The Myth of Cultural Deprivation
Edited with an Introduction by Nell Keddie

Penguin Education
In the past decade, a great deal of federally sponsored research has been devoted to the educational problems of children in ghetto schools. In order to account for the poor performance of children in these schools, educational psychologists have attempted to discover what kind of disadvantage or defect they are suffering from. The viewpoint that has been widely accepted and used as the basis for large-scale intervention programs is that the children show a cultural deficit as a result of an impoverished environment in their early years. Considerable attention has been given to language. In this area the deficit theory appears as the concept of 'verbal deprivation': Negro children from the ghetto area are said to receive little verbal stimulation, to hear very little well-formed language, and as a result are impoverished in their means of verbal expression. They cannot speak complete sentences, do not know the names of common objects, cannot form concepts or convey logical thoughts.

Unfortunately, these notions are based upon the work of educational psychologists who know very little about language and even less about Negro children. The concept of verbal deprivation has no basis in social reality: in fact, Negro children in the urban ghettos receive a great deal of verbal stimulation, hear more well-formed sentences than middle-class children, and participate fully in a highly verbal culture; they have the same basic vocabulary, possess

1. This paper was originally presented at the Twentieth Annual Georgetown Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies, Washington, D.C., 14 March 1969, where the theme was 'Linguistics and the Teaching of Standard English to Speakers of Other Languages or Dialects'.
the same capacity for conceptual learning, and use the same logic as anyone else who learns to speak and understand English.

The notion of 'verbal deprivation' is a part of the modern mythology of educational psychology, typical of the unfounded notions which tend to expand rapidly in our educational system. In past decades linguists have been as guilty as others in promoting such intellectual fashions at the expense of both teachers and children. But the myth of verbal deprivation is particularly dangerous, because it diverts attention from real defects of our educational system to imaginary defects of the child; and as we shall see, it leads its sponsors inevitably to the hypothesis of the genetic inferiority of Negro children that it was originally designed to avoid.

The most useful service which linguists can perform today is to clear away the illusion of 'verbal deprivation' and to provide a more adequate notion of the relations between standard and nonstandard dialects. In the writings of many prominent educational psychologists, we find very poor understanding of the nature of language. Children are treated as if they have no language of their own in the pre-school programs put forward by Bereiter and Engelmann (1966). The linguistic behavior of ghetto children in test situations is the principal evidence of genetic inferiority in the view of Jensen (1969). In this paper, we will examine critically both of these approaches to the language and intelligence of the populations labelled 'verbally deprived' and 'culturally deprived', and attempt to explain how the myth of verbal deprivation has arisen, bringing to bear the methodological findings of sociolinguistic work and some substantive facts about language which are known to all linguists. Of particular concern is the relation between concept formation on the one hand, and dialect differences on the other, since it is in this area that the most dangerous misunderstandings are to be found.

2. I am indebted to Rosalind Weiner of the Early Childhood Education group of Operation Head Start in New York City, and to Joan Baratz of the Education Study Center, Washington, D.C., for pointing out to me the scope and seriousness of the educational issues involved here, and the ways in which the cultural deprivation theory has affected federal intervention programs in recent years.

Verbality

The general setting in which the deficit theory arises consists of a number of facts which are known to all of us. One is that Negro children in the central urban ghettos do badly in all school subjects, including arithmetic and reading. In reading, they average more than two years behind the national norm (see New York Times, 3 December 1968). Furthermore, this lag is cumulative, so that they do worse comparatively in the fifth grade than in the first grade.

Reports in the literature show that this poor performance is correlated most closely with socioeconomic status. Segregated ethnic groups seem to do worse than others— in particular, Indian, Mexican-American and Negro children. Our own work in New York City confirms that most Negro children read very poorly; however, studies in the speech community show that the situation is even worse than has been reported. If one separates the isolated and peripheral individuals from members of central peer groups, the peer-group members show even worse reading records, and to all intents and purposes are not learning to read at all during the time they spend in school (see Labov, et al., 1968).

In speaking of children in the urban ghetto areas, the term 'lower class' frequently is used, as opposed to 'middle class'. In the several sociolinguistic studies we have carried out, and in many parallel studies, it has been useful to distinguish a lower-class group from a working-class one. Lower-class families are typically female-based, or matr-i-focal, with no father present to provide steady economic support, whereas for the working-class there is typically an intact nuclear family with the father holding a semi-skilled or skilled job.

The educational problems of ghetto areas run across this important class distinction. There is no evidence, for example, that the father's presence or absence is closely correlated with educational achievement (e.g., Langer and Michaels, 1963; Coleman, et al., 1966). The peer groups we have studied in south-central Harlem, representing the basic vernacular culture, include members from both family types. The attack against 'cultural deprivation' in the ghetto is overtly directed at family structures typical of lower-class families, but the educational failure we have been discussing is characteristic of both working-class and lower-class children.
This paper, therefore, will refer to children from urban ghetto areas rather than 'lower-class' children. The population we are concerned with comprises those who participate fully in the vernacular culture of the street and who have been alienated from the school system. We are obviously dealing with the effects of the caste system of American society — essentially a color-marking system. Everyone recognizes this. The question is: by what mechanism does the color bar prevent children from learning to read? One answer is the notion of 'cultural deprivation' put forward by Martin Deutsch and others (Deutsch, et al., 1967; Deutsch, Katz and Jensen, 1968). Negro children are said to lack the favorable factors in their home environment which enable middle-class children to do well in school. These factors involve the development of various cognitive skills through verbal interaction with adults, including the ability to reason abstractly, speak fluently and focus upon long-range goals. In their publications, these psychologists also recognize broader social factors. However, the deficit theory does not focus upon the interaction of the Negro child with white society so much as on his failure to interact with his mother at home. In the literature we find very little direct observation of verbal interaction in the Negro home. Most typically, the investigators ask the child if he has dinner with his parents, if he engages in dinner-table conversation with them, if his family takes him on trips to museums and other cultural activities, and so on. This slender thread of evidence is used to explain and interpret the large body of tests carried out in the laboratory and in the school.

The most extreme view which proceeds from this orientation — and one that is now being widely accepted — is that lower-class Negro children have no language at all. The notion is first drawn from Basil Bernstein’s writings that ‘much of lower-class language consists of a kind of incidental “emotional” accompaniment to action here and now’ (Jensen, 1968, p. 118). Bernstein’s views are filtered through a strong bias against all forms of working-class behavior, so that middle-class language is seen as superior in every respect — as ‘more abstract, and necessarily somewhat more flexible, detailed and subtle’ (p. 119). One can proceed through a range of such views until he comes to the pre-school programs of Bereiter and Engelmann (1966; Bereiter, et al., 1966). Bereiter’s program for an academically oriented pre-school is based upon the premise that Negro children must have a language with which they can learn and the empirical finding that these children come to school without such a language. In his work with four-year-old Negro children from Urbana, Bereiter (et al., 1966, pp. 113 ff.) reports that their communication was by gestures, single words and ‘a series of badly connected words or phrases’, such as ‘They mine and Me got juice. He reports that Negro children could not ask questions, that ‘without exaggerating . . . these four-year-olds could make no statements of any kind’. Furthermore, when these children were asked ‘Where is the book?’ they did not know enough to look at the table where the book was lying in order to answer. Thus Bereiter concludes that these children’s speech forms are nothing more than a series of emotional cries, and he decides to treat them ‘as if the children had no language at all’. He identifies their speech with his interpretation of Bernstein’s restricted code: ‘the language of culturally deprived children . . . is not merely an underdeveloped version of standard English, but is a basically non-logical mode of expressive behavior’ (Bereiter, et al., 1966, pp. 112–13). The basic program of his pre-school is to teach them a new language devised by Engelmann, which consists of a limited series of questions and answers such as ‘Where is the squirrel?’ ‘The squirrel is in the tree.’ The children will not be punished if they use their vernacular speech on the playground, but they will not be allowed to use it in the schoolroom. If they should answer the question, ‘Where is the squirrel?’ with the illogical vernacular form ‘In the tree’ they will be reprimanded by various means and made to say, ‘The squirrel is in the tree.’

Linguists and psycholinguists who have worked with Negro children are apt to dismiss this view of their language as utter nonsense. Yet there is no reason to reject Bereiter’s observations as spurious. They were certainly not made up. On the contrary, they give us a very clear view of the behavior of student and teacher which can be duplicated in any classroom. In our own work outside of adult-domi-
rated environments of school and home, we have not observed Negro children behaving like this. However, on many occasions we have been asked to help analyse the results of research into verbal deprivation conducted in such test situations.

Here, for example, is a complete interview with a Negro boy, one of hundreds carried out in a New York City school. The boy enters a room where there is a large, friendly, white interviewer, who puts on the table in front of him a toy and says: 'Tell me everything you can about this.' (The interviewer's further remarks are in parentheses.)

[12 seconds of silence]
(What would you say it looks like?)
[8 seconds of silence]
A space ship.
(Hmmmm.)
[13 seconds of silence]
Like a je-et.
[12 seconds of silence]
Like a plane.
[20 seconds of silence]
(What color is it?)
[6 seconds of silence]
(An' what could you use it for?)
[8 seconds of silence]
A je-et.

