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FOLK STEREOTYPES AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Blason populaire in the San Francisco Bay Area

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In recent years, only few linguists have tapped the rich resources of folklore. Doing so, it appears, would have soiled the purity of the linguistic approach. In my view, however, linguistics is in need of a re-definition of its field in broader, holistic terms. Re-definition is the appropriate word here. After all, a broad holistic conception of linguistics is not something new; it has simply been out of fashion. Up to the first part of our century, a holistic approach to language studies could be taken for granted. A unified perspective on linguistics, anthropology, and folklore was present in Herder's work and - in the USA - still in that of Sapir. It was only after the split of linguistics and anthropology - for which in the USA Bloomfield mostly has to take the blame - that linguistics seemed less and less interested in the socio-cultural roots of language. The "assertion and pursuit of disciplinary autonomy on the part of linguistics", Baumann says (1977:15), contributed to the undoing of the integrated approach in modern times.

One important conceptual framework for the attempt to bring about a re-definition of linguistics, anthropology, and folklore is the ethnography of speaking or ethnography of communication. Sherzer (1977:44) defines the ethnography of speaking as "a description in cultural terms of the patterned uses of language and speech in a particular group, institution, community, or society". Such patterned uses of language that are connected to groups, institutions, or communities can be considered language varieties. They certainly fall under the heading of what I call typolects. When speaking of language varieties, i.e., I do not have in mind examples of linguistic variation found within the speech even of one person or detectable if the speech behavior of two or more persons in the same setting are compared. I am here not concerned with

variation in language on the level of the individual and idiolectal, but on the level of the supra-individual, the typical; with language that is group or situation or community specific, in short, with typolects. Terminologically, then, 'typolect' is intended to express that a variety is not simply the language of a certain individual, but that typical of a group, a situation, an institution, a place at a given point of time. A Black inhabitant of the San Francisco Bay Area, e.g., does not represent Black English by himself; however, he most probably participates in the variety called Black English. Typolects are characterized by what, through common agreement, is viewed as representative; by features, rules, patterns that are characteristically observed by the average speaker of the variety in question. (cp. Dürmüller, forthcoming). For examples of typolects I turn to varieties of English in the San Francisco Bay Area (SFBA), ca. 1980.

From the viewpoint of demographic statistics there seems to be ample evidence suggesting a stratification of the English language in the SFBA according to social factors, especially ethnicity. According to the International Encyclopedia of Social Science (1968), an ethnic group is "a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own. The members of such a group are, or feel themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race, or nationality, or culture". This is a definition loose enough to accommodate not only such obviously ethnic varieties like Black English, Chicano English, Chinese English, Japanese English, etc., but also 'Mellowspeak', the variety favored by many Whites in California and even 'Fraternity Talk' and 'Gaytalk', although it may be safer to simply call these latter three 'social varieties' or 'group varieties'. Groups are separated by boundaries which help to emphasize the cultures within these boundaries. In terms of language as an emblem of ethnicity, such boundaries clearly separate one language variety from another. Within the larger social system of the SFBA, the English language is the vehicle of communication used by all the ethnic groups, both for intergroup and intragroup communication (cp. more generally Fishman, Cooper and Conrad, 1977). Although, in some cases, a group may have its own

