Sociolinguistic and Pedagogical Dimensions of Dialects in Education
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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

I. Dialect and Education

Numerous historical developments have led to the creation of societies where more than one linguistic code (be it a language or a dialect) is used, either exclusively or partially, in different communicative domains such as the media, administration, education and everyday life. It is common practice in bidialectal speech communities that standard dialects are strongly favoured in education whereas the role of the nonstandard dialects in education is highly disputed. Several countries in Europe have successfully dealt with the use of dialects in education in the last thirty years or so. On the contrary, in some other countries, including Cyprus, such matters have yet to be adequately addressed and effectively resolved. Some educators are still debating as to whether dialects and nonstandard languages should be used in education because, among other concerns, they erroneously question the adequacy of dialects in meeting speakers’ communicative needs. In the same vein, others do not seem to be convinced that conducting education in a dialect is beneficial for all the members (monodialectal and bidialectal) of a community. Moreover, the ‘supremacy’ of standard languages still prevails in most countries at the expense of local vernaculars and dialects. While the majority of researchers in the field nowadays do not hold negative attitudes towards dialects and nonstandard languages, there are strong voices advocating against the use of dialects in education.

It could be argued that the potential use of non-standard dialects in education could contribute to the elevation of the status of non-standard dialects in a speech community and prevent their decay and possible extinction. Such a development would be in accordance with the respect for linguistic and cultural diversity advocated by the European Union. Such policy is now enshrined in Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which states: "The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity." On the initiative of the European Parliament, which has adopted a series of resolutions on this subject, the European Union has taken action to safeguard and promote the regional and minority languages of Europe. Linguists know very well that the designation of a linguistic code as a language or a dialect is usually based on socio-historical and political criteria rather than on purely linguistic ones. Therefore, even if local dialects do not directly fall under the category of
regional and minority languages, they should be treated with the same respect that is bestowed to standard or ‘official’ languages. This respect towards regional and minority languages is indispensable since they are, as in the case of standard languages, the carriers of local cultures and a part of people’s identity.

The aforementioned issues are of great relevance to Cyprus because the Greek Cypriot community is a bidialectal speech community with the vast majority of the population having the nonstandard dialect as their mother tongue. At the same time, the language of education in Cypriot state schools is Standard Modern Greek (SMG). This situation may be a source of problems for both teachers and students which have not been sufficiently and adequately addressed by the authorities for many years. Recently, however, the role of dialect in education has been the focus of research by local scholars in Cyprus (Pavlou and Papapavlou, 2002; Yiakumetti, 2003; Papapavlou, 2004; Papapavlou and Pavlou, 2005) culminating in the organization of a relevant conference in November 2005. The conference entitled “1st International Conference on Dialectal and Bidialectal Education” was organized by Associate Professor Andreas Papapavlou and Assistant Professor Pavlos Pavlou of the Department of English Studies of the University of Cyprus. A great number of academics and researchers from Cyprus, the UK, Spain, Switzerland as well as officials from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Cyprus), primary-school teachers and graduate students attended the conference.

Almost 20 years ago, a similar Workshop on Dialect and Education was held in Kerkrade, the Netherlands in 1987 as part of a research project directed by Professors Jenny Cheshire and Viv Edwards. These two distinguished scholars as well as two other eminent researchers from the EU, Professor Richard Watts from Switzerland and Professor Juan Manuel Hernandez-Campoy from Spain served as the invited speakers for the aforementioned highly specialized conference. Since Cyprus, a new EU member, is in the process of reviewing its national educational policy, such a conference was timely; it could offer local language policy makers the opportunity to acquaint themselves with various approaches to language in education, challenge traditional ideas about dialects, and offer insights derived from sound research on educational problems which are posed by language variation.

Like the Workshop in Kerkrade (see Cheshire et al. 1989 for the work presented at this workshop), the present conference aimed at bringing together researchers who have worked in the field of dialect education in different European countries with local academics and researchers recognizing the need of pooling their resources together, disseminating their research findings and benefitting from each other’s individual experiences. Furthermore, this conference was intended to revive and renew creative interest in dialect
education that would serve as a vehicle for further research not only among scholars directly involved in the topic, but also among language planners and language practitioners. The current renewed research in dialects in education, as shown in the papers delivered at the conference, has prompted the preparation of the present edited volume which aims to serve the needs of the international and local researchers who have an interest in language policy and language planning.

II. Review of papers in this volume

The theoretical, descriptive and experimental studies that are presented in this volume deal mainly with (a) the status of non-standard dialects, (b) their relation and coexistence with standard or official languages and (c) their use or non-use in education. The volume consists of twelve papers which are presented in four thematic areas. The first area, Diachronic Issues in Dialects in Education, consists of three papers by (1) Jenny Cheshire, (2) Viv Edwards and (3) Juan Manuel Hernandez Campoy.

