XII. OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

Relatively rigorous theories of language problems have so far been presented within the Prague School and within contemporary sociolinguistics. Neither of these attempts has however succeeded in producing a theory which could be integrated with the framework of the "grammatical" linguistics.*

The model outlined in this chapter not only systematizes a number of so far isolated sections of our knowledge of language problems, but attempts to link this system with grammatical theories of language. As such it offers to contribute to those processes in contemporary linguistics which aim at the unification of so far more or less isolated post-structural varieties of metalinguistic systems into a single general theory of communicative competence.
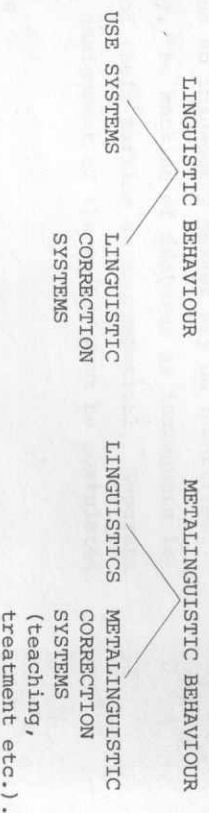
TYPES OF LINGUISTIC AND METALINGUISTIC BEHAVIOUR

Within the realm of linguistic behaviour we can isolate at least two sets of rules: rules of the *use of language*, and *linguistic correction* rules. The former produce communicative acts, while the latter operate on these acts only under particular conditions which will be specified later in this chapter. The correction rules cover a wide range of behaviour including Labov's hypercorrection (*cf*. Labov 1972a), speaker's correction of his lexical selection, repetition, request for clarification, etc. The feature

which characterizes all these types of behaviour is the presence of a "language problem". When no problem is implied the rules of use alone will suffice.[1]

Linguistic behaviour, both use and correction, is paralleled by metalinguistic systems. When a metalinguistic system simply reflects the usage, it is called *linguistics*. When it parallels linguistic correction I shall call it a *metalinguistic correction system* (*cf.* Table 1).

TABLE 1.

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                LINGUISTIC BEHAVIOUR          METALINGUISTIC BEHAVIOUR
                 /          \                   /              \
USE SYSTEMS   LINGUISTIC               LINGUISTICS        METALINGUISTIC
              CORRECTION                                  CORRECTION
              SYSTEMS                                     SYSTEMS
                                                          (teaching,
                                                          treatment etc.).
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Examples of metalinguistic correction systems are language teaching systems or systems of language treatment (e.g. policy, cultivation, planning etc.). The inner boundaries within the field of metalinguistic behaviour are determined by the historical development of the system. Some metalinguistic systems have only one variety which does not differentiate between grammar, school grammar, and treatment. However, more developed systems do split into more or less clearly separate systems of linguistics "proper", language teaching theories (possibly divided into native and foreign), a treatment variety, possibly even a theory of translation, and a system of literary criticism which aims at correction of aesthetically oriented utterances. It seems to me highly probable that in the future all these metalinguistic varieties will merge into a single integrated metalinguistic system.

CORRECTION ACTS

The Inadequacy Marker

It was claimed above that correction rules applied where a language problem was present. It is now necessary to say what a "language problem" is. I wish to suggest that "language problems" can be reformulated as occurrences of the marker "inadequate", which can be attached to certain features of communicative acts or features of communicative systems. It is this marker that under certain conditions switches on the correction rules mentioned above.

Inadequacy and Ungrammaticality

It seems obvious that the two markers, inadequacy and ungrammaticality, are related. There are however cases when grammatical speech acts are marked as inadequate, and cases when ungrammatical acts are not so marked.

The example of the former is the scene quoted by Ervin-Tripp (1969, p.21).

"What's your name, boy?" the policeman asked...

"Dr Poussaint. I'm a physician"...

"What's your first name, boy?"...

"Alvin."

Ervin-Tripp comments on this passage as follows: "The policeman insulted Dr Poussaint three times. First, he employed a social selector for race in addressing him as 'boy'... The officer next treated TLN as a failure to answer his demand... third he repeated the term 'boy'."

There is nothing ungrammatical in this short conversation. Yet several features of the verbal interchange were marked as inadequate by one of the speakers or the other. Evidence about this is provided on the one hand by the course of the dialogue (i.e. request for correction and the correction itself), on the other hand by Dr Poussaint's comment, "As my

heart palpitated, I muttered in profound humiliation".
Obviously, it is in this case the violation of non-grammatical
rules (addressing adult as "boy", white man's superiority
in networks etc.) that has resulted in the inadequacy marking.