4. For example, in Deutsch, Katz and Jensen (1968) there is a section on Social and Psychological Perspectives which includes a chapter by Proshansky and Newton on 'The Nature and Meaning of Negro Self-Identity', and one by Rosenthal and Jacobson on 'Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in the Classroom'.

5. The research cited here was carried out in south-central Harlem and other ghetto areas in 1965-8 to describe the structural and functional differences between Negro nonstandard English and standard English in the classroom. It was supported by the Office of Education as Cooperative Research Projects 3091 and 3288. Detailed reports are given in Labov, et al. (1965), Labov (1967), and Labov, et al. (1968).

We have here the same kind of defensive, monosyllabic behavior which is reported in Bereiter's work. What is the situation that produces it? The child is in an asymmetrical situation where anything he says can literally be held against him. He has learned a number of devices to avoid saying anything in this situation, and he works very hard to achieve this end. One may observe the intonation patterns of

\[
\text{2 a 3 'o' 2 know}
\]
and
\[
\text{a 2 space 2 sh 3 ip}
\]

which Negro children often use when they are asked a question to which the answer is obvious. The answer may be read as: 'Will this satisfy you?'

If one takes this interview as a measure of the verbal capacity of the child, it must be as his capacity to defend himself in a hostile and threatening situation. But unfortunately, thousands of such interviews are used as evidence of the child's total verbal capacity, or more simply his verbality. It is argued that this lack of verbality explains his poor performance in school. Operation Head Start and other intervention programs have largely been based upon the deficit theory - the notions that such interviews give us a measure of the child's verbal capacity and that the verbal stimulation which he has been missing can be supplied in a pre-school environment.

The verbal behavior which is shown by the child in the situation quoted above is not the result of the ineptness of the interviewer. It is rather the result of regular sociolinguistic factors operating upon adult and child in this asymmetrical situation. In our work in urban
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In ghetto areas, we have often encountered such behavior. Ordinarily we worked with boys ten to seventeen years old, and whenever we extended our approach downward to eight- or nine-year-olds, we began to see the need for different techniques to explore the verbal capacity of the child. At one point we began a series of interviews with younger brothers of the Thunderbirds in 1390 Fifth Avenue [a pre-adolescent group studied in this research]. Clarence Robins returned after an interview with eight-year-old Leon L., who showed the following minimal response to topics which arouse intense interest in other interviews with older boys.

CR What if you saw somebody kickin' somebody else on the ground, or was using a stick, what would you do if you saw that?
LEON Mmmm.
CR If it was supposed to be a fair fight -
LEON I don' know.
CR You don't know? Would you do anything? ... huh? I can't hear you.
LEON No.
CR Did you ever see somebody got beat up real bad?
LEON ... Nope ...
CR Well - uh - did you ever get into a fight with a guy?
LEON Nope.
CR That was bigger than you?
LEON Nope.
CR You never been in a fight?
LEON Nope ...
CR Nobody ever pick on you?
LEON Nope.
CR Nobody ever hit you?
LEON Nope.
CR How come?
LEON Ah 'on' know.
CR Didn't you ever hit somebody?
LEON Nope.
CR (incredulously) You never hit nobody?
LEON Mhm.
CR Aww, ba-a-abe, you ain't gonna tell me that!

It may be that Leon is here defending himself against accusations of wrong-doing, since Clarence knows that Leon has been in fights, that he has been taking pencils away from little boys, and so on. But if we turn to a more neutral subject, we find the same pattern:

CR You watch - you like to watch television? ... Hey, Leon ... you like to watch television? (Leon nods) What's your favorite program?
LEON Uhhmmmm ... I look at cartoons.
CR Well, what's your favorite one? What's your favorite program?
LEON Superman ...
CR Yeah? Did you see Superman - ah - yesterday, or day before yesterday? When's the last time you saw Superman?
LEON Sa-aturday ...
CR You rem - you saw it Saturday? What was the story all about? You remember the story?
LEON Mm.
CR You don't remember the story of what - that you saw of Superman?
LEON Nope.
CR You don't remember what happened, huh?
LEON Hm-m.
CR I see - ah - what other stories do you like to watch on TV?
LEON Mmmm? ... umm ...(glottalization)
CR Hmm? (four seconds)
LEON Hh?
CR What's th' other stories that you like to watch?
LEON Mi-ighty Mouse ... 
CR And what else?
LEON Ummmm ... ahm ...

This nonverbal behavior occurs in a relatively favorable context for adult-child interaction. The adult is a Negro man raised in Harlem, who knows this particular neighborhood and these boys very well. He is a skilled interviewer who has obtained a very high level of verbal response with techniques developed for a different age level, and he has an extraordinary advantage over most teachers or experimenters in these respects. But even his skills and personality
are ineffective in breaking down the social constraints that prevail here.

When we reviewed the record of this interview with Leon, we decided to use it as a test of our own knowledge of the sociolinguistic factors which control speech. In the next interview with Leon we made the following changes in the social situation:

1. Clarence brought along a supply of potato chips, changing the interview into something more in the nature of a party.
2. He brought along Leon's best friend, eight-year-old Gregory.
3. We reduced the height in balance by having Clarence get down on the floor of Leon's room; he dropped from six feet, two inches to three feet, six inches.
4. Clarence introduced taboo words and taboo topics, and proved, to Leon's surprise, that one can say anything into our microphone without any fear of retaliation.

The result of these changes is a striking difference in the volume and style of speech.

**CR** Is there anybody who says your momma drink pee?

**Leon** (rapidly and breathlessly) Yee-ah!

**Greg** Yup!

**Leon** And your father eat doo-doo for breakfast!

**CR** Ohhh! (laughs)

**Leon** And they say your father — your father eat doo-doo for dinner!

**Greg** When they sound on me, I say CBS.

**CR** What that mean?

| **Leon** | Congo booger-snahter! (laughs) |
| **Greg** | Congo booger-snahter! (laughs) |

**Greg** And sometimes I'll curse with BB.

**CR** What that?

**Greg** Black boy! (Leon — crunching on potato chips) Oh that's a MBB.

**CR** MBB. What's that?

**Greg** 'Merican Black Boy.

**CR** Oh...

**Greg** Anyway, 'Mericans is same like white people, right?

**Leon** And they talk about Allah.

**CR** Oh yeah?

**Greg** Yeah.

**CR** What they say about Allah?

| **Leon** | Allah — Allah is God. |
| **Greg** | Allah — |

**CR** And what else?

| **Leon** | I don' know the res'. |

| **Greg** | Allah — Allah is God, Allah is the only God, Allah... |

| **Leon** | Allah is the son of God. |

| **Greg** | But can he make magic? |

| **Leon** | Nope. |

**Greg** I know who can make magic.

**CR** Who can?

| **Leon** | The God, the real one. |

**CR** Who can make magic?

**Greg** The son of po' — I'm sayin' the po'k chop God! He only a po'k chop God! (Leon chuckles).

(The 'nonverbal' Leon is now competing actively for the floor; Gregory and Leon talk to each other as much as they do to the interviewer.)

We can make a more direct comparison of the two interviews by examining the section on fighting. Leon persists in denying that he fights, but he can no longer use monosyllabic answers, and Gregory cuts through his façade in a way that Clarence Robins alone was unable to do.

**CR** Now, you said you had this fight, now, but I wanted you to tell me about the fight that you had.

| **Leon** | I ain't had no fight. |

| **Greg** | Yes, you did! |

| **CR** | You said you had one? you had a fight with Butchie, |

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6. The reference to the *pork chop* God condenses several concepts of black nationalism current in the Harlem community. A *pork chop* is a Negro who has not lost the traditional subservient ideology of the South, who has no knowledge of himself in Muslim terms, and the *pork chop* God would be the traditional God of Southern Baptists. He and his followers may be pork chops, but he still holds the power in Leon and Gregory's world.
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The observer must now draw a very different conclusion about the verbal capacity of Leon. The monosyllabic speaker who had nothing to say about anything and cannot remember what he did yesterday has disappeared. Instead, we have two boys who have so much to say they keep interrupting each other, who seem to have no difficulty in using the English language to express themselves. And we in turn obtain the volume of speech and the rich array of grammatical devices which we need for analyzing the structure of non-standard Negro English (NNE): negative concord [I 'on' play with him no more], the pluperfect [had came back out], negative perfect [I ain't had], the negative preterite [I ain't go], and so on.

We can now transfer this demonstration of the sociolinguistic control of speech to other test situations - including IQ and reading tests in school. It should be immediately apparent that none of the standard tests will come anywhere near measuring Leon's verbal capacity. On these tests he will show up as very much the monosyllabic, inept, ignorant, bumbling child of our first interview. The teacher has far less ability than Clarence Robins to elicit speech from this child; Clarence knows the community, the things that Leon has been doing, and the things that Leon would like to talk about. But the power relationships in a one-to-one confrontation between adult and child are too asymmetrical. This does not mean that some Negro children will not talk a great deal when alone with an adult, or that an adult cannot get close to any child. It means that the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behavior and that an adult must enter into the right social relation with a child if he wants to find out what a child can do: this is just what many teachers cannot do.

