Andrew J. Taylor

A NOTE ON THE STUDY OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO PAPUA-NEW GUINEA

Introduction

In recent years increased attention has been given by linguists, anthropologists, and others to studies classified under such headings as sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and language and culture. The use of the term 'sociolinguistics' in this paper is arbitrary, and does not reflect a deep-seated theoretical preference over all the other terms. Some idea of the scope of the field can be gained from Language in Culture and Society, edited by D. Hymes,[1] which includes readings on the differences and similarities among languages used by greatly differing societies and cultures, and on types of speech variation within one society such as methods of address, baby talk, literary forms and social dialects.[2]

Ethnography of Communication

An important recent article from the theoretical point of view is Hymes' Introduction to The Ethnography of Communication[3] where he uses the term 'ethnography of communication' for "studies ethnographic in basis, and of communication in scope and kind of patterned complexity with which they deal."[4] Some of the ideas with which he and others are currently occupied are worth mentioning here. In Hymes' view "it is not linguistics but ethnography - not language, but communication - which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be described." The linguistic code,

i.e. the language itself, is only one of the several "components of communicative events,"[6] the others being the participants, e.g. sender and receiver; the channel, e.g. speaking, writing; the setting; the message form; the topic; and the events themselves. All these must be identified in an adequate, ethnographic way. As Kaldor puts it: concerning speech events, we seek to answer the question "what is said by whom to whom in what situation in what language through what channel and in what style "

Since not all the combinations of these components are possible in a particular event, nor in a community, study of the relations among these components is required.[8]

Hymes also refers to the capacity and state of the components, and notes that not all senders of messages, for example, have the same capacity or are in the same state.[9]

The Need for Sociolinguistic Research in Papua-New Guinea

Most linguistic research in Papua-New Guinea at present involves the description of previously unrecorded codes and the grouping together of related codes. A quick glance at Publications of the Linguistic Circle of Canberra and at the journal Oceanic Linguistics will show this. (It is true that even in code studies dialect variation, loanwards, polite forms and the like are noted but they tend to be treated as exceptions or remain as uncoordinated scraps of information, rather than systematized by being related to the various components of communicative events). The present situation is understandable but the field of sociolinguistics should not be left until last.

Certain aspects of sociolinguistics must be of

immediate concern to, for example, administrators and educators. On a Territory-wide basis there is the question of national and official languages. Much has been said and written about this but only in a few instances has an attempt been made, as by Dr.S.A. Wurm,[10] to deal with the problem in an orderly and comprehensive manner. Again, while formal education is essentially in English, some missions have a programme of vernacular education, especially for adults, while most engage in some form of translation activity such as of the Bible, catechisms, and hymns. They face decisions not only about which languages to do such work in, but also about which dialect to prefer, a choice to be based on social as well as purely linguistic factors. Thus the dialect with the greatest number of speakers may not have the prestige of the dialect spoken around the patrol post or mission station. When an orthography is being constructed, attention must be paid to the speakers' attitudes to other languages which already have an orthography: English, Pidgin, or perhaps another vernacular.

Three Sociolinguistic Studies

Some studies incorporating sociolinguistic material need to be mentioned here. Only one of them has been published; two others are still in progress, but contain topics which others may wish to investigate in other places. The Rev. H.A. Brown[11] has made "an attempt to present Toaripi in its social setting". This typescript includes material on the use of Toaripi by both village and town dwellers, the place of speech in certain aspects of Toaripi culture:

entertainment, social discord, and social manners; the effects on Toaripi of social change from Motu and English speakers, and the use of literacy skills.

R.F. Salisbury[12] has given an account of bilingualism and linguistic change in a Siane village. Among others, he reports on the number of bilingual men, the approximate frequency of their use of the second language (another vernacular), and of the languages of their parents. Such statistics are in very short supply even today. Salisbury pays particular attention to the use of bilingualism, and to the change in the degree of bilingualism in the village over a period of 8 years.