It is true that clearly ungrammatical acts will usually be
marked as inadequate but this is not always necessarily so.
For instance, if a foreign speaker well known to the addressee
produces cases of violation of certain accent rules of the
language, this fact, although reportable, can be left totally
unreported and no inadequacy marker may be identified.

Apparently, the marking of features as inadequate is
independent of their marking as ungrammatical. Separate
rules of the assignment of the marker must be postulated.

Marking Rules

What is the precise shape of these rules which assign the
marker to linguistic features of utterances is still difficult
to say. The discussion of some of these rules has been
conducted in linguistics under the topic of "evaluation of
language". Various types of "criteria" have been suggested
but the discussion has not reached the stage of even partial
agreement.

For further enquiry it will be useful to note at least
the following facts:

(1) Not all violations of grammatical (or other communicative)
rules are necessarily marked as inadequate.

(2) Some fully non-deviant acts are marked as inadequate
because of the presence of some features. E.g. the features
"lower class", "non-standard" etc. often belong here.

(3) In some acts the output message is neither deviant nor
contains any particular features marked as inadequate. It
may be, e.g. the special amount of effort needed for production
of the message that may lead to the appearance of the marker.
In the last case a speaker apparently can assign values to

the amount of effort needed for the production of a
communicative act on the basis of comparison with an
"average" message. The question of inadequacy marking is
then identical with the question whether a certain amount
of effort is negatively evaluated or not. This is an
empirical question and must be investigated separately for
each case. I do however believe that such investigations
will lead to a number of useful generalizations.

In cases such as (2) the speaker acquires the marking
rule together with the acquisition of value judgements about
his social system. Again, it is an empirical question which
social features parallelled in communicative acts are negat-
ively evaluated and which are not. I believe that here, too,
we can arrive at useful generalizations. For instance during
the process of modernization all social features connected
with heterogeneity, underdevelopment, inequality etc. are
negatively evaluated, and it can be expected that the
reflexion of these features in communicative acts (and the
underlying systems) will be marked as inadequate. However,
most likely detailed lists, specifying these general principles
for individual acts, will be needed.

As far as acts containing violations of communicative rules
are concerned, the inconvenience resulting from such cases will
again be judged differentially in different societies. It
seems to me that some societies allow for more variation in
this respect than others. In any case, empirical studies of
this problem will be needed.

One additional general principle can be stated here. All
cases of inadequacy marking seem to be "potential". There are
factors which strengthen the appearance of the marker, such as
a situation in which attention is centred on the act
(unfamiliarity of the speaker, metalinguistic situation, e.g.
observation etc.), while other factors work in the opposite
direction (urgency of the situation, familiarity with the

speaker etc.). It will be necessary that further research reveals what are such factors and under what conditions do potentially inadequate acts actually acquire the marker.

It will be clear from the preceding paragraphs that in my opinion it is communicative *acts* that are primarily marked as inadequate. Secondarily, certain features of the *system*, which are supposed to be responsible for the inadequacy of acts, can also be marked. Their marking, however, can only be derived from the marking of communicative acts.

The preceding discussion concentrated mainly on linguistic marking. Metalinguistic marking is usually derived from linguistic marking. This is however not necessarily so, and sometimes we need to *know* what in a treatment system is supposed to be inadequate.

As a general principle I wish to call for empirical studies of inadequacy marking. Too much, so far, has been said on how language *should* be evaluated. Little is known about the actual processes of evaluation in language situations around us.

Correction Rules

When an inadequacy marker is assigned to a communicative act two possibilities are open for the speaker.

(i) First, the marker may be simply decoded as such (attitudinal-affective behaviour), while no other behaviour immediately follows.

(iii) Secondly, the decoding of the marker can be followed by a corrective process.

Both (i) and (iii) are of basic importance for the empirical study of inadequacy marking because they provide evidence about the presence of the marker.

Correction rules can be classified from various points of view.

(a) When does the correction rule apply?

Pre-correction. If a previous occurrence of similar features was marked as inadequate, a corrective device can already be applied before the generation of a string commences. An example of this pre-correction is a case of hesitation of a foreign speaker, or of an inexperienced speaker, to join in a speech situation. The voluntary constraints on communication represent one type of correction rules usual in these situations.

Another corrective device of this type is "careful speech". Some speakers of English who usually employ the Indian variety can switch to the British standard if desired. Labov's hypercorrection is a similar case - a pre-correction which leads to another case of (potential) inadequacy marking.

In-correction. Quite common are cases of successful correction of non-terminal strings for which the speaker cannot supply lexical items, or, on the contrary, lexical items for which a syntagmatic frame is not available. Such strings can be corrected before their completion, without a resulting surface inadequacy. Hesitation may appear, but it is not necessarily marked inadequate in all languages and in all situations.