The view of the Negro speech community which we obtain from our work in the ghetto areas is precisely the opposite from that reported by Deutsch, Engelmann and Bereiter. We see a child bathed in verbal stimulation from morning to night. We see many speech events which depend upon the competitive exhibition of verbal skills: sounding, singing, toasts, rifting, loudly - a whole range of activities in which the individual gains status through his use of language (see Labov, et al., 1968, section 4.2). We see the younger child trying to acquire these skills from older children - hanging around on the outskirts of the older peer group, and imitating this

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| GREG | An' he say Garland ... an' Michael. |
| CR an' Barry ... |
| LEON | I di'n'; you said that, Gregory! |
| GREG | You did. |
| LEON | You know you said that! |
| GREG | You said Garland, remember that? |
| GREG | You said Garland! Yes you did! |
| CR | You said Garland, that's right. |
| GREG | He said Mich - an' I say Michael. |
| CR | Did you have a fight with Garland? |
| LEON | Uh-uh. |
| CR | You had one, and he beat you up, too! |
| GREG | Yes he did! |
| LEON | No, I di-I never had a fight with Butch! ... |

The same pattern can be seen on other local topics, where the interviewer brings neighborhood gossip to bear on Leon and Gregory acts as a witness.

| CR | Hey Gregory! I heard that around here ... and I'm 'on' tell you who said it, too ... |
| LEON | Who? |
| CR | about you ... |
| LEON | Who? |
| GREG | I'd say it! |
| CR | They said that - they say that the only person you play with is David Gilbert. |
| LEON | Yee-ah! yee-ah! yee-ah! ... |
| GREG | That's who you play with! |
| LEON | I 'on' play with him no more! |
| GREG | Yes you do! |
| LEON | I 'on' play with him no more! |
| GREG | But remember, about me and Robbie? |
| LEON | So that's not - |
| GREG | and you went to Petey and Gilbert's house, 'member? |
| LEON | Ah haah! |
| GREG | So that's - so - but I would - I had came back out, an' I aint go to his house no more ...
behavior to the best of his ability. We see no connection between verbal skill at the speech events characteristic of the street culture and success in the schoolroom.

**Verbosity**

There are undoubtedly many verbal skills which children from ghetto areas must learn in order to do well in the school situation, and some of these are indeed characteristic of middle-class verbal behavior. Precision in spelling, practice in handling abstract symbols, the ability to state explicitly the meaning of words, and a richer knowledge of the Latinate vocabulary, may all be useful acquisitions. But is it true that all of the middle-class verbal habits are functional and desirable in the school situation? Before we impose middle-class verbal style upon children from other cultural groups, we should find out how much of this is useful for the main work of analysing and generalizing, and how much is merely stylistic – or even dysfunctional. In high school and college middle-class children spontaneously complicate their syntax to the point that instructors despair of getting them to make their language simpler and clearer. In every learned journal one can find examples of jargon and empty elaboration – and complaints about it. Is the 'elaborate code' of Bernstein really so 'flexible, detailed and subtle' as some psychologists believe? (Jensen, 1969, p. 119) Isn't it also turgid, redundant, and empty? Is it not simply an elaborated style, rather than a superior code or system?7

Our work in the speech community makes it painfully obvious that in many ways working-class speakers are more effective narrators, reasoners and debaters than many middle-class speakers who temporize, qualify, and lose their argument in a mass of irrelevant detail. Many academic writers try to rid themselves of that part of middle-class style that is empty pretension, and keep that part that is needed for precision. But the average middle-class speaker that we encounter makes no such effort; he is enmeshed in verbiage, the victim of sociolinguistic factors beyond his control.

I will not attempt to support this argument here with systematic quantitative evidence, although it is possible to develop measures which show how far middle-class speakers can wander from the point. I would like to contrast two speakers dealing with roughly the same topic – matters of belief. The first is Larry H., a fifteen-year-old core member of the Jets, being interviewed by John Lewis. Larry is one of the loudest and roughest members of the Jets, one who gives the least recognition to the conventional rules of politeness. For most readers of this paper, first contact with Larry would produce some fairly negative reactions on both sides: it is probable that you would not like him any more than his teachers do. Larry causes trouble in and out of school; he was put back from the eleventh grade to the ninth, and has been threatened with further action by the school authorities.

**JL** What happens to you after you die? Do you know?

**LARRY** Yeah, I know.

**JL** What?

**LARRY** After they put you in the ground, your body turns into - ah - bones, an' shit.

**JL** What happens to your spirit?

**LARRY** Your spirit – soon as you die, your spirit leaves you.

**JL** And where does the spirit go?

**LARRY** Well, it all depends...

**JL** On what?

**LARRY** You know, like some people say if you're good an' shit, your spirit goin' t'heaven... 'n' if you bad, your spirit goin' to hell. Well, bullshit! Your spirit goin' to hell anyway, good or bad.

7. The term code is central in Bernstein's description of the differences between working-class and middle-class styles of speech. The restrictions and elaborations of speech observed are labelled as 'codes' to indicate the principles governing selection from the range of possible English sentences. No rules or detailed description of the operation of such codes are provided as yet, so that this central concept remains to be specified.

8. A direct view of Larry's verbal style in a hostile encounter is given in Labov, et al. (1968), vol. 2, pp. 39–43. Gray's Oral Reading Test was being given to a group of Jets on the steps of a brownstone house in Harlem, and the landlord tried unsuccessfully to make the Jets move. Larry's verbal style in this encounter matches the reports he gives of himself in a number of narratives cited in section 4.8.
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JL Why?
Larry Why? I'll tell you why. 'Cause, you see, 'cause, nobody really know that it's a God, y'know, 'cause I mean I have seen black gods, pink gods, white gods, all color gods, and don't nobody know it's really a God. An' when they be sayin' if you good, you goin' t'heaven, tha's bullshit, 'cause you ain't goin' to no heaven, 'cause it ain't no heaven for you to go to.

Larry is a paradigmatic speaker of nonstandard Negro English (NNE) as opposed to standard English. His grammar shows a high concentration of such characteristic NNE forms as negative inversion [don't nobody know ...], negative concord [you ain't goin' to no heaven ...], invariant be [when they be sayin' ...], dummy it for standard English there [it ain't no heaven ...], optional copula deletion [if you're good ... if you bad ...], and full forms of auxiliaries [I have seen ...]. The only standard English influence in this passage is the one case of doesn't instead of the invariant don't of NNE. Larry also provides a paradigmatic example of the rhetorical style of NNE: he can sum up a complex argument in a few words, and the full force of his opinions comes through without qualification or reservation. He is eminently quotable, and his interviews give us many concise statements of the NNE point of view. One can almost say that Larry speaks the NNE culture (see Labov, et al., 1968, vol. 2, pp. 38, 71-3, 291-2).

It is the logical form of this passage which is of particular interest here. Larry presents a complex set of interdependent propositions which can be explicated by setting out the standard English equivalents in linear order. The basic argument is to deny the twin propositions

(A) If you are good, then your spirit will go to heaven.
(B) If you are bad, then your spirit will go to hell.

Larry denies (B), and asserts that if (A) or (¬A), then (C). His argument may be outlined as follows:

1. Everyone has a different idea of what God is like.
2. Therefore nobody really knows that God exists.
3. If there is a heaven, it was made by God.
4. If God doesn't exist, he couldn't have made heaven.
5. Therefore heaven does not exist.
6. You can't go somewhere that doesn't exist.
    (¬B) Therefore you can't go to heaven.
C. Therefore you are going to hell.

The argument is presented in the order: (C), because (2) because (1), therefore (2), therefore (¬B) because (5) and (6). Part of the argument is implicit: the connection (2) therefore (¬B) leaves unstated the connecting links (3) and (4), and in this interval Larry strengthens the propositions from the form (2) Nobody knows if there is ... to (5) There is no ... Otherwise, the case is presented explicitly as well as economically. The complex argument is summed up in Larry's last sentence, which shows formally the dependence of (¬B) on (5) and (6).

An' when they be sayin' if you good, you goin' t'heaven,
[The proposition, if (A), then (B)]
That's bullshit,
[is absurd]
'cause you ain't goin' to no heaven
[because (¬B)]
'cause it ain't no heaven for you to go to.
[because (5) and (6)].

This hypothetical argument is not carried on at a high level of seriousness. It is a game played with ideas as counters, in which opponents use a wide variety of verbal devices to win. There is no personal commitment to any of these propositions, and no reluctance to strengthen one's argument by bending the rules of logic as in the (2-5) sequence. But if the opponent invokes the rules of logic, they hold. In John Lewis' interviews, he often makes this move, and the force of his argument is always acknowledged and countered within the rules of logic. In this case, he pointed out the fallacy that the argument (2-3-4-5-6) leads to (¬C) as well as (¬B), so it cannot be used to support Larry's assertion (C):

JL Well, if there's no heaven, how could there be a hell?
Larry I mean - ye - eah. Well, let me tell you, it ain't no hell, 'cause this is hell right here, y'know!
This is hell?