Professor Jenny Cheshire of Queen Mary College in London proposed several solutions that sociolinguists can offer in relation to dialectal education. Focusing mainly on the English language, her paper considered two aspects of sociolinguistic research that are relevant to the question of dialectal education: research in social dialectology and research carried out in school classrooms. Research carried out in classrooms is discussed in terms of initiatives in bidialectal education, the use of dialect in the classroom, research on children’s spoken language at school, and research on children’s school writing. The paper concludes that both pure and applied research on dialect is essential in order to develop realistic and effective educational policies, and that there is much evidence to show that children reach higher levels of educational attainment when their dialect has a recognised and explicitly valued place within the educational system.

Professor Vivian Edwards of Reading University in the UK discussed the issue of multilingual Europe and the importance of preserving non-standard dialects. Her paper explored issues relating to educational materials that have traditionally been based on the standard language and she stressed the need for coming up with alternative approaches to language diversity that relate with non-standard dialects. Four developments are suggested, involving other language materials, dual language texts, multilingual, multimedia stories and multivariety resources that can be used to highlight the implications for curriculum and pedagogy. The writer concludes that if the heteroglossia of everyday life is more accurately reflected in the classroom, then positive messages will be sent out.
Professor Juan Manual-Hernández-Campoy of the University of Murcia in the south of Spain analyzed through a historical retrospect the constant fight of non-standard dialects for survival against oppression from standard dialects. His paper highlighted the fact that multilingualism is a phenomenon common to nearly all the countries in the world. The majority of the world’s nations speak more than one language, and what is difficult is to locate a genuinely monolingual country. Even Europe’s countries are nearly all multilingual and contain linguistic minorities. He concludes that the dialect bears a cross in a battle against the standard.

The second thematic area, Historical and Current Issues in Language-in-Education Policy and Planning, consists of two papers by (1) Dimitra Karoulla-Vrikki and (2) Andreas Papapavlou and Pavlos Pavlou.

Dr. Dimitra Karoulla-Vrikki’s paper gives a detailed account of the language policy practiced in Cyprus from 1960 up to 1997 and analyzes the way each government dealt with the dialect in terms of education throughout the years. Her paper attempted to demonstrate that in the domain of (Greek-Cypriot) education from 1960 to 1997 language policy aimed at either Hellenization, which emphasized Greek ethnic identity and reflected language policy in ethnic nations or Cypriotization, which emphasized Cypriot state identity and reflected language policy in civic nations. These language policies were inextricably linked to the political developments on the island and the ideological orientations of Greek-Cypriots.

Dr. Andreas Papapavlou and Dr. Pavlos Pavlou discussed the issue of literacy and language-in-education policy in bidialectal settings. Their paper (a) investigated primary teachers’ views on the use of GCD and how this usage affects students’ literacy acquisition (i.e. linguistic performance, educational attainment, and psychological welfare), (b) examined how teachers view the adequacy of GCD as a linguistic system, (c) delineated those factors that shaped teachers’ attitudes toward GCD, (d) discussed the relation between dialect use and ethnic identity and (e) explored teachers’ stance on language policy matters.

The third thematic area, Aspects of Dialect Use in the Classroom, consists of four papers by (1) Richard Watts, (2) Andrie Yiakoumetti, (3) Elena Ioannidou and (4) Pavlos Pavlou.

Professor Richard Watts of the University of Bern in Switzerland stressed the fact that German-speaking Swiss consider local dialects rather than German as their mother tongue and that the Swiss-German dialect is currently used in all aspects of private and public life, including university. He indicated that every child has the right to be educated in the mother tongue but nowadays it is difficult to define a country’s mother tongue since virtually all urban areas throughout the world are by now multilingual. Children rarely come to school with the same mother tongue, and when the “mother tongue” is a dialect,
different teaching approaches are required without impeding a learner’s access to the standard.

Dr. Androula Yiakoumetti proposed that the deliberate and systematic comparison of the dialect to the standard, through the use of specifically designed teaching material, can raise the linguistic awareness of elementary school students and consequently raise their performance in standard Greek. The main issue of her paper was the possibility of learning the standard by exploiting the dialect as a facilitating tool. For that purpose, a bidialectal language model was designed and then applied through an intervention programme in an urban and a rural primary school in Cyprus. The model was designed in order to encourage formal and conscious reflection on language differences and similarities between bidialectal speakers’ two related codes. Quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed a marked improvement in learners’ standard production, in sense that dialectal occurrences were reduced.