Post-correction. When a speaker fails to perceive the underlying inadequacy, when he lacks the appropriate correction device, or decides not to correct by pre- or in-correction, the resulting surface string remains uncorrected.

Correction processes applied in such cases of inadequate surface strings may be initiated by the speaker himself - reissuance of the string or further clarification - or by the hearer by a request for reissuance or clarification. Rules which decide whether and how such correction is carried out can be called post-correction rules. There are consider- able differences between languages as to whether a noticed inadequacy is corrected or not. To ask for clarification in Japanese is often rude (and marked as inadequate itself)

while in English it is much more admissible. The speech of children seems to be usually more corrected in the middle class than in the working class etc.

(b) Discourse vs. system inadequacy

Some instances of inadequacy are due simply to the lack of control of the speaker or hearer over a particular *discourse* (act). Correction in this case, such as an instance of a simple mispronunciation by a native speaker, is directed toward the actual discourse, not toward the speaker's system of communicative competence. In this case a simple mechanism will usually suffice. The correction will as a rule immediately follow the occurrence of the inadequacy marker. The means of correction are normally verbal routines.

Correction can however be directed not simply against one particular discourse but against inadequacy of a set of discourses which results from a certain feature of the *system*. The system can be an individual's system, a group system, or the community system as a whole. Especially in the latter case correction is likely to require more complicated mechanisms, does not necessarily immediately follow each occurrence, and implies a larger number of participants. An example of system correction is a language reform, or a course of school education. Both are based on the identification of inadequacy in a set of communicative situations and both aim at pre-correction of future communication in such situations.

LINGUISTIC AND METALINGUISTIC CORRECTION

Components of Correction Acts

Correction processes consist of three components or phases:

(a)   Inadequacy identification
(b)   Action programme
(c)   Implementation

During identification phase the inadequacy marker is identified, then an action programme is selected, and the action is implemented - i.e. correction performed either in a discourse or in the system.

Neither do all correction acts necessarily consist of all of these three phases, nor must they cover the whole phase. Take for example a request for correction which is not honoured: A identifies the inadequacy marker, and communicates this to B, who - supposing that he understands the situation - also passes through the phase (a), but at this stage the act is closed. In acts of language treatment it is rather usual that an act is fully devoted either only to the identification of the marker, or one aspect of the action programme or implementation.

Difference Between Linguistic and Metalinguistic Correction Acts

So far linguistic and metalinguistic correction were discussed as if they were two completely distinct categories. In fact there is a gradual transition from one to the other type of correction and little can be gained by an attempt to impose a clearcut boundary between the two.

What are the features which distinguish a clear case of linguistic correction, such as reissuance of an utterance, from a clear instance of metalinguistic correction, e.g. an act of language planning? In its most typical form, language planning is likely to be a case of system (not discourse) correction, to involve a larger number of participants, and to require a more complicated course of action. Accordingly, each phase of a planning correction act requires:

(a)   A system of conscious non-communicative behaviour, (research toward the identification of inadequacy, thought about the problems and their solution, political and administrative action towards implementation).

(b) A social system within which the behaviour under (a) can be realized (research, discussion, implementation organizations, necessary budgets, instrumentalities etc.), and

(c) A system which enables extensive communication between participants in the correction acts. This system will decide what will be communicated in each phase, and how.

It offers a number of topics which will represent the relevant ideas, specify the form of the messages etc.

These components can also be presented as a five-fold division of

(i)   enquiry (identification, research)

(ii) thought (selection of programme, decision)

(iii) implementation

(iv) social system (for the previous three components),
      and

(v)   the communicative idiom of the system.

If we now ask the question to what extent these five components characterize various correction acts, the acts can be arranged so that typically linguistic correction is on one extreme of the line and typically metalinguistic correction is located on the other. In other words, the five components provide us with a measure of the degree of meta-linguistic-ness of a correction act.

In order to illustrate this let us consider the following examples.

1. Reissuance of a lexical item motivated by the speaker's fear of miscomprehension. All phases of this process are simple, no institutional structure is needed, and there is no communication about the process. This correction act is marked negatively on all the five components (cf. Table 2). 2 This is a clear case of linguistic correction.

TABLE 2

	systematic enquiry	thought	imple-ment. syst.	social idiom	communic.
word-reissuance	–	–	–	–	–
requested reissuance	–	–	(+)	(+)	–
self-teaching	–	–	+	+	–
language reform	?	+	+	+	+

2. Requested reissuance. This case differs from the previous one in the active participation of the hearer in one correction phase. This constitutes a rudimental social system. There is also a rudiment of communication about the correction process. This case clearly possesses a higher degree of meta-linguistic-ness. Notice that this degree can further increase if a discussion concerning the justification of the request (i.e. a rudimental enquiry) ensues, or when before the reissuance the speaker consults a dictionary (thought and communication).