Mr. T. Dutton of the Australian National University has recently noted[13] that among the Koita and Grass Koiari villages can be found with two, and sometimes three linguistic strata, one corresponding to each generation. These strata show differing degrees of the influence of Motu, Police Motu, and English, the young knowing the language of their grandparents only poorly. The situation is further complicated by marriages across dialect or language barriers.

Mr. A. Rew, also of the Australian National University, is at present examining the work situations of Port Moresby town dwellers. He has found that significant relationships have been forged between migrants from different language groups through common residence and common employment.[14] Often these people have two or more languages in common and the question arises as to what factors determine selection for a given communication. In town contact between Roro, Mekeo, and Kovio speakers there appears to be a tendency for the language nearest the coast to be used. However, it also seems that this implies something of a superior-inferior

relationship and, if the participants wish to avoid this, Police Motu, if available, is used.

Sociolinguistic Research in Tubuseria

While my own programme, only recently begun, is primarily a study of the Motu language itself (the code), some work using an 'ethnography of communication' approach is also undertaken. At present it is only possible to consider the crudest distinctions of code use - the use of different languages - and not the finer ones of variation within Motu. Earlier it was mentioned that not language but communication should provide the frame of reference for such studies. Thus here the frame is a community, the village of Tubuseria about 20 miles east of Port Moresby and with a population of roughly 1,500," a social group which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication."[15]

Extent of Multilingualism

The first part of this study contains a survey conducted by means of interviews to determine the extent of active multilingualism in the village and, to find the total number of codes available for use in a speech situation, and to describe the most common groupings of codes.[16] For this paper, the survey has been limited to twenty better-educated villagers (most villagers have at least attended a village mission school), as this promised a greater variety of answers. If a person's ability to speak a language was in doubt, he was given a dozen everyday sentences in English for oral translation. Although a rough test, it has revealed such things

as "Anglicised Pidgin," and has provided some sort of minimum requirement. As the sample is small, further interviews may alter present findings. In view of this, the following observations are of a tentative nature. However, the sample includes middle aged and young people of both sexes.

A better-educated Tubuserian is almost without exception trilingual, a speaker of Motu, Police Motu, and English. In the majority of cases he also speaks some Pidgin. (Pidgin has either been learnt during residence in New Guinea or, significantly, in one third of the cases, in work situations in Port Moresby). About half of those interviewed use all four languages in daily life. Contrary to expectation, so far no adverse comments have been made to the interviewer about Pidgin. He has, however, refrained from asking for specific comment on this point. In many cases Police Motu was not mentioned until the interviewer suggested it. It seems to be regarded as a simple form of Motu rather than as a separate language.

The number of languages spoken has ranged from three to seven, with the average for men a little above that for women. The other vernaculars spoken, though not as a rule well, have been languages on the Papuan coast, e.g. (Toaripi, Hula, Mailu, and Suau), learnt from residence in these areas, not from marriage. It is left to the inland people to learn the coastal language or a lingua franca. So far no Tubuserian has been encountered who can speak Koiari, though they have numerous dealings with two Koiari villages, have the same councillors, are in the same Papua Ekalesia district, attend each others' feasts on occasions, and their gardens are located close to the Koiari villages.

Language use in Tubuseria

In the daily village life of native Motu speakers, only Motu appears to be used. However, when a person is drunk or in some excited emotional state such as anger, pain, or disgust, English is often used even by people who do not speak English in any other speech situation. This accords with Hymes' theory concerning the capacity of the components of a communicative event in that such capacity varies with the particular event and with the particular state of the participant(s) in the event.

There are about twenty-five non-Motuans in the village, some in positions of importance, such as teachers, a Seventh Day Adventist pastor, and a nurse. The Australians use English; most of the Gulf District people use Police Motu in speaking to Motuans, one couple has a limited knowledge of Motu, while the rest of the better-educated people do not speak Motu or even Police Motu, and are possibly reluctant to do so. The handful of people married into the village from Rigo and Hula speak Motu but with a wide variation in ability, from good Motu to very mixed Hula and Motu even after some years of residence. A teacher from Aroma uses Motu with the Motuans generally, but not with the teachers, as he feels his Motu is not good enough. Instead, he uses English or Police Motu.