Dr. Elena Ioannidou recorded, through an ethnographic approach, the linguistic attitudes of elementary school students on their mother tongue and the teachers’ and officials’ of the Ministry of Education position on the issue. Her paper explored the issue of bidialectalism in the Greek Cypriot primary school classroom, examining when and how standard Modern Greek and the Greek Cypriot dialect were used by the students and to some extent by their teachers. The main aim of the paper was to understand the issue of bidialectalism in the context of classroom talk. It was seen that despite the stated policy, the dialect is a reality in the classroom and that it is very possible that students have problems in expressing themselves adequately in the 'language of the classroom' which is the standard rather than the dialect. If this is the case, Ioannidou states, then policy making needs to reconsider the issue of bidialectalism in the classroom.

In his study, Dr. Pavlou investigated teachers’ attitudes towards the usage of the Greek Cypriot Dialect and presented specific examples where it is used in different subjects of the curriculum in primary education. The aims of the study were: to elicit teachers’ views on the use of the dialect in the classroom and to look at what actually goes on in the classroom with regard to the use of the CD and especially to investigate the effect of school subject on dialect use. The data for the study was derived from the following sources: a) questionnaires completed by the teachers b) guided interviews with a representative number of teachers and c) transcriptions of lessons taped in primary schools. The results showed that the teachers behaved, with regard to dialect use, to a large extent, similarly to the teachers in the Pavlou and Papapavlou 2004 study. In general, teachers correct themselves much of the time when they use CD during lessons, use CD to create a relaxing and more pleasant classroom atmosphere, often use the CD to explain difficult concepts and theories, etc. Teachers also correct students who use the CD orally during
lessons and especially when using the CD in their writing. Moreover, the dialect is used more frequently in subjects or activities that offer the students the opportunity to express their own ideas.

The fourth thematic area, *Psycholinguistic and Sociolinguistic Dimensions of Bidialectalism*, consists of three papers by (1) Andreas Papapavlou, (2) Andreas Papapavlou and Thekla Kouridou and (3) Stavroula Tsiplakou.

Dr. Andreas Papapavlou presented a study on linguistic attitudes which explored the acceptance or rejection of dialectal or bidialectal education in Cyprus. The paper investigated the role language attitudes can play in accepting future changes in language policy. For the purposes of this study, Greek Cypriot university students were asked, through the use of questionnaires, about the possibility of introducing the Cypriot dialect as a medium of instruction in primary schools, the perceived effects that such a change in language policy may bring about and whether such changes in policy are deemed acceptable and/or even desirable in Cyprus. Students’ responses were statistically examined and it was concluded that the proposal of introducing the dialect as a medium of instruction would be rejected.

In another study, Dr. Papapavlou and Kouridou examined experimentally whether bidialectism has a positive impact on metalinguistic awareness in comparison to monodialectism. The results of the study have shown that the increased metalinguistic ability and awareness found among Greek Cypriot bidialectal speakers can have a positive impact on their further understanding of the standard language as well as enhancing the learning of additional languages. Indeed, certain metalinguistic and metacognitive skills of bidialectal students were more enhanced than those of their monolingual counterparts.

Dr. Stavroula Tsiplakou’s paper focused on code-switching and code-mixing in high school students and their importance for the correct linguistic description of mixed Cypriot Greek as well as for the cultivation of critical literacy. An attempt was made to relate actual linguistic practices and discourses on these practices to linguistic, sociolinguistic and (critical) discourse-analytic approaches to variation. The study had the following objectives in mind: (i) to construct a (linguistic) model of the type(s) of variation involved, (ii) to show the precise nature of the relationship between the overall model of variation and specific parameters of linguistic/pedagogical practice, and (iii) to determine the ways in which the implications of the above should inform the construction of a viable model of language pedagogy.

The studies included in the edited volume, as well as other current published research in the area, clearly point out that the systematic use of the children’s mother tongue in education, even in cases of non-standard languages,
can only have positive effects on their linguistic awareness and academic performance, the development of literacy skills and the formation of a multicultural identity. Since several studies in this volume aptly refer to issues of language-in-education policy and planning in reference to Cyprus, it is imperative for reasons of familiarity that an account of the language policy in Cyprus is reviewed here.