different language (e.g. Spanish, Cantonese, Tagalog), all the groups have created their own varieties of English. The point here is that even without taking into consideration the original mother-tongue of, say, the Chinese, the Fillipinos, or the Chicanos, ethnicity is mirrored in language: in the English language, i.e., which is the language shared by all the groups, though differentiated by each according to cultural heritage and folklore, according to favored topics and techniques of narration and conversation, according to the conceptualization of the world in vocabularies and semantic fields, and according to pronunciation habits often acquired through interference phenomena. Since there is a variety of English used by all the groups and taught to all of them in school (Standard Textbook English), communication between the ethnically different population groups in the SFBA is not impossible. However, the curse of Babel - to refer to this illustrative myth - would certainly have had drastic effects upon communication between the many immigrant groups if they had not all accepted English as their lingua franca. There are still many members of ethnic groups - especially among the Chinese and Mexicans - who stick to their original mother-tongue; other speakers have had less reservations about taking up English as their second language and handing it down to their children as their first language. But even where the original mother-tongues have lost ground, differences between the various group-specific varieties persist. These differences can be traced on the various levels of language organization: in phonology, including suprasegmentals, morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicon, text structures and text types, discourse conventions. On the surface, the points of difference may seem insignificant at times, in their totality, however, they are bound to be of some consequence. Recent work by John Gumperz and his collaborators (1978, 1979) has shown that miscommunication between speakers of English from different cultural or ethnic origins are very frequent. In England, e.g., speakers of English English and speakers of Indian English were found to lack understanding for each other's way of using English. Both groups needed help in the form of hints as to how to decode each other's speech. If speakers in the interaction are using different strategies and signals from each other to con-

vey attitude and meaning, wrong inferences are likely to be drawn. Over a period of time, these tend to build up into stereotyped attitudes and help to produce the folklore of blason populaire. One should not be surprised therefore to hear members of different ethnic and social groups in the SFBA passing negative or prejudiced judgments on each other. The fact that there are so many examples of blason populaire in the folklore of the SFBA suggests that misunderstandings of the kind reported by Gumperz under the heading of 'crosstalk' are probably quite common.

However, folklore materials do not only underline the existence of crosstalk between members of ethnically and socially distinct groups speaking different varieties of English, folklore materials, such as blason populaire, can also be used in the process of identifying language varieties in the first place. The folk are aware of their own and especially of others' way of speaking. In the SFBA, they are aware of some Whites talking in a particular, funny way (Mellowspeak), of Black English being different from Chicano English, of Asian English being different again from Black English, of the Berkeley Fraternities and the San Francisco Gay community employing vocabularies of their own, etc. Such a folk classification of English language varieties in terms of ethnic and social groups makes much more sense than a conservative dialectological classification of language varieties in regional terms. Although speakers of Mellowspeak predominate in Marin County (North West), and speakers of Chicano English in Santa Clara County (South), there is no point in distinguishing South Bay English from North Bay English or West Bay English (Peninsula: San Francisco and San Mateo Counties) from East Bay English (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties). In most localities there are representatives of various social and ethnic groups and the speech repertoires of the communities are multivarietal. Instead of using a system of arbitrary regional classification, then, social dialectologists are better advised to follow the hints of folklore when attempting an identification and classification of the English language varieties in the SFBA.

Folklore materials may represent a group's image of itself as well as the representation of that image by members of other groups. Social and ethnic groups have

traditional rivals and scapegoats for which the folklore acts as a unifying force by means of identifying the group and as a divisive force by means of molding or confirming a group's attitude toward another group. The genre of folklore most useful for this purpose is blason populaire, a genre comprising ethnic slurs, prejudiced attitudes and stereotype judgements (Dundes 1975). Examples of blason populaire can be used to illustrate the existence of boundaries between groups as well as to identify solidarity within groups. Jansen (1965) distinguishes between the esoteric and the exoteric factor in folklore: 'esoteric' referring to what a group thinks of itself and what it imagines others to think of it; 'exoteric' referring to what a group thinks of another group and to what it imagines another group thinks it is saying about this other group. The stereotypes can be inwardly directed to establish strong in-group identification or they can be outwardly directed for the purpose of drawing attention to or depicting the characteristics of other groups (1965:47).

When dealing with stereotypes of the kind represented by blason populaire, the question arises to what extent these can be taken to reveal something generally valuable. Since I claim that examples of blason populaire can be used to identify language varieties of social or ethnic groups, I obviously think that folklore stereotypes are of some value. Looking back on the definitions of stereotypes in America, I find support for my view already in Walter Lippmann's classical account (1922). Lippmann characterized stereotypes as (1) means of organizing images, (2) fixed, simplex impressions, and (3) salient features chosen to stand for the whole. I am concerned mainly with the third point, the selection by the folk of a few salient features exhibited by another group, these features summing up in a short-hand way its characteristics in various areas, including language. (Lippmann also noted that such stereotypes are convenient, time-saving, and necessary; for without them man would have to interpret each situation as if he had never experienced any of that kind previously).