Both the Motuans and the Migrants are involved in village political, religious, and educational affairs. There are two councillors, both better-educated Motuans. Village meetings are in Motu, and it seems the non-Motuans rarely if ever speak at these. In personal dealings with councillors the migrants appear to use the same language as

in everyday village life.

In the Papua Ekalesia and in the Seventh Day Adventist churches in the village, the services are normally conducted in Motu. English is used for the Lord's Prayer in both churches; in the S.D.A. church English is used for all hymns and for the considerable amount of reading from the Old Testament. In both Sunday Schools English Bibles or New Testaments are employed for reading, the latter partly for economic reasons (they are free), and partly because their Motu vocabulary is limited.

This brings us to the education system. Since 1964 only instruction in English has been available. The Administration primary school is attended by all children between six and twelve, and by some older ones. It is particularly hard in this village, in comparison with other places, to prevent the use of the vernacular in the school area. The full effect of the absence of teaching in Motu cannot yet be seen, but English is already being used by quite a few better-educated Motuans in the middle and younger generations in writing letters to other Motuans for reasons of prestige, practice, (with a view, no doubt, to later prestige), or security.

This paper is only a sketch. Communicative events will have to be analysed in detail. It is hoped however, that the topic treated will stimulate more people to undertake socio-linguistic research in Papua-New Guinea.

NOTES

1. Hymes, Dell (ed.), Language in Culture and Society, New York, Harper and Row 1964, p.764.
2. Since most sociolinguistic studies have appeared in journals, it may be useful to mention a few books and those issues of journals that deal solely with this subject. In addition to the book already referred to there is Studies in Sociolinguistics by A. Capell, The Hague, Mouton 1966, a book of particular interest as the author has a wide knowledge of languages of Australia and the Pacific. Then there are "The Ethnography of Communication" edited by John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, in American Anthropologist, Vol.66 No.6, Part 2, December, 1964, and in Anthropological Linguistics Vol. 4, No.1, 1962.
3. Hymes, Dell, "Introduction : Toward Ethnographies of Communication," in The Ethnography of Communication edited by John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, A.A. Vol.66, No.6, Pt.2, 1964, ppl-34.
4. Ibid, p.2. (The term was mentioned earlier in "Directions in (Ethno-) Linguistic Theory" by Dell Hymes, A.A. Vol.66 No.3 Pt.2, p.44.
5. Ibid, p.3.
6. Ibid, p.13.
7. Kaldor, Susan, "Speech in its Socio-cultural Context: A Recent Trend in American Linguistics," in Linguistic Circle of Canberra Publications, Bulletin No.2, ed. C. Ruhle, 1966, p.23.
8. Hymes, Dell "Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication" p.18 (see note 3).

9. Ibid, p.20f.

10. For example in "Papua-New Guinea Nationhood: The Problem of a National Language, "The Journal of the Papua and New Guinea Society, Vol. 1, 1966-67, pp. 7-19.

11. Brown, H.A. 'The Toaripi Language of the Gulf of Papua', unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Sydney. The writer is a missionary who has lived many years in the areas and has done extensive translation work. The quotation is from page 1.

12. Salisbury, R.F. "Notes on Bilingualism and Linguistic Change in New Guinea," Anthropological Linguistics, Vol. 4, No.7, 1962, pp. 1-13.

13. Dutton, T.E. "Languages of the Port Moresby Sub-District: Tentative Statement" typescript, Section 5.1.

14. Rew, A., personal communication.

15. Gumperz, John J. "Types of Linguistic Communities, Anthropological Linguistics, Vol. 4, No.1, 1962, p.31. He adds that "linguistic communities may consist of small groups bound together by face-to-face contact or may cover large regions, depending on the level of abstraction we wish to achieve."

16. In devising questions and in formulating a general approach Ferguson, C.A. "On Sociolinguistically Oriented Language Surveys," The Linguistic Reporter, Vol. 8, No.4, August 1966, pp.1-3; and Reyburn, W.D. "The Evaluation of Multilingual Situations," an unpublished American Bible Society Translations Department, work paper, 8 pp., have been helpful.