III. Current language policy in Cyprus

The language policy in Cyprus can be characterized as a covert policy as it has never been clearly articulated in an official declaration or decree nor is it presented in any specific, official, state document or regulated by law. Nevertheless, it is widely known among educators that the language of instruction at all levels of education is the ‘Koini Neoelliniki’ or Pan-Hellenic Demotic Greek (Standard Modern Greek) due to the fact that the national curriculum in Cyprus is, to a large degree, a replica of the one used in Greece. The declared preference and almost exclusive use of SMG in education erroneously assumes that the native language of Greek Cypriots is SMG when in fact, the language that children use at home and bring to school (that is, their mother tongue) is the Cypriot dialect. Although SMG may not be considered as a different or as a ‘foreign’ language for Cypriot children, it is nevertheless a code that is not felt to be their own natural ‘native’ way of communicating with each other or with their parents and so is not actively used before entering school. In other words, Cypriot children recognize SMG as the language used in ‘other’ Greek communities (Ioannidou 2002; Yiakoumetti, 2003; Papapavlou, 2004, Papapavlou and Pavlou, 1998).

Since the language policy is not overtly stated, the role and use of the Cypriot dialect remains, to a large extent, unclear and it can only be deduced from various official publications and circulars sent out periodically to schools by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In one of these documents, namely the Analytic Curriculum for the Lyceum (2000), regarding the issue of “language and language varieties” it is stated (p. 71) that the main objective of the language lessons should be for students to acquire an awareness of their national language (that is, the Greek language). The major intention of the didactic unit on “geographical language varieties” is for students to be made aware of the ‘horizontal’ division of the Greek language and its differentiation in the various places where the language is used. This aim of course, as stated in the document (p. 72), is not to encourage students to speak the various dialects or idioms but rather to help them understand that dialects (with greater differentiation from Demotic Greek) and idioms (with lesser differentiation) compose ‘Koini Neoelliniki’ and enrich it. In other words, as stated in the document, students...
should learn to appreciate and respect the sources that enrich their language. In this way, urban dwellers’ negative attitudes and disrespect toward idioms and dialects would be eradicated and students who have as their mother tongue a certain idiom or a certain dialect would not be made to feel that they speak an ‘inferior’ or ‘degenerate’ language. Also, the authors of the document state that the teachers’ attitudes are expected to contribute decisively in this direction, especially when they do not characterize as expressive ‘mistakes’ the idiomatic or dialectal use of students’ language. It would also be of much greater benefit, if teachers during class time provided explanations as to how these expressions function in the dialect. It would be equally beneficial if teachers used these ‘differences’ as facilitators in order to encourage students to search for equivalent and corresponding linguistic elements in ‘Koini Neoelliniki’. Furthermore, the main aim of the unit “social language varieties” is to make students aware that oral and written language are affected by such factors as social class, education, age, sex, profession, ideology, etc. Also, students must recognize that, as in all languages, in ‘Koini Neoelliniki’ there are also several stylistic levels and registers. Finally, in the unit “The Literature of Cyprus”, and especially in the section covering the poetic works of L. Macheras, B. Michaelides and D. Lipertis, it is stated that one of the many aims of this part of the curriculum is to teach students to recognize and appreciate the uniqueness of this poetry, which is mainly attributed to the ‘Cypriot linguistic idiom’, and the creative strength of these literary men. In another document, the Anthology of Cypriot Literature (2002), used in the Lyceum, it is suggested that Cypriot literature should be thought of as being part of general Greek literature. The authors of the document believe that the aim of covering various Cypriot literary works is to provide students the opportunity to learn about the aspirations and struggles of Cypriot Hellenism.

The one document that makes direct references to the present language policy and the role of the Cypriot dialect in education is a circular from the Ministry of Education and Culture entitled The Cypriot Dialect and Koini Neoelliniki which was circulated to all schools in August of 2002. This document states that the official language of the Republic of Cyprus (for the Greek Cypriot Community) is ‘Koini Neoelliniki’ which, according to this document, constitutes the common language for all Greeks. In Greece, as well as in other Greek-speaking communities worldwide, several dialects such as the Cypriot and the Cretan dialects are respected and maintained in addition to the use of ‘Koini Neoelliniki’. The Cypriot dialect is used in Cypriot schools to the extent that it facilitates and enhances effective communication. The document also reiterates that among the basic aims of language lessons is for the student to (a) become aware of the social and geographical variations of the Greek language and (b) gain knowledge about his/her linguistic tradition by reinforcing
the diachronic elements of the language currently in use. The Ministry of Education and Culture, the document reiterates, shows respect and affection towards all works of Cypriot literature as many of these works, mainly written in the Cypriot dialect, are true masterpieces that can contribute to Cypriot self-awareness and understanding of Cypriot culture. For these reasons, the Ministry incorporates them in the curricula and encourages the study and promotion of such masterpieces for the literary empowerment of Cypriot students.