A study more closely concerned with stereotypes and language is that by Ogawa (1969). Ogawa deals with stereotypes in small-group communication. He shows how Caucasian UCLA students expect Japanese Americans to behave in discussions, and - this is the result I want

to emphasize - that these stereotyped expectations are indeed represented in actual communicative behavior, i.e. the Japanese Americans indeed behaved as the stereotypes predicted they would. Equally, in my own research on examples of blason populaire and their relevance to social and ethnic varieties of English in the SFBA, I came to conclude that the materials stored in the Berkeley Folklore Archives (Folklore Program, University of California at Berkeley) do not only document the awareness of the folk that other social and ethnic groups are different from the one they themselves belong to and that the kind of English used by the members of these groups may differ from their own, but also that the points singled out by the folk turn up in linguistic accounts of the varieties in question as well.

My first example is Berkeley Fraternity Talk. It illustrates the case where the data about a language variety have been extracted almost exclusively from folklore records. Folklore has provided the social dialectologist with the material necessary for the description of a variety when other sources were not available. In blason populaire the members of the Berkeley fraternities and sororities are known as freddies and sallies respectively. The genre as a whole reflects the fact that non-fraternity students view the Greek system as mainly dedicated to partying and strange outlandish customs. The freddies are seen as conceited, rich, boisterous, sex-, drink-, and generally fad-addicted; the sallies as snobbish, rich, fashion-conscious, proper and prim. Blason populaire parodies and ridicules fraternity lifestyle in house-name imitations like these: Grabba Thigh, Wanna Mastur Beta, Ata Bit a Pie, Un Kappa Keg.

While the main information about Berkeley Fraternity Talk comes from folklore materials other than blason populaire - folk speech, rhymes, songs, games, etc. - the following ethnic varieties of English in the SFBA are also described - to some extent - in blason populaire. Examples both of esoteric and exoteric forms of blason populaire help to outline the demarcation line between, say, the Black ethnic group and other ethnic groups. It would be wrong to assume that boundaries exist only between the white and the black community; esoteric examples of folklore illustrate that Blacks capitalize on their being ethnically different from all the other ethnic groups, Whites, Chicanos,

Chinese, or whatever. Equally, it is not only the white community, but also the Chicanos, the Chinese, the Japanese, etc. that use ethnic slurs directed against the Blacks. The stereotypes, however, tend to be the same in the blason populaire folklore of all the non-Black groups. (The same point can be made about any other group; for a black perspective, see Folb 1980: 54 ff.). Anti-Black blason populaire deals with skin color (Blackness being associated with ugliness, dirt, baseness, evil, sin, hell), body size, sexual licentiousness; with animal-like behavior, lack of civilization and education; poverty, crime and agitation. Where so many points are singled out for blason populaire it is not surprising that language, too, is included in the catalog. Witness this joke (recorded in Oakland):

Rastas and Mandy had been married for a little while, and one day they were just sitt'n out on the porch talk'n, and Mandy says, "Rastas, when we all goin to Florida?" Rastas looks at her funny and replies, "Goin to Florida? Who says we goin to Florida?" Mandy says, "Why, you did, honey. You said when we got married, you was gonna take me to Florida". Rastas shakin his head says, "No, Mandy, I never said notin like that. I say dat after wes get married, I was gonna tampa wi' you".

This is an example of exoteric blason populaire. The non-Black folk usually tell the joke with what they think is a typically Black accent. Thus, and by observing other characteristics of Black English, the linguistic pun on "Tampa/tamper" is prepared for by the pointing out of other features, such as

Absence of postvocalic [r]
 Replacement of dental fricatives by stops
 Dropping of final consonants
 Denazalization of [ŋ] > [n] in word-end position
gonna
was conditional
 contamination of we with us
 unmarked past tense with say
 copula deletion
get - passive
 double negation
 Question without inverted word order

