in the home may be affected by societal attitudes toward use of the native language.

Attitudes toward the languages and language varieties an individual speaks have an impact on language learning. There has been a great deal of research on the effects of attitudes in the literature on second language learning. Societal attitudes toward an individual’s first language have been suggested as one source of variation in second language acquisition. Evidence exists that members of at least some nondominant cultures have acquired the dominant culture’s negative attitudes toward their language or language variety (Genesee, 1987; Sebastian & Ryan, 1985). A negative attitude toward one’s first language and culture is one factor that has been suggested to explain the widespread difficulty some cultural groups have had in gaining academic proficiency and proficiency in English (Cummins, 1986).

The individual’s and society’s attitude toward the second language also are related to progress in learning the second language. The degree and type of an individual’s motivation has long been recognized as a factor in second language learning (Damico, 1993). The progress of normal second language learners in one study was related to both their own motivation and to their perceptions of positive societal attitudes toward learning a second language (Genesee, 1987). Overall, positive attitudes toward the second language and toward the first language are associated with greatest proficiency in acquiring a second language and academic skills (Cummins, 1986; Damico, 1993; Genesee, 1987).

If societal attitudes affect the language learning progress of normal second language learners, they are very likely to affect individuals who have language disorders. An individual who is language impaired and who comes from a minority linguistic background is in a particularly difficult position. Such an individual is at risk for negative influences on language learning because of societal attitudes toward linguistic minorities and is at risk for social and emotional difficulties common among individuals with communication disorders (Prizant, Audet, Burke, Hummel, Maher, & Theodore, 1990; Baltaxe & Simmons, 1990).

Caution should be used when assessing the socioemotional status and needs of a client from a minority linguistic or cultural group. The interrelated processes of social, emotional, and communicative development (Wetherby & Prizant, 1990) occur in the context of societal attitudes and beliefs. What one culture judges to be evidence of poor self-esteem may be a characteristic or behavior that is positively regarded in another culture. As is true in our fields, mental health professionals only recently have become aware of how normal cross-cultural variation relates to clinical practices (Neimeyer, 1993). Furthermore, mental health workers are unlikely to be aware of sociolinguistic principles and findings that will be helpful in their work. It would be useful, for example, to know that it is common in many instances for linguistic minorities to negatively evaluate certain aspects of their own communication in accordance with the attitudes of the dominant society. Although this is an unfortunate state of affairs, it is not evidence of pathology when an individual expresses a negative evaluation of his or her own speech and linguistic background.

A final example of broad societal influences on professional practices is the influence of how society judges language variation on the development of language assessment, teaching, and treatment methods. James and Lesley Milroy (1991) discuss the process and by-products of the standardization of English, the process of increasing and maintaining linguistic uniformity. Attempts to standardize a language often are motivated by a desire to minimize misunderstandings and maximize clarity. While this is a positive motivation, the promotion of a standard in the United States and Great Britain has been based largely on prescriptivism, which is the belief that anything other than the standard is wrong. Because the standards that have been developed have been based on formal written language, standards have been misused, misinterpreted, and misrepresented when applied to spoken language.

Judgments of the “correctness” of spoken language are a problem for speakers of all varieties of English; normal speakers’ usage is often inappropriately regarded as “sloppy” or “incorrect” when judged by standards developed with reference to written language. Furthermore, the prescriptive belief that there should be only one standard also has led to the disvaluing of other varieties of English. Finally, standard forms often are promoted as more logical or linguistically superior to other forms. These arguments do not hold up to linguistic analysis, however. This is not surprising because choices of standard variants and varieties are made on the basis of social factors, such as the prestige of people who happen to speak a certain way. New variants will become the standard in the inevitable course of linguistic change, and older standard variants eventually will sound archaic or will become nonstandard. For example, although in is now considered the nonstandard variant of -ing), there is evidence that it was a prestige variant used by upper-class English speakers in earlier years, perhaps until early in this century (Milroy & Milroy, 1991).

The focus on written and formal language in the process of standardization has led to the development of tests and teaching methods that focus on a narrow range of language (Milroy & Milroy, 1991) and the use of an inappropriate set
of standards for evaluating spoken language. Some of the problems with such a narrow view of language have been discussed in this article. Our field has changed and will continue to change as we view normal language and communication disorders from a broader perspective.

CONCLUSIONS

A sociolinguistic perspective in educational and clinical work already has proven useful. We have an even greater need for a sociolinguistic framework as we work with diverse populations in the United States and the world. In the past, variation has been considered something external to language and has been considered a nuisance, or something to be controlled. In contrast, sociolinguistic principles and information are focused on describing and explaining patterns of social variation in language and communicative behavior. A sociolinguistic framework is designed to deal with diversity and change, rather than being predicated on assumptions that language is static and homogeneous. It is therefore invaluable in a clinical field concerned with diversity within and across groups.

In order to deal effectively with variation, we must include consideration of sociocultural factors that are external to the individual (Damico, 1993). The recognition of the importance of sociocultural factors in communication disorders has come about through multiple influences. These influences include the emphasis on the need for socially based definitions of communicative disorders from the beginnings of our fields (Damico, 1993; Gallagher, 1991), research on cultural similarities and differences in communicative behavior, and the recognition of cultural and individual diversity in understandings and perspectives (Neimeyer, 1993). Our clients will benefit from the work in all of these fields as we apply sociolinguistic principles and information to our clinical practice and research.

REFERENCES