Finally, the document continues by stating that both teachers and students are generally expected to use ‘Koini Neoelliniki’ in the classroom. It also states that the Cypriot dialect should be treated respectfully and may be used on special occasions such as in theatrical performances and school events. The use of the Cypriot dialect is also legitimate, according to the document, when students face difficulties in oral discourse, especially in the lower grade levels of elementary school. All of these recommendations, the document states, should be carefully thought out and should not go against the cultivation of ‘Koini Neoelliniki’ which is the national, official language of Cyprus.

The widespread use of the dialect for oral communication among Greek Cypriots is well attested in another document entitled *The Teaching of Greek as a Foreign Language* (Threshold, Volume A, Appendix C of the Council of Europe, 1996). The document attests to the fact that learners of Greek as a foreign language in Cyprus come into contact with the local dialect especially as a means of oral communication. Therefore, it is considered necessary to provide learners of Greek as a foreign language in Cyprus a description of the basic differences between the dialect and the standard. In order to meet this need, a committee comprised of members from the Ministry of Education of Culture (Cyprus) and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (Greece) has prepared an appendix which (a) provides some background information on the dialect, (b) clarifies the current linguistic scene in Cyprus and (c) illustrates the major characteristics of the dialect (lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic) by providing numerous examples in each category (such examples can also be found in Pavlou and Christodoulou, 2001). Finally, it is strongly emphasized in this document (p. 216) that Greek Cypriots are privileged to be able to express themselves in Standard Greek, in the local Koine Cypriot Greek and the dialect itself.

Thus, it may be deduced from the aforementioned documents that, although Cypriot students are not encouraged to speak their dialect in the classroom, there is an indirect admission that their mother tongue is indeed the Cypriot dialect and thus it can be appropriately used in certain situations (for example, in theatrical plays and school functions and for providing explanations of difficult concepts to younger learners). In general, the various documents suggest that the dialect should be respected, and that it can be creatively
exploited for the enrichment of Cypriot students’ linguistic awareness and language competence.

Despite the theoretically well-grounded and enlightened approach to the issue, the education authorities choose to ignore the reality of actual classroom practices concerning the role and use of the dialect in the classroom. Moreover, the authorities do not appear to be concerned as to whether changes in language policy are long overdue and this is clearly evident from the fact that no official discussions have taken place recently. The lack of concern about language policy receives additional evidence from the following: the Ministry of Education and Culture (Cyprus) recently commissioned a seven-member committee comprised of academics from Cyprus and Greece with the mandate of reviewing the present education system of Cyprus. The aim of the review was to generate recommendations for the restructuring, reformulation and modernization of the system. The committee, after a year’s work, in August 2004, published a 360-page document, which included eighteen chapters. Although the document addresses numerous issues and is very comprehensive, no mention of any kind is made about language policy and planning (literacy in the mother-tongue, language of instruction, etc.). Moreover, no relevant recommendations are presented regarding the need, if any, for re-examining the existing policy. While the committee provides specific recommendations for the improvement of the system (having as models several European systems of education), there is no reference to literacy issues and to language policies followed by other European states or the various directives of EU, which recommend respect for minority languages and dialects, and their inclusion in school curricula. Since the entire educational system is currently under review, one would have expected that this would have been an opportune time to address the role of the Cypriot dialect in education.

It is hoped that the work included in this volume will encourage further research in the area that could promote a deeper understanding of relevant issues in dialect in education on the part of those concerned (policy makers, teachers, parents, children). Furthermore, it provides significant research-based educational insights that could help in creating an educational environment that would respect the linguistic rights of bidialectal speakers and at the same time equipping them with the requisite linguistic repertoire that would enhance their academic performance, and, at the same time, it can be a source of empowerment in their personal and social lives.

IV. References

THEME I:
DIACHRONIC ISSUES IN DIALECTS
IN EDUCATION
DIALECT AND EDUCATION:
RESPONSES FROM SOCIOLINGUISTS

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Abstract

Focusing mainly on the English language, the chapter considers two aspects of sociolinguistic research that are relevant to the question of bidialectal education: research in social dialectology, and research carried out in school classrooms. A wide range of research in social dialectology may have both direct and indirect relevance to the educational issues arising from the coexistence of dialects and standard varieties in school. To illustrate this, the chapter briefly discusses contrastive analyses of dialects and standard varieties and then, drawing on a recent British research project, considers some sociopragmatic aspects of dialect use. Further research is needed to consider how best to disseminate relevant information arising from research in social dialectology to those involved in teaching, as well as how best to present the research, and how to evaluate its use in education. Research carried out in classrooms is discussed in terms of initiatives in bidialectal education, the use of dialect in the classroom, research on children’s spoken language at school, and research on children’