All these characteristics of Black English are illustrated in this short example of blason populaire. Other genres of folklore point out that area of language which is often missed in narrow linguistic accounts: the linguistic tradition of Black English which centers on oral-aural skills rather than on reading and writing. Folklorists more often than linguists have identified the narrative forms exploiting these qualities: tales, proverbs, playing the dozens, toasts, signifying, rhymes. If we turn to Chicano English, it appears that the linguistic characterization of this variety of English is less distinctive than that of Black speech. Judging from documented folklore material alone, it appears that the folk are better informed about the peculiarities of Black English than about those of Chicano English. Non-Blacks are able to list linguistic items of Black speech to a degree not reached when non-Chicanos imitate Chicano English. Given the wealth of folklore material about Chicanos, this may, at first sight, be surprising. Blason populaire is directed at Chicanos just as much as against Blacks. The following are terms used by non-Chicanos to refer to Mexican-Americans: pepperbelly, beaner, taco, tortilla; greaser; wetback; Manuel Labor. Reference here is made to Mexican food, greasy hair, and employment. Wetback is understood both as referring to the frequent sweating of Chicanos due to work and to their having reached the U.S.A. illegally by swimming through the Rio Grande. All the terms, including the punning Manuel Labor, view the Chicanos as bums and hoodlums. In spite of all these - and many more, and worse - ethnic slurs, Chicano English itself is rarely singled out for blason populaire. There are stories like this one:

Riding on the trail with sidekick Pancho, Billy could smell this terrible odor. "Hey, Pancho, did you poo in your pants?" "No", said Pancho, "I no poo in my panz".

They rode on a little further and Billy could still smell this shit. "Hey, Pancho, are you sure you no doo doo in your pants?" "I smell something awful".

"No, Billy, I no poo in my panz".

Well, Billy really got perturbed. Come on, Pancho, are you really sure you no poo in your pants?"

"No, Billy, I no poo in my panz".

Well, Billy told Pancho to get off his horse and pull down his pants. Of course, these two turds fell out of his pants.

"Pancho, I thought you said you no doo doo in your pants". "Oh, Billy, I think you mean today !"
(Berkeley)

The language used by Chicanos is represented as primitive; doo doo and poo emphasize the infantile ring of the passage. Pancho, the Chicano, leaves out the verb in his sentences ("I no poo in my panz".), a feature which is echoed, for purposes of further ridicule, by his companion, Bill. The only feature that can be considered relevant, with regard to a description of Chicano English is the absence of tense marking ("I think you mean today,"), while the simplification and voicing of [ts] > [z] may be typical of other English vernaculars as well. The example illustrates, however, that it is pronunciation which is most reliably noticed by the folk. Witness this riddle-joke:

What is a pee-cup ?

It is what a Chicano drives to work every day.
(San Francisco)

In this item of blason populaire, the tensing of [I] in closed syllables characteristic of Chicano English makes for a new reading of 'pickup'. The fact that the folk rarely include other linguistic points in their catalog of observations about Chicano English does not contradict my claim that folklore materials point out what is typical about language varieties. According to Metcalf (1972, 1974), it is precisely in the areas of phonology and suprasegmentals that the characteristics of Chicano English appear most distinctively.

In the case of the varieties of Asian English, it is especially the incapability of the Asian Americans to distinguish between [r] and [l] in the pronunciation of English words, which is ridiculed by the folk. Jokes like the following have as their butt the Chinese, the Japanese, or the Korean:

A Chinese lady walks into the optometrist's and complains about eye trouble. The optometrist gives her an examination. After the examination,

the optometrist says, "Well, lady, I'm sorry to say that you have a cataract [kə'dərək]. She says, "I do not, I have a Rincoln Continental".
(Berkeley)

A jovial Japanese man was standing on a corner in San Francisco on a particularly chilly day. An elderly, though staunch appearing Caucasian lady approached him and they stood together at the corner waiting for the light to change. The Japanese man, wishing to be friendly, made a cheerful comment on the weather: "Bely, bely cold today, yes ?". The woman replied indignantly, "Well, your belly wouldn't be so cold if you'd tuck your shirt in !"
(Berkeley)