Larry's answer is quick, ingenious and decisive. The application of the (3-4-5) argument to hell is denied, since hell is here, and therefore conclusion (C) stands. These are not ready-made or preconceived opinions, but new propositions devised to win the logical argument in the game being played. The reader will note the speed and precision of Larry's mental operations. He does not wander, or insert meaningless verbiage. The only repetition is (2), placed before and after (1) in his original statement. It is often said that the nonstandard vernacular is not suited for dealing with abstract or hypothetical questions, but in fact speakers from the NNE community take great delight in exercising their wit and logic on the most improbable and problematical matters. Despite the fact that Larry H. does not believe in God, and has just denied all knowledge of him, John Lewis advances the following hypothetical question:

... But, just say that there is a God, what color is he? White or black?

Well, if it is a God ... I wouldn' know what color, I couldn' say, - couldn' nobody say what color he is or really would be.

But now, jus' suppose there was a God -

Unless'n they say ...

No, I was jus' sayin' jus' suppose there is a God, would he be white or black?

... He'd be white, man.

Why?

I'll tell you why, 'Cause the average whitey out here got everything, you dig? And the nigger ain't got shit, y'know? Y'understand? So - um - for - in order for that to happen, you know it ain't no black God that's doin' that bullshit.

No one can hear Larry's answer to this question without being convinced that they are in the presence of a skilled speaker with great 'verbal presence of mind', who can use the English language expertly for many purposes. Larry's answer to John Lewis is again a complex argument. The formulation is not standard English, but it is clear and effective even for those not familiar with the vernacular. The nearest standard English equivalent might be: 'So you know that God isn't black, because if he was, he wouldn't have arranged things like that.'

The reader will have noted that this analysis is being carried out in standard English, and the inevitable challenge is: why not write in NNE, then, or in your own nonstandard dialect? The fundamental reason is, of course, one of firmly fixed social conventions. All communities agree that standard English is the 'proper' medium for formal writing and public communication. Furthermore, it seems likely that standard English has an advantage over NNE in explicit analysis of surface forms, which is what we are doing here. We will return to this opposition between explicitness and logical statement in subsequent sections on grammaticality and logic. First, however, it will be helpful to examine standard English in its primary natural setting, as the medium for informal spoken communication of middle-class speakers.

Let us now turn to the second speaker, an upper-middle-class, college educated Negro man being interviewed by Clarence Robins in our survey of adults in Central Harlem.

Do you know of anything that someone can do, to have someone who has passed on visit him in a dream?

Well, I even heard my parents say that there is such a thing as something in dreams some things like that, and sometimes dreams do come true. I have personally never had a dream come true. I've never dreamt that somebody was dying and they actually died, (Mhm) or that I was going to have ten dollars the next day and somehow I got ten dollars in my pocket. (Mhm). I don't particularly believe in that, I don't think it's true. I do feel, though, that there is such a thing as - ah - witchcraft. I do feel that in certain cultures there is such a thing as witchcraft, or some sort of science of witchcraft; I don't think that it's just a matter of believing hard enough that there is such a thing as witchcraft. I do believe that there is such a thing that a person can put himself in a state of mind (Mhm), or that - er - something could be given them to intoxicate them in a certain - to a certain
frame of mind — that — that could actually be considered witchcraft.

Charles M. is obviously a 'good speaker' who strikes the listener as well-educated, intelligent and sincere. He is a likeable and attractive person — the kind of person that middle-class listeners rate very high on a scale of 'job suitability' and equally high as a potential friend. His language is more moderate and tempered than Larry's; he makes every effort to qualify his opinions, and seems anxious to avoid any mis-statements or over-statements. From these qualities emerge the primary characteristic of this passage — its verbosity. Words multiply, some modifying and qualifying, others repeating or padding the main argument. The first half of this extract is a response to the initial question on dreams, basically:

1. Some people say that dreams sometimes come true.
2. I have never had a dream come true.
3. Therefore I don't believe (1).

Some characteristic filler phrases appear here: such a thing as, some things like that, particularly. Two examples of dreams given after (2) are afterthoughts that might have been given after (1). Proposition (3) is stated twice for no obvious reason. Nevertheless, this much of Charles M.'s response is well-directed to the point of the question. He then volunteers a statement of his beliefs about witchcraft which shows the difficulty of middle-class speakers who (a) want to express a belief in something but (b) want to show themselves as judicious, rational and free from superstitions. The basic proposition can be stated simply in five words:

But I believe in witchcraft.

However, the idea is enlarged to exactly a hundred words, and it is difficult to see what else is being said. In the following quotations, padding which can be removed without change in meaning is shown in brackets.

1. 'I do feel, though, that there is [such a thing as] witchcraft.' Feel seems to be a euphemism for 'believe'.
2. 'I do feel that in certain cultures [there is such a thing as witchcraft.]' This repetition seems designed only to introduce the word culture, which lets us know that the speaker knows about anthropology. Does certain cultures mean 'not in ours' or 'not in all'?  
3. '[for some sort of science of witchcraft.]' This addition seems to have no clear meaning at all. What is a 'science' of witchcraft as opposed to just plain witchcraft? The main function is to introduce the word science, though it seems to have no connection to what follows.
4. 'I don't think that it's just [a matter of] believing hard enough that [there is such a thing as] witchcraft.' The speaker argues that witchcraft is not merely a belief; there is more to it.
5. 'I do believe that [there is such a thing that] a person can put himself in a state of mind ... that [could actually be considered] witchcraft.' Is witchcraft as a state of mind different from the state of belief denied in (4)?
6. 'or that something could be given them to intoxicate them [to a certain frame of mind] ...' The third learned word, intoxicate, is introduced by this addition. The vacuity of this passage becomes more evident if we remove repetitions, fashionable words and stylistic decorations:

But I believe in witchcraft.

I don't think witchcraft is just a belief.

A person can put himself or be put in a state of mind that is witchcraft.

Without the extra verbiage and the OK words like science, culture and intoxicate, Charles M. appears as something less than a first-rate thinker. The initial impression of him as a good speaker is simply our long-conditioned reaction to middle-class verbosity: we know that people who use these stylistic devices are educated

9. For a description of subjective reaction tests which utilize these evaluate dimensions, see Labov, et al. (1968, section 4.6).

10. Several middle-class readers of this page have suggested that science here refers to some form of control as opposed to belief; the 'science of witchcraft' would then be a kind of engineering of mental states; other interpretations can of course be provided. The fact remains that no such subtleties of interpretation are needed to understand Larry's remarks.
people, and we are inclined to credit them with saying something intelligent. Our reactions are accurate in one sense: Charles M. is more educated than Larry. But is he more rational, more logical, or more intelligent? Is he any better at thinking out a problem to its solution? Does he deal more easily with abstractions? There is no reason to think so. Charles M. succeeds in letting us know that he is educated, but in the end we do not know what he is trying to say, and neither does he.

In the previous section I have attempted to explain the origin of the myth that lower-class Negro children are nonverbal. The examples just given may help to account for the corresponding myth that middle-class language is in itself better suited for dealing with abstract, logically complex and hypothetical questions. These examples are intended to have a certain negative force. They are not controlled experiments: on the contrary, this and the preceding section are designed to convince the reader that the controlled experiments that have been offered in evidence are misleading. The only thing that is 'controlled' is the superficial form of the stimulus: all children are asked 'What do you think of capital punishment?' or 'Tell me everything you can about this.' But the speaker's interpretation of these requests, and the action he believes is appropriate in response is completely uncontrolled. One can view these test stimuli as requests for information, commands for action, as threats of punishment, or as meaningless sequences of words. They are probably intended as something altogether different: as requests for display; but in any case the experimenter is normally unaware of the problem of interpretation. The methods of educational psychologists like Deutsch, Jensen and Bereiter follow the pattern designed for animal experiments where motivation is controlled by such simple methods as withholding food until a certain weight reduction is reached. With human subjects, it is absurd to believe that an identical 'stimulus' is obtained by asking everyone the 'same question'.

Since the crucial intervening variables of interpretation and motivation are uncontrolled, most of the literature on verbal deprivation tells us nothing about the capacities of children. They are only the trappings of science: an approach which substitutes the formal procedures of the scientific method for the activity itself. With our present limited grasp of these problems, the best we can do to understand the verbal capacities of children is to study them within the cultural context in which they were developed.