3. Foreign-language self-teaching. This is a case of a system pre-correction. There is usually no elaborate systematic enquiry concerning the extent of the inadequacy caused by lack of the target variety in the learner's system. The action programme requires however systematic thought of which some must be done by the learner (selection of a textbook, deciding about the pace of progress, etc.). The degree of systematicity is however lower than in a well planned intensive course offered by an established institution. Much of the action programme is available and ready in the form of the textbook. The implementation can be more or less systematic. The social system needed for this case is quite complicated, because the personnel involved in the production

of the textbook is quite varied. Communication about the process is limited to the learner's use of the textbook. There is no exchange about the "method" etc. because the learner is the only participant present.

It is not difficult to find less metalinguistic cases of foreign-language acquisition, e.g. in the case of an immigrant who learns his target language with only minimum use of a textbook. On the other hand, some cases of foreign-language teaching are much more metalinguistic than the described example.

4. Language reform. A well planned language reform implies the presence of systematic behaviour in all of the five metalinguistic components. There is (or should be) a detailed enquiry, the course of action is carefully elaborated, implementation is systematic, the number of personnel is high, and there is a considerable amount of communication about the process on all levels.

Again, it is easy to find reforms with less systematic (rigorous) components, and reforms which more closely approximate the ideal.

Correction Systems

Rules of correction applied in related correction acts constitute systems of correction. There are folk systems of correction, and more rigorous ones. A thoroughly modern system of language planning can be viewed as the extreme of the rigorousness scale.[3]

VARIATION IN CORRECTION SYSTEMS

Types of Variation

Similarly to language use, correction is also subject to inter- and intra-community variation. There is variation in rigorousness, variation which reflects different goals, or groups within the community etc.

Developmental Stages

Of special importance is variation which depends on the historical stage of development of the community.

I have suggested earlier in this book, especially in Chapter IX, that within the recent period of history at least three stages must be considered. The Early Modern stage of socioeconomic history corresponds to so-called *macro-modernization* processes, and these in their turn require a *policy* approach to language treatment and the *grammar-translation* variety of foreign language teaching. (In linguistics pre-structural linguistics corresponds to this stage). The Modern stage of socioeconomic development produces so-called *micro-modernization*, paralleled by the *cultivation* variety of language treatment and the *audio-lingual* methods in foreign language teaching. (Structural linguistics corresponds to this stage). The character of the correction processes which correspond to the Contemporary stage of socioeconomic development still awaits clarification. Within the metalinguistic sphere we are witnesses to the development of *language planning*. (Post-structural linguistics is emerging as a replacement of structuralism for this period.) The situation is summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Socioeconomic stage	Linguistic correction variety	Metalinguistic correction variety		Linguistic variety
		Treatment	Teaching	
Early Modern	macro-modernization	policy	grammar-translation	pre-structural
Modern	micro-modernization	cultivation	audio-lingual	structural
Contemporary	rationalization?	planning	cognitive etc?	post-structural

The differences between these varieties should not be conceived as categorical ones. As Jernudd (1973, p.21) has suggested, they should be expressed by a matrix, which would show the degree of deviation of each case from the central (ideal) cases.

NOTES

*   The text of this chapter is identical with Neustupný 1973c. The paper, prepared for the 1974 Toronto World Congress of Sociology, has never been printed before; it was, however, widely circulated and orally presented in October 1973 at the University of Pennsylvania.

1. In this paragraph all terms are presented as if absolutely distinct from all others. This however is not the case. The oppositions between the terms are a matter of degree.

Consider, for instance, an historical process of a "therapeutic" change through which two homophones are differentiated. At the onset of the process the pair of homophones constituted a "language problem" and their differentiation fulfilled the role of a correction rule. However, with the repetition of the process the correction rule was automized and finally replaced the original generative rule. My argument is that somewhere in the middle of the process we might be unable to say whether the rule was still corrective or already generative.

2. The assumption that all values in the matrix can be reduced to either + or − is only a heuristic one. This method for investigation of transition between two vague categories was first developed in Neustupný 1961a. For later precision see especially Chapter II of this book.

3. Notice that when we discuss questions such as rigorousness of language treatment systems, public views on language treatment etc., we are departing from the study of

correction and entering the field of "correction of correction" studies. I am not prepared for making any further suggestions in this field.

POST-STRUCTURAL APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE

Language Theory in a Japanese Context

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