

Social Networks

Language in a Black Community
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Black people in Britain

- post-war period in GB marked by rapid migration from New Commonwealth
- especially after the restriction in 1950's to entering the U.S.
- immigrants mostly had low paid work
- frustration because of hostility of white people and unfulfilled expectations
- especially in the 1970's high unemployment rate among Blacks

‘Inglan is a Bitch’ by Linton Kwesi Johnson

well mi dhu day wok an mi dhu night wok
mi dhu clean wok an' mi dhu dutty wok
dem seh dat black man is very lazy
but if y'u si how mi wok y'u woulda sey mi crazy

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
y'u better face up to it

(...)

Education

- problems because the schools were not prepared to take new pupils with special needs
 - > “seriously over-represented in schools for educationally sub-normal” (p. 15)
- officially pupils had temporary problems of adjustment and language

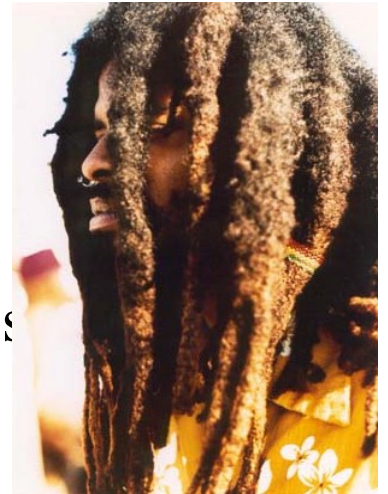
Black youth culture:

- dissatisfaction with white mainstream society; therefore orientation towards an all-black life-style: e.g. Reggae

Two examples of subgroups: 1. Rastafariansim 2. Pentecostal Church

Rastafariansim

- Ras Tafari (Ethiopian Emperor, who claimed that Africa is the origin of human kind and encouraged blacks to return to Africa)
- a movement in Jamaica (since 1930s); it rejected the white colonial system and wanted to remodel the social order
- beliefs: cultural independence, no racial separation
- created distinct physical traits: dreadlocks, colourful clothes



language: "... the young people who take pride in 'talking black' are those who have chosen a life style associated with black youth culture which revolves around reggae and other specifically black forms of music and dance... . Patois usage is ... seen as a conscious assertion of black identity and a reflection of hostility towards mainstream white society." (Edwards: 124)

Remodeled West Indian Pentecostal church with African framework in GB

West Indian Pentecostal tradition contrasts with the "reserved" services in GB

- Language (ethnic markers in speech): preaching, testimony, prayer, call-and-response, preverbal expression, exaggerated language, image making and metaphor, tonal sound effects)
 - Church also organized programmes for self-help
- powerful social group (Edwards: 18-20)

Sociolinguistic framework

Labov

- one of the first to take into account social characteristics
- speech data correlates with background variables:
sex, education, social class

LePage

- added observations on the socio-linguistic motivation of speakers in language choice
- language used to identify with a special group

Vernacular language loyalty and social network

Milroy and Margrain

"stresses social solidarity and normative influence of the group on the language of its members" (Edwards: 43)

- local community marked by usage of vernacular speech norm
- network is dense
- individuals act with each other in more than one capacity → multiplexity
 - multiplexity: rural areas (e.g. dialect, closed network)
 - uniplexity: urban areas (standard language, open network)
- integration into multiplex community by adopting norms and values of the "local" team

Example: Miners

1. same job
2. live in the same area
3. spend free time together

This network structure is universal because based on the economy.

"the maintenance of strong solidarity relationships is necessary for survival" (Milroy and Margrain: 69)

Research on the use of Patois

Location: shared characteristics = place of birth, residence, parents' islands of origin

Age: 16-23 (Labov started to look at social motivation - young males used more dialect)

Sex: 21 young women and 24 men, single-sex conversations were used to avoid too much variation

Social networks: degree of group membership, two kinds of relationships:

1. open , individuals related to one another in one capacity, uniplex
2. closed, individuals interact more often- multiplex

Employment: indicator of social network

Education: educational aspirations high but over-represented in low-streams

Acquiescence- criticalness : response to racial inequality

Pentecostal Christians and Rastafarians (markers: outer appearance)

“Insider” vs. “Outsider” Approaches

- collect data in authentic situations very difficult because researcher (outsider) would influence spontaneous speech style
- researchers needed to participate in community life become “insider”
- but racial identity is not sufficient
- young people largely use Patois in in-group conversations

- white researcher, two inside researchers (blacks)
- group of 3-4 participants
- recorders not hidden
- 1. taping with white researcher: formal situation
 2. taping with black researcher: formal but more use of Patois
 3. left alone with questionnaire: frequent use of patois
- certain questions provoked Patois: treatment of black people by the police (p. 75)
- after questionnaire was finished, the situation was more relaxed :
Patois was used more frequently

Analysis of data

- correlation between social variables and language use
- situations that influenced language behaviour during the research:
 1. formal interview with white researcher
 2. formal interview with black researcher
 3. informal racially mixed conversation
 4. informal peer group conversation
 5. informal conversation with black researcher

- low index score= use of Patois
 - high index score= use of English
 - mainly high use of English in situation 1 and low index in situations 4 and 5
 - majority of participants tended to see the white formal interview as the most “English” situation
 - background variables :
 - negative view of white mainstream = high use of Patois
- “... the more critical the speaker's attitude towards white society, the greater the likelihood of a high proportion of Patois features in their speech.”(Edwards: pp. 83 f)

Social network

- degree of integration is a matter of choice; on other occasions it is a function of circumstances (p. 85)
- social relations exert normative force over behaviour

Example:

- the group that talked Patois the most were included Tommy, Don, Paddy

DON: Unless hard time hit him.

TOMMY: Talk Patois, man, you sound daft, “unless hard time lick him”.

DON: Di man can' t understand we - he can't understand we.“

-> close -knit social group exert normativ influence

“Competence” and “performance” (Chomsky)

- competence: users have knowledge of their language (ability in general)
- performance: the use of language in given situations

Teddy:

“When I'm at home I speak Patois, but when I 'm at work I automatically go back to English...but if it get too much for me, me just cut down to Patois.”

Darleen:

“Sometimes when I speak to a Rasta guy I cannot speak Patois because I feel I 'm going to slip and feel stupid. If a chap says to me ‘You a go burn fire, mi a go deal you a this, dat’ (...) I 'm thinking ‘What's he saying?’”

Scotton (1980) : linguistic choices are individually motivated negotiations of identity

1. Hypothesis: chose English and reject the inferior status associated with Patois
2. Hypothesis: solidarity-motif
3. Hypothesis: use of Patois reflects intimacy

Patois used by whites

“I heard him talk Patois and he talks it ever so good.”

“With this guy I know I could throw any thing at him and he'd understand....I didn't have to change down for him.”

“Some of the English people are trying to speak Patois and I hate that. It's nothing to do with them. Patois doesn't come naturally to them, so they should stick to their own language and stop talking ours.”

Video: 02.07.2009

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZnYa7u6WxQ&feature=fvst

Bibliography:

Edwards, Viv (1986) *Language in a Black Community*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Milroy, Lesley and Sue Margrain. "Vernacular Language Loyalty and social network," *Language in Society* 9 (1980), pp. 43-69.