It is not only the NNE vernacular which should be studied in this way, but also the language of middle-class children. The explicitness and precision which we hope to gain from copying middle-class forms are often the product of the test situation, and limited to it. For example, it was stated in the first part of this paper that working-class children hear more well-formed sentences than middle-class children. This statement may seem extraordinary in the light of the current belief of many linguists that most people do not speak in well-formed sentences, and that their actual speech production or 'performance' is ungrammatical. But those who have worked with any body of natural speech know that this is not the case. Our own studies (Labov, 1966) of the grammaticality of every-day speech show that the great majority of utterances in all contexts are complete sentences, and most of the rest can be reduced to grammatical form by the small set of 'editing rules'. The proportions of grammatical sentences vary with class backgrounds and styles. The highest percentage of well-formed sentences are found in casual speech, and working-class speakers use more well-formed sentences than middle-class speakers. The widespread myth that most speech is ungrammatical is no doubt based upon tapes made at learned conferences, where we obtain the maximum number of irreducibly ungrammatical sequences.

It is true that technical and scientific books are written in a style
which is markedly 'middle-class'. But unfortunately, we often fail to achieve the explicitness and precision which we look for in such writing; and the speech of many middle-class people departs maximally from this target. All too often, standard English is represented by a style that is simultaneously over-particular and vague. The accumulating flow of words buries rather than strikes the target. It is this verbosity which is most easily taught and most easily learned, so that words take the place of thought, and nothing can be found behind them.

When Bernstein (1966, for example) describes his 'elaborated code' in general terms, it emerges as a subtle and sophisticated mode of planning utterances, achieving structural variety, taking the other person's knowledge into account, and so on. But when it comes to describing the actual difference between middle-class and working-class speakers (Bernstein, 1966), we are presented with a proliferation of 'I think', of the passive, of modals and auxiliaries, of the first person pronoun, of uncommon words; these are the bench marks of hemming and hawing, backing and filling, that are used by Charles M., devices which often obscure whatever positive contribution education can make to our use of language. When we have discovered how much middle-class style is a matter of fashion and how much actually helps us express our ideas clearly, we will have done ourselves a great service. We will then be in a position to say what standard grammatical rules must be taught to nonstandard speakers in the early grades.

Grammaticality

Let us now examine Bereiter's own data on the verbal behavior of the children he dealt with. The expressions They mine and Me got juice are cited as examples of a language which lacks the means for expressing logical relations - in this case characterized as 'a series of badly connected words' (Bereiter, et al., 1966, pp. 113 ff.). In the case of They mine, it is apparent that Bereiter confuses the notions of logic and explicitness. We know that there are many languages of the world which do not have a present copula, and which conjoin subject and predicate complement without a verb. Russian, Hungarian and Arabic may be foreign; but they are not by that same token illogical. In the case of NNE we are not dealing with even this superficial grammatical difference, but rather with a low-level rule which carries contraction one step farther to delete single consonants representing the verbs is, have, or will (Labov, 1969). We have yet to find any children who do not sometimes use the full forms of is and will, even though they may frequently delete it. Our recent studies with Negro children four to seven years old indicate that they use the full form of the copula is more often than preadolescents ten to twelve years old, or the adolescents fourteen to seventeen years old.13

Furthermore, the deletion of the is or are in NNE is not the result of erratic or illogical behavior: it follows the same regular rules as standard English contraction. Wherever standard English can contract, Negro children use either the contracted form or (more commonly) the deleted zero form. Thus They mine corresponds to standard They're mine, not to the full form They are mine. On the other hand, no such deletion is possible in positions where standard English cannot contract: just as one cannot say That's what they're in standard English, That's what they is equally impossible in the vernacular we are considering. The internal constraints upon both of these rules show that we are dealing with a phonological process like contraction, sensitive to such phonetic conditions as whether or not the next word begins with a vowel or a consonant. The appropriate use of the deletion rule, like the contraction rule, requires a deep and intimate knowledge of English grammar and phonology. Such knowledge is not available for conscious inspection by native speakers. The rules we have recently worked out for standard contraction (Labov, 1969) have never appeared in any grammar, and are certainly not a part of the conscious knowledge of any standard English speakers. Nevertheless, the adult or child who uses these rules must have formed at some level of psychological organization clear concepts of 'tense marker', 'verb phrase', 'rule ordering', 'sentence embedding', 'pronoun' and many other grammatical categories which are essential parts of any logical system.

13. This is from work on the grammars and comprehension of Negro children, four to eight years old, being carried out by Professor Jane Torrey of Connecticut College in extension of the research cited above in Labov, et al. (1968).
Bereiter's reaction to the sentence *Me got juice* is even more puzzling. If Bereiter believes that *Me got juice* is not a logical expression, it can only be that he interprets the use of the objective pronoun *me* as representing a difference in logical relationship to the verb: that the child is in fact saying *the juice got him* rather than *he got the juice*. If on the other hand the child means *I got juice*, then this sentence form shows only that he has not learned the formal rules for the use of the subjective form *I* and oblique form *me*. We have in fact encountered many children who do not have these formal rules in order at the ages of four, five, six or even eight. It is extremely difficult to construct a minimal pair to show that the difference between *he* and *him*, or *she* and *her*, carries cognitive meaning. In almost every case, it is the context which tells us who is the agent and who is acted upon. We must then ask: what differences in cognitive, structural orientation are signalled by the fact that the child has not learned this formal rule? In the tests carried out by Jane Torrey it is evident that the children concerned do understand the difference in meaning between *she* and *her* when another person uses the forms; all that remains is that the children themselves do not use the two forms. Our knowledge of the cognitive correlates of grammatical differences is certainly in its infancy; for this is one of very many questions which we simply cannot answer. At the moment we do not know how to construct any kind of experiment which would lead to an answer; we do not even know what type of cognitive correlate we would be looking for.

Bereiter shows even more profound ignorance of the rules of discourse and of syntax when he rejects *In the tree* as an illogical, or badly-formed answer to *Where is the squirrel?* Such elliptical answers are of course used by everyone; they show the appropriate deletion of subject and main verb, leaving the locative which is questioned by *wh-attraction* to the front of the sentence, and flip-flop of auxiliary and subject to produce this sentence from an underlying form which would otherwise have produced *The squirrel is there*. If the child had answered *The tree*, or *Squirrel the tree*, or *The in tree*, we would then assume that he did not understand the syntax of the full form, *The squirrel is in the tree*. Given the data that Bereiter presents, we cannot conclude that the child has no grammar, but only that the investigator does not understand the rules of grammar. It does not necessarily do any harm to use the full form *The squirrel is in the tree*, if one wants to make fully explicit the rules of grammar which the child has internalized. Much of logical analysis consists of making explicit just that kind of internalized rule. But it is hard to believe that any good can come from a program which begins with so many misconceptions about the input data. Bereiter and Engelmann believe that in teaching the child to say *The squirrel is in the tree* or *This is a box* and *This is not a box* they are teaching him an entirely new language, whereas in fact they are only teaching him to produce slightly different forms of the language he already has.

**Logic**

For many generations American schoolteachers have devoted themselves to correcting a small number of nonstandard English rules to their standard equivalents under the impression that they were teaching logic. This view has been reinforced and given theoretical justification by the claim that NNE lacks the means for the expression of logical thought.

Let us consider for a moment the possibility that Negro children do not operate with the same logic that middle-class adults display. This would inevitably mean that sentences of a certain grammatical form would have different truth values for the two types of speakers. One of the most obvious places to look for such a difference is in the handling of the negative, and here we encounter one of the nonstandard items which has been stigmatized as illogical by school-
teachers - the double negative, or as we term it, negative concord. A child who says *He don't know nothing* is often said to be making an illogical statement without knowing it. According to the teacher, the child wants to say *He knows nothing* but puts in an extra negative without realizing it, and so conveys the opposite meaning, *He does not know nothing*, which reduces to *He knows something*. I need not emphasize that this is an absurd interpretation. If a nonstandard speaker wishes to say that *He doesn't know nothing*, he does so by simply placing contrastive stress on both negatives as I have done here (*He don't know nothing*) indicating that they are derived from two underlying negatives in the deep structure. But note that the middle-class speaker does exactly the same thing when he wants to signal the existence of two underlying negatives: *He doesn't know nothing*. In the standard form with one underlying negative (*He doesn't know anything*), the indefinite *anything* contains the same superficial reference to a preceding negative in the surface structure as the nonstandard *nothing* does. In the corresponding positive sentence, the indefinite *something* is used. The dialect difference, like most of the differences between the standard and nonstandard forms, is one of surface form, and has nothing to do with the underlying logic of the sentence.