In the case of the Chinese, blason populaire also records a certain fascination exerted by Chinese names. This is documented in the well-known Chinky Chinky Chinaman and Ching Chong Chinaman rhymes and in riddle-jokes like these:

Why don't the Chinese use telephone books ?
There's too many Wing Wongs and they might
wing the wong number.
(Inglewood)

How do the Chinese name their babies ?
They throw a bunch of silverware in the air
and the noise it makes as it hits the floor
are the names for the babies.
(Los Angeles, Berkeley)

How Long is a Chinese ?!
(Berkeley)

This last example can be used to illustrate the fact that speakers of Cantonese English experience difficulties in grasping the particulars of English intonation patterns such as used in questions. The sentence How Long is a Chinese is disambiguated only if accompanied by the correct intonation pattern; since Chinese is a tone language, speakers of Chinese English find it hard to attend to the patterns of sentence intonation characteristic of English.

My last two examples of blason populaire are directed at Italian English:

One day an Italian man came into a bank to take out a loan. The teller told him to see the loan arranger. The Italian replied, "I donna wanna seea noa cowboy, I wanna makka loan".
(Berkeley)

One day a poor Italian who was living in the United States bought a ticket to the state lottery. As luck would have it, he won the first prize of 1,000,000 dollars. Since he and his wife and children were living in a very small apartment, he decided the first thing he would do would be to have a large house built for his family. After discussing it with the man, the architect and the contractor went to work. They were confused by one final instruction, but felt they had the right solution. At the unveiling of the house to the man, he was quite pleased until he got to the top of the long stairway to the second floor. In front of him was a statue of the Blessed Virgin. Furious he turned to the contractor to find out what it was doing there. "You asked for a statue with a halo, didn't you?". "No, no, you know. It rings. You go over and pick it up and say, 'halo, 'statyu ?'"
(Berkeley, Daly City)

It is not only the stereotypes about interference phenomena that are pointed out in these two examples, but, more important, the possibilities for misunderstandings and communication breakdowns between speakers of different varieties of English, a point also made in the sociolinguistic research referred to above.

It is usually isolation due to different geographical and cultural origins, to differences in apparent behavior, countenance and customs, to differences in occupation, education, age, and social status, and, finally, to speaking the language in a somewhat marked way, that causes the creation of group stereotypes and ethnic slurs. If language is addressed in blason populaire, it is perceived not simply as one of the cultural emblems marking off a group, but as the one emblem that can also include and express all the other emblems, like clothing, manners, diets, beliefs, myths, etc.

Blason populaire can identify the cultural background and the characteristics of the kind of language typically used by the speakers in a certain group; it can point out the existence of what I call 'typolects'. Folklore as a whole can establish the link between language and its function in different communities. "The ways in which language and folklore differ in function from one community to another are the most revealing", is what Hymes (1972:44) says on the subject. Folklore, in general, may point to "the amount, frequency, and kinds of speech that are typical; the valuation of speech with respect to other modes of communication; and the valuation of different languages and ways of speaking". (1972:44). Blason populaire, in particular, can reveal how ethnic and other social language varieties are valued and which of their features appear as the most salient ones. Since folklore is concerned above all with speech genres, speech acts, and phraseology, its comprehension of language is quite holistic. That is why I can easily agree with Hymes on the point that folklore can "direct attention to essential features of language that are now neglected or misconceived in linguistic theory". (Hymes 1972:47). Any (socio)linguist with a holistic orientation is well advised to include the Folklore Archives among his sources of information. Descriptions of language varieties like Black English, Chicano English, or Chinese English, etc., remain incomplete without proper consideration of the genres of folklore in which cultural background is revealed so well. Where differences between language varieties are to be listed, it is insufficient to account only for what can be placed within the conventional narrow scope of linguistics: particulars of phonology, morphology, syntax, and certain aspects of semantics. A different notion of the scope of linguistics is required, one that can also accommodate variation in contextual and cultural frames. Folklore would again be understood as a storehouse for such broader linguistic information and appreciated as such as in Herder's days.

Note:

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