A Pilot Study of Subjective Reactions of University Students to Various Speech Styles

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research reported on here was to investigate the adaptation of a method for measuring the subjective reactions of subjects to various speech styles in the Japanese context. The method employed here is known as the 'matched-guise' technique. This technique was developed by Wallace Lambert and his associates (See Lambert et al 1960; Anisfeld, Bogo and Lambert 1962; Gardner and Lambert 1972), and, briefly, involves making a tape-recording of the various dialects or styles to be investigated then recording subjects' responses to questions about the characteristics of each speaker on the tape. The technique is known as 'matched-guise' since it employs a single speaker who is able to use two or more speech styles fluently. Thus, subjects' reactions to the speaker in his various 'guises' will show their attitudes toward the dialect or style itself and not to a particular speaker of it. This sort of attitudinal information is important in the field of language planning, in educational policy-making and in language curriculum planning. For example, it is of interest to know what dialect of a particular language people feel is most suitable for use on radio and television or for use in schools or in government; in education, it is important to know how parents and students feel about the most useful foreign language to learn and which variety of that foreign language is most favored. The matched-guise technique has been used in Canada, the U.S., Egypt, Israel, Peru and the Philippines among other places, but not yet in Japan. Therefore, before any meaningful data can be gained, it is necessary to explore the use of the technique with a pilot study in Japan. This is the purpose of the present research.

METHOD

MATERIALS

A tape recording was made containing six speech styles: Kanto-ben Japanese, Kansai-ben Japanese, Japanese English (all three by one speaker), American English, British English, and Sri Lanka English (each by a different speaker). The speakers were instructed to speak about the difference between radio and television announcers. A ten-item questionnaire in English was produced to elicit subjects' attitudes toward each speech style. Subjects were asked to say where they thought the speaker came from and how old the speaker was. Three questions were asked about the subjects' attitudes toward the speakers: how likeable the speaker was, how intelligent, and how good a leader. Five questions were asked about the suitability of the style in various domains of use: the home, a company office, a school, the Diet, and on radio or TV. A six-point attitude scale was employed.

SUBJECTS

The subjects in this study were mainly third-year students of English Language Education at Hiroshin University. There were 22 males and 26 females. Eighteen were speakers of Kansai-ben Japanese, the rest of other dialects of Japanese. Forty-three had never traveled outside Japan, two had been to Britain, three to the U.S.
All subjects were tested at one time. Questionnaires were distributed, instructions given, and a sample tape played to introduce the subjects to the technique. Then each voice on the tape was played and after each, the subjects were asked to answer the questions on the questionnaire. Figure 1 shows the comparison of attitudes toward Kanto-ben, Kansai-ben and Japanese English. These three varieties were produced by a single speaker. Note that

the subjects felt that the Kansai speaker was most likeable, the Kanto speaker least likeable. However, the English speaker was considered to be more intelligent than either of the other two, as well as a better leader. Kansai dialect was thought to be most suitable at home, English least suitable, but Kanto most suitable for use at work, at school, in the Diet and on radio and TV. The Kansai dialect was deemed quite unsuitable for use in the Diet or in broadcasting. Thus it appears that there are quite definite attitudes toward these three speech styles and also definite domains for their use. Figure 2 shows the comparison of attitudes and domains for Japanese English, American English and British English. These three styles are spoken by different people on the tape. Note that British English appears...
to be most favored in all areas and that American and Japanese English are relatively close in most areas. [Note: other results are not discussed in this condensed version.]

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to gain experience in the use of the matched-guise technique and to investigate its applicability to the Japanese situation for gaining information about attitudes toward various speech styles and their suitability in different domains of use. As El-Dash and Tucker (1975) point out, the technique 'has been widely used to examine the relationship between language and ethnic identity and to examine the prestige, status and perceived utility of one code in relation to another.' This study has shown that the technique has possibilities for use in Japan. The data on Kanto and Kansai Japanese and Japanese English are probably the most reliable owing to the use of a single speaker for all three. That standard Japanese (Kanto) is preferred over the non-standard dialect (Kansai) in all domains except the home, which fits data from other studies (Remillard 1972) and suggests that the emphasis on the standardization of Japanese begun in the 1950's (Nomoto 1975) is bearing fruit. The Kansai dialect was perceived to be least suitable for use in the Diet and in broadcasting. It is interesting that the speaker when using Japanese English was perceived as more intelligent and a better leader than when using Japanese, either
standard or dialect, but that the dialect speaker was more likeable than the other two. English was considered most suitable in school and broadcasting (though less so than Kanto-ben) and least suitable at home and in the Diet.

The data on the three varieties of English is less certain owing to the use of different speakers for each. It is possible that subjects responded more to voice quality and speaking ability than to language variety. The preference for British English on all variables was interesting and needs further study. It has definite implications for English teaching policy in Japan.

Three problems were identified in the use of the matched-guise technique in this study. One was that of the meaning of age as an attitude variable. No significant difference was found between the estimates of the ages of the speakers of the various styles when one would have expected the speakers of the more prestigious varieties (Kanto and British English) to have been perceived as older than speakers of the other varieties. A second problem was that the use of the term 'Diet' caused some confusion among subjects. In future studies a different term should be employed. Indeed, in future studies, the questionnaire should be in Japanese rather than English. A final problem was in finding suitable bi-dialectal speakers for the tape. Many Japanese apparently find it difficult to switch dialects at the behest of an experimenter, and methods for obtaining 'natural' samples of speech styles will have to be investigated. Further research using the matched-guise technique is planned with high school students as subjects.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