We can summarize the ways in which the two dialects differ:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive:</th>
<th>Standard English</th>
<th>Nonstandard Negro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>He knows something</em></td>
<td><em>He know something</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative:</td>
<td><em>He doesn't know anything</em></td>
<td><em>He don't know nothing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>He doesn't know nothing</em></td>
<td><em>He don't know nothing</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This array makes it plain that the only difference between the two dialects is in superficial form. When a single negative is found in the deep structure, standard English converts *something* to the indefinite *anything*; NNE converts it to *nothing*. When speakers want to signal the presence of two negatives, they do it in the same way. No one would have any difficulty constructing the same table of truth values for both dialects. English is a rare language in its insistence that the negative particle be incorporated in the first indefinite only. The Anglo-Saxon authors of the Peterborough Chronicle were surely not illogical when they wrote *For ne waeren nan martyrs swa pined also he waeron*, literally, 'For never weren't no martyrs so tortured as these were.' The 'logical' forms of current standard English are simply the accepted conventions of our present-day formal style. Russian, Spanish, French and Hungarian show the same negative concord as nonstandard English, and they are surely not illogical in this. What is termed 'logical' in standard English is of course the conventions which are habitual. The distribution of negative concord in English dialects can be summarized in this way (Labov, et al., 1968, section 3.6; Labov, 1968):

1. In all dialects of English, the negative is attracted to a lone indefinite before the verb: *Nobody knows anything*, not *Anybody doesn't know anything*.
2. In some nonstandard white dialects, the negative also combines optionally with all other indefinites: *Nobody knows nothing, He never took none of them*.
3. In other white nonstandard dialects, the negative may also appear in pre-verbal position in the same clause: *Nobody doesn't know nothing*.
4. In nonstandard Negro English, negative concord is obligatory to all indefinites within the clause, and it may even be added to pre-verbal position in following clauses: *Nobody didn't know he didn't* (meaning, *Nobody knew he did*).

Thus all dialects of English share a categorical rule which attracts the negative to an indefinite subject, and they merely differ in the extent to which the negative particle is also distributed to other indefinites in pre-verbal position. It would have been impossible for us to arrive at this analysis if we did not know that Negro speakers are using the same underlying logic as everyone else.

Negative concord is more firmly established in nonstandard Negro English than in other nonstandard dialects. The white nonstandard speaker shows variation in this rule, saying one time, *Nobody ever goes there* and the next *Nobody never goes there*. Core speakers of the NNE vernacular consistently use the latter form. In repetition
tests which we conducted with adolescent Negro boys (Labov, et al., 1968, section 3.9), standard forms were repeated with negative concord. Here, for example, are three trials by two thirteen-year-old members (Boot and David) of the Thunderbirds.

MODEL BY INTERVIEWER:
Nobody ever sat at any of those desks, anyhow.

BOOT:
2. Nobody never sat any any o' tho' dess, anyhow.
3. Nobody as ever sat at no desses, anyhow.

DAVID:
1. Nobody ever sat in-in-in-in- none o' - say it again?
2. Nobody never sat in none o' tho' <lesses anyhow.
3. Nobody -awvvl Nobody never ex- Dawg!

It can certainly be said that Boot and David fail the test; they have not repeated the sentence correctly – that is, word for word. But have they failed because they could not grasp the meaning of the sentence? The situation is in fact just the opposite; they failed because they perceived only the meaning and not the superficial form. Boot and David are typical of many speakers who do not perceive the surface details of the utterance so much as the underlying semantic structure, which they unhesitatingly translate into the vernacular form. Thus they have asymmetrical system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Nonstandard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Nonstandard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This tendency to process the semantic components directly can be seen even more dramatically in responses to sentences with embedded questions; for example:

MODEL:
I asked Alvin if he knows how to play basketball.

BOOT:
I ax Alvin do he know how to play basketball.

MONEY:
I ax Alvin if – do he know how to play basketball.

MODEL:
I asked Alvin whether he knows how to play basketball.

LARRY F:
1. I axt Alvin does he know how to play basketball.
2. I axt Alvin does he know how to play basketball.

Here the difference between the words used in the model sentence and in the repetition is striking. Again, there is a failure to pass the test. But it is also true that these boys understand the standard sentence, and translate it with extraordinary speed into the NNE form, which is here the regular Southern colloquial form. This form retains the inverted order to signal the underlying meaning of the question, instead of the complementizer if or whether which standard English uses for this purpose. Thus Boot, Money and Larry perceive the deep structure of the model sentence (Figure 1). The complementizers if or whether are not required to express this underlying meaning. They are merely two of the formal options which one dialect selects to signal the embedded question. The colloquial Southern form utilizes a different device – preserving the order of the direct question. To say that this dialect lacks the means for logical expression is to confuse logic with surface detail.

To pass the repetition test, Boot and the others have to learn to listen to surface detail. They do not need a new logic; they need practice in paying attention to the explicit form of any utterance rather than its meaning. Careful attention to surface features is a temporary skill needed for language learning – and neglected thereafter by competent speakers. Nothing more than this is involved in the language training in the Bereiter and Engelmann program, or in most methods of teaching English. There is of course nothing wrong with learning to be explicit. As we have seen, that is one of the main advantages of standard English at its best; but it is important that we recognize what is actually taking place, and what teachers are in fact trying to do.

I doubt if we can teach people to be logical, though we can teach them to recognize the logic that they use. Piaget has shown us that
in middle-class children logic develops much more slowly than grammar, and that we cannot expect four-year-olds to have mastered the conservation of quantity, let alone syllogistic reasoning.

Figure 1

The problems working-class children may have in handling logical operations are not to be blamed on the structure of their language. There is nothing in the vernacular which will interfere with the development of logical thought, for the logic of standard English cannot be distinguished from the logic of any other dialect of English by any test that we can find.

What's wrong with being wrong?

If there is a failure of logic involved here, it is surely in the approach of the verbal deprivation theorists, rather than in the mental abilities of the children concerned. We can isolate six distinct steps in the reasoning which has led to programs such as those of Deutsch, Bereiter and Engelmann:

1. The lower-class child's verbal response to a formal and threatening situation is used to demonstrate his lack of verbal capacity, or verbal deficit.
2. This verbal deficit is declared to be a major cause of the lower-class child's poor performance in school.
3. Since middle-class children do better in school, middle-class speech habits are seen to be necessary for learning.
4. Class and ethnic differences in grammatical form are equated with differences in the capacity for logical analysis.
5. Teaching the child to mimic certain formal speech patterns used by middle-class teachers is seen as teaching him to think logically.
6. Children who learn these formal speech patterns are then said to be thinking logically and it is predicted that they will do much better in reading and arithmetic in the years to follow.

In the previous sections of this paper, I have tried to show that these propositions are wrong, concentrating on (1), (4) and (5). Proposition (3) is the primary logical fallacy which illicitly identifies a form of speech as the cause of middle-class achievement in school. Proposition (6) is the one which is most easily shown to be wrong in fact, as we will note below.

However, it is not too naïve to ask, 'What is wrong with being wrong?' There is no competing educational theory which is being dismantled by this program; and there does not seem to be any great harm in having children repeat This is not a box for twenty minutes a day. We have already conceded that NNE children need help in analysing language into its surface components, and in being more explicit. But there are serious and damaging consequences of the verbal deprivation theory which may be considered under two headings: theoretical bias, and consequences of failure.

Theoretical bias

It is widely recognized that the teacher's attitude towards the child is an important factor in his success or failure. The work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) on self-fulfilling prophecies shows that the progress of children in the early grades can be dramatically affected by a single random labelling of certain children as 'intellectual bloomers'. When the everyday language of Negro children is stigmatized as 'not a language at all' and 'not possessing the means for logical thought', the effect of such a labelling is repeated many times during each day of the school year. Every time that a child uses a form of NNE without the copula or with negative concord, he will be labelling himself for the teacher's benefit as 'illogical', as a
'nonconceptual thinker'. Bereiter and Engelmann, Deutsch and Jensen are giving teachers a ready-made, theoretical basis for the prejudice they already feel against the lower-class Negro child and his language. When they hear him say I don't want none or They mine, they will be hearing through the bias provided by the verbal deprivation theory: not an English dialect different from theirs, but the primitive mentality of the savage mind.

But what if the teacher succeeds in training the child to use the new language consistently? The verbal deprivation theory holds that this will lead to a whole chain of successes in school, and that the child will be drawn away from the vernacular culture into the middle-class world. Undoubtedly this will happen with a few isolated individuals, just as it happens in every school system today, for a few children. But we are concerned not with the few but the many, and for the majority of Negro children the distance between them and the school is bound to widen under this approach.

Proponents of the deficit theory have a strange view of social organization outside of the classroom; they see the attraction of the peer group as a 'substitute' for success and gratification normally provided by the school. For example, Whiteman and Deutsch (1968, pp. 86-7) introduce their account of the deprivation hypothesis with an eye-witness account of a child who accidentally dropped his school notebook into a puddle of water and walked away without picking it up: 'A policeman who had been standing nearby walked over to the puddle and stared at the notebook with some degree of disbelief.' The child's alienation from school is explained as the result of his coming to school without the 'verbal, conceptual, attentional and learning skills requisite to school success'. The authors see the child as 'suffering from feelings of inferiority because he is failing; ... he withdraws or becomes hostile, finding gratification elsewhere, such as in his peer group'.

To view the peer group as a mere substitute for school shows an extraordinary lack of knowledge of adolescent culture. In our studies in south-central Harlem we have seen the reverse situation: the children who are rejected by the peer group are quite likely to succeed in school. In middle-class suburban areas, many children do fail in school because of their personal deficiencies; in ghetto areas, it is the healthy, vigorous, popular child with normal intelligence who cannot read and fails all along the line. It is not necessary to document here the influence of the peer group upon the behavior of youth in our society; but we may note that somewhere between the time that children first learn to talk and puberty, their language is restructured to fit the rules used by their peer group. From a linguistic viewpoint, the peer group is certainly a more powerful influence than the family (for example, Gans, 1962). Less directly, the pressures of peer-group activity are also felt within the school. Many children, particularly those who are not doing well in school, show a sudden sharp down-turn in the fourth and fifth grades, and children in the ghetto schools are no exception. It is at the same age, at nine or ten years old, that the influence of the vernacular peer group becomes predominant (see Wilmott, 1966). Instead of dealing with isolated individuals, the school is then dealing with children who are integrated into groups of their own, with rewards and value systems which oppose those of the school. Those who know the sociolinguistic situation cannot doubt that reaction against the Bereiter-Engelmann approach in later years will be even more violent on the part of the students involved, and that the rejection of the school system will be even more categorical.

The essential fallacy of the verbal-deprivation theory lies in tracing the educational failure of the child to his personal deficiencies. At present, these deficiencies are said to be caused by his home environment. It is traditional to explain a child's failure in school by his inadequacy; but when failure reaches such massive proportions, it seems to us necessary to look at the social and cultural obstacles to learning, and the inability of the school to adjust to the social situation. Operation Headstart is designed to repair the child, rather than the school; to the extent that it is based upon this inverted logic, it is bound to fail.

Consequences of failure

The second area in which the verbal deprivation theory is doing serious harm to our educational system is in the consequences of this failure, and the reaction to it. As failures are reported of Operation Headstart, the interpretations which we receive will be from the same educational psychologists who designed this program.
fault will be found not in the data, the theory, nor in the methods used, but rather in the children who have failed to respond to the opportunities offered to them. When Negro children fail to show the significant advance which the deprivation theory predicts, it will be further proof of the profound gulf which separates their mental processes from those of civilized, middle-class mankind.

A sense of the 'failure' of Operation Headstart is already in the air. Some prominent figures in the program are reacting to this situation by saying that intervention did not take place early enough. Caldwell (1967, p. 16) notes that:

... the research literature of the last decade dealing with social-class differences has made abundantly clear that all parents are not qualified to provide even the basic essentials of physical and psychological care to their children.

The deficit theory now begins to focus on the 'long-standing patterns of parental deficit' which fill the literature. 'There is, perhaps unfortunately,' writes Caldwell (1967, p. 17), 'no literacy test for motherhood.' Failing such eugenic measures, she has proposed 'educationally oriented day care for culturally deprived children between six months and three years of age'. The children are returned home each evening to maintain primary emotional relationships with their own families, but during the day they are removed to 'hopefully prevent the deceleration in rate of development which seems to occur in many deprived children around the age of two to three years'.

There are others who feel that even the best of the intervention programs, such as those of Bereiter and Engelmann, will not help the Negro child no matter when they are applied - that we are faced once again with the 'inevitability hypothesis' of the genetic inferiority of the Negro people. Many readers of this paper are undoubtedly familiar with the paper of Arthur Jensen in the Harvard Educational Review (1969) which received immediate and widespread publicity. Jensen (p. 3) begins with the following quotation from the United States Commission on Civil Rights (1967) as evidence of the failure of compensatory education:

The fact remains, however, that none of the programs appear to have raised significantly the achievement of participating pupils, as a group, within the period evaluated by the Commission (p. 136).

Jensen believes that the verbal deprivation theorists with whom he had been associated - Deutsch, Whiteman, Katz, Bereiter - have been given every opportunity to prove their case - and have failed. This opinion is part of the argument which leads him to the overall conclusion that 'the preponderance of the evidence is ... less consistent with a strictly environmental hypothesis than with the genetic hypothesis'; that racism, or the belief in the genetic inferiority of Negroes, is a correct view in the light of the present evidence.

Jensen argues that the middle-class white population is differentiated from the working-class white and Negro population in the ability for 'cognitive or conceptual learning', which Jensen calls Level II intelligence as against mere 'associative learning' or Level I intelligence:

Certain neural structures must also be available for Level II abilities to develop, and these are conceived of as being different from the neural structures underlying Level I. The genetic factors involved in each of these types of ability are presumed to have become differentially distributed in the population as a function of social class, since Level II has been most important for scholastic performance under the traditional methods of instruction (Jensen, 1969, p. 114).

Jensen found, for example, that one group of middle-class children were helped by their concept-forming ability to recall twenty familiar objects that could be classified into four categories: animals, furniture, clothing, or foods. Lower-class Negro children did just as well as middle-class children with a miscellaneous set, but showed no improvement with objects that could be so categorized.

The research of the educational psychologists cited here is presented in formal and objective style, and is widely received as impartial scientific evidence. Jensen's paper has already been reported by Joseph Alsop and William F. Buckley Jr (New York Post, 20 March 1969) as 'massive, apparently authoritative ...'. It is not my intention to examine these materials in detail; but it is important to realize that we are dealing with special pleading by those who have a strong personal commitment. Jensen is concerned with class differences in cognitive style and verbal learning. His earlier papers incorporated the cultural deprivation theory which he now rejects as a basic explanation.15 Jensen (1968, p. 167) classified the Negro 15. In Deutsch, et al. (1968), Jensen expounds the verbal deprivation theory in considerable detail for example: 'During this labeling period.
children who fail in school as 'slow-learners' and 'mentally-re­tarded', and urged that we find out how much their retardation is
due to environmental factors and how much is due to 'more basic
biological factors'. (Jensen, 1968, p. 167). His conviction that the
problem must be located in the child leads him to accept and reprint
some truly extraordinary data. To support the genetic hypothesis
Jensen (1969, p. 83) cites the following percentage estimates by
Heber (1968) of the racial distribution of mental retardation (based
upon IQs below seventy-five) in the general population:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SES</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Negro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These estimates, that almost half of lower-class Negro children are
mentally retarded, could be accepted only by someone who has no
knowledge of the children or the community. If he had wished to,
some very important social-class differences may exert their effects on
verbal learning. Lower-class parents engage in relatively little of this
naming or "labelling" play with their children ... That words are
discrete labels for things seems to be better known by the middle-class
child entering first grade than by the lower-class child. Much of this
knowledge is gained in the parent-child interaction, as when the parent
looks at a picture book with the child ..." (p. 119).

16. Heber's studies of eighty-eight Negro mothers in Milwaukee are
cited frequently throughout Jensen's paper. The estimates in this table
are not given in relation to a particular Milwaukee sample, but for the
general United States population. Heber's study was specifically designed
to cover an area of Milwaukee which was known to contain a large
concentration of retarded children, Negro and white, and he has stated
that his findings were 'grossly misinterpreted' by Jensen (Milwaukee Sen­
tinel, 11 June 1969).

Jensen could easily have checked this against the records of any
school in any urban ghetto area. Taking IQ tests at their face value,
there is no correspondence between these figures and the com­
munities we know. For example, among seventy-five boys we worked
with in central Harlem who would fall into status categories 4 or 5,
there were only three with IQs below seventy-five: one spoke very
little English, one could barely see, and the third was emotionally
disturbed. When the second was retested, he scored ninety-one, and
the third retested at eighty-seven.17 There are of course hundreds
of realistic reports available to Jensen; he simply selected one which
would strengthen his case for the genetic inferiority of Negro chil­
dren.

The frequent use of tables and statistics by educational psycholo­
gists serves to give outside readers the impression that this field is
a science and that the opinions of the authors should be given the
same attention and respect that we give to the conclusions of physi­
cists or chemists. But careful examination of the input data will
often show that there is no direct relationship between the conclu­
sions and the evidence (in Jensen's case, between IQ Tests in a
specially selected district of Milwaukee and intelligence of lower­
class Negro children). Furthermore, the operations performed upon
the data frequently carry us very far from the common-sense ex­
perience which is our only safeguard against conclusions heavily
weighted by the author's theory. As another example we may take
some of the evidence presented by Whiteman and Deutsch for the
cultural hypothesis. The core of Deutsch's environmental explana­
tion of low school performance is the Deprivation Index - a numeri­
cal scale based on six dichotomized variables. One variable is 'the
educational aspirational level of the parent for the child'. Most
people would agree that a parent who did not care if a child finished
high school would be a disadvantageous factor in the child's educa­
tional career. In dichotomizing this variable Deutsch was faced with
the fact that the educational aspiration of Negro parents is in fact
very high - higher than for the white population, as he shows in

17. The IQ scores given here are from group rather than individual
tests and must therefore not be weighted heavily: the scores are from the
Pintner-Cunningham test, usually given in the first grade in New York
City schools in the 1950s.
other papers. In order to fit this data into the Deprivation Index, he therefore set the cutting point for the deprived group as 'college or less' (Whiteman and Deutsch, 1968, p.100). Thus if a Negro child's father says that he wants his son to go all the way through college, the child will fall into the 'deprived' class on this variable. In order to receive the two points given to the 'less deprived' on the index, it would be necessary for the child's parent to insist on graduate school or medical school! This decision is never discussed by the authors: it simply stands as a fait accompli in the tables. Readers of this literature who are not committed to one point of view would be wise to look as carefully as possible at the original data which lies behind each statement and check the conclusions against their own knowledge of the community and people being described.

No one can doubt that the inadequacy of Operation Headstart and of the verbal deprivation hypothesis has now become a crucial issue in our society. The controversy which has arisen over Jensen's article typically assumes that programs such as Bereiter and Engelmann's have tested and measured the verbal capacity of the ghetto child. The cultural sociolinguistic obstacles to this intervention program are not considered; and the argument proceeds upon the data provided by the large, friendly interviewers that we have seen at work in the extracts given above.

18. Table 15.1 in Deutsch, et al. (1967, p. 312, section C), shows that some degree of college training was desired by 96, 97 and 100 per cent of Negro parents in Class levels I, II and III respectively. The corresponding figures for whites were 79, 95 and 97 per cent. In an earlier version of this paper, this discussion could be interpreted as implying that White- man and Deutsch had used data in the same way as Jensen to rate the Negro group as low as possible. As they point out [personal communica- tion], the inclusion of this item in the Deprivation Index had the oppo- site effect and it could easily have been omitted if that had been their intention. They also argue that they had sound statistical grounds for dichotomizing as they did. The criticism which I intended to make is that there is something drastically wrong with operations which produce definitions of deprivation such as the one cited here. It should of course be noted that Whiteman and Deutsch have strongly opposed Jensen's genetic hypothesis and vigorously criticized his logic and data.

19. The negative report of the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University on Operation Headstart was published in the New York Times (on 13 April 1969). This evidence for the failure of the program was widely publicized and it seems likely that the report's discouraging conclusions will be used by conservative Congressmen as a weapon against any kind of expenditure for disadvantaged children, especially Negroes. The two hypotheses mentioned to account for this failure is that the impact of Headstart is lost through poor teaching later on, and more recently, that poor children have been so badly damaged in infancy by their lower-class environment that Headstart cannot make much differ- ence. The third 'inevitable' hypothesis of Jensen is not reported here.

The linguistic view

Linguists are in an excellent position to demonstrate the fallacies of the verbal-deprivation theory. All linguists agree that nonstandard dialects are highly structured systems. They do not see these dialects as accumulations of errors caused by the failure of their speakers to master standard English. When linguists hear Negro children saying He crazy or Her my friend, they do not hear a primitive language. Nor do they believe that the speech of working-class people is merely a form of emotional expression, incapable of expressing logi- cal thought.

All linguists who work with NNE recognize that it is a separate system, closely related to standard English but set apart from the surrounding white dialects by a number of persistent and systematic differences. Differences in analysis by various linguists in recent years are the inevitable products of differing theoretical approaches and perspectives as we explore these dialect patterns by different routes – differences which are rapidly diminishing as we exchange our findings. For example, Stewart differs with me on how deeply the invariant be of She be always messin' around is integrated into the semantics of the copula system with am, is, are, and so on. The position and meaning of have . . . ed in NNE is very unclear, and there are a variety of positions on this point. But the grammatical features involved are not the fundamental predicates of the logical system. They are optional ways of contrasting, foregrounding, em- phasizing, or deleting elements of the underlying sentence. There are a few semantic features of NNE grammar which may be unique to this system. But the semantic features we are talking about here are items such as 'habitual', 'general', 'intensive'. These linguistic features involved are not the fundamental predicates of the logical system. They are optional ways of contrasting, foregrounding, emphasizing, or deleting elements of the underlying sentence. There are a few semantic features of NNE grammar which may be unique to this system. But the semantic features we are talking about here are items such as 'habitual', 'general', 'intensive'. These linguistic features involved are not the fundamental predicates of the logical system. They are optional ways of contrasting, foregrounding, emphasizing, or deleting elements of the underlying sentence. There are a few semantic features of NNE grammar which may be unique to this system. But the semantic features we are talking about here are items such as 'habitual', 'general', 'intensive'. These linguistic
markers are essentially points of view – different ways of looking at the same events, and they do not determine the truth values of propositions upon which all speakers of English agree.

The great majority of the differences between NNE and standard English do not even represent such subtle semantic features as those, but rather extensions and restrictions of certain formal rules and different choices of redundant elements. For example, standard English uses two signals to express the progressive, be and -ing, while NNE often drops the former. Standard English signals the third person in the present by the subject noun phrase and by a third singular -s; NNE does not have this second redundant feature. On the other hand, NNE uses redundant negative elements in negative concord, in possessives like mines, uses or either where standard English uses a simple or, and so on.

When linguists say that NNE is a system, we mean that it differs from other dialects in regular and rule-governed ways, so that it has equivalent ways of expressing the same logical content. When we say that it is a separate subsystem, we mean that there are compensating sets of rules which combine in different ways to preserve the distinctions found in other dialects. Thus, as noted above, NNE does not use the if or whether complementizer in embedded questions, but the meaning is preserved by the formal device of reversing the order of subject and auxiliary.

Linguists therefore speak with a single voice in condemningBerlcrew's view that the vernacular can be disregarded. I exchanged views on this matter with all of the participants in the Twentieth Annual Georgetown Round Table where this paper was first presented, and their responses were in complete agreement in rejecting the verbal deprivation theory and its misapprehension of the nature of language. The other papers in the report (Alatis, 1970) of that conference testified to the strength of the linguistic view in this area. It was William Stewart who first pointed out that Negro English should be studied as a coherent system, and in this all of us follow his lead. Dialectologists like Raven McDavid, Albert Marckwardt and Roger Shuy have been working for years against the notion that vernacular dialects are inferior and illogical means of communication. Linguists now agree that teachers must know as much as possible about Negro nonstandard English as a communicative system.

The exact nature and relative importance of the structural differences between NNE and standard English are not in question here. It is agreed that the teacher must approach the teaching of the standard through a knowledge of the child's own system. The methods used in teaching English as a foreign language are recommended, not to declare that NNE is a foreign language, but to underline the importance of studying the native dialect as a coherent system for communication. This is in fact the method that should be applied in any English class.

Linguists are also in an excellent position to assess Jensen's claim that the middle-class white population is superior to the working-class and Negro populations in the distribution of Level II, or conceptual, intelligence. The notion that large numbers of children have no capacity for conceptual thinking would inevitably mean that they speak a primitive language, for even the simplest linguistic rules we discussed above involve conceptual operations more complex than those used in the experiment Jensen cites. Let us consider what is involved in the use of the general English rule that incorporates the negative with the first indefinite. To learn and use this rule, one must first identify the class of indefinites involved – any, one, ever, which are formally quite diverse. How is this done? These indefinites share a number of common properties which can be expressed as the concepts 'indefinite', 'hypothetical', and 'nonpartitive'. One might argue that these indefinites are learned as a simple list, by association learning. But this is only one of the many syntactic rules involving indefinites – rules known to every speaker of English, which could not be learned except by an understanding of their common, abstract properties. For example, everyone knows, unconsciously, that anyone cannot be used with preterite verbs or progressives. One does not say, Anyone went to the party or Anyone went to the party. The rule which operates here is sensitive to the property [+ hypothetical] of the indefinites. Whenever the proposition is not inconsistent with this feature, anyone can be used. Everyone knows, therefore, that one can say Anyone who was anyone went to the party or if anyone went to the party... or if anyone went to the party... There is another property of anyone which is grasped unconsciously by all native speakers of English; it is [+ distributive]. Thus if we need one more man for a game of bridge or basketball,
and there is a crowd outside, we ask *Do any of you want to play?* not *Do some of you want to play?* In both cases, we are considering a plurality, but with *any*, we consider them one at a time, or distributively.

What are we then to make of Jensen's contention that Level I thinkers cannot make use of the concept *animal* to group together a miscellaneous set of toy animals? It is one thing to say that someone is not in the habit of using a certain skill. But to say that his failure to use it is genetically determined implies dramatic consequences for other forms of behavior, which are not found in experience. The knowledge of what people must do in order to learn language makes Jensen's theories seem more and more distant from the realities of human behavior. Like Bereiter and Engelmann, Jensen is handicapped by his ignorance of the most basic facts about human language and the people who speak it.

There is no reason to believe that any nonstandard vernacular is in itself an obstacle to learning. The chief problem is ignorance of language on the part of all concerned. Our job as linguists is to remedy this ignorance; but Bereiter and Engelmann want to reinforce it and justify it. Teachers are now being told to ignore the language of Negro children as unworthy of attention and useless for learning. They are being taught to hear every natural utterance of the child as evidence of his mental inferiority. As linguists we are unanimous in condemning this view as bad observation, bad theory and bad practice.

That educational psychology should be strongly influenced by a theory so false to the facts of language is unfortunate; but that children should be the victims of this ignorance is intolerable. It may seem that the fallacies of the verbal-deprivation theory are so obvious that they are hardly worth exposing. I have tried to show that such exposure is an important job for us to undertake. If linguists can contribute some of their available knowledge and energy toward this end, we will have done a great deal to justify the support that society has given to basic research in our field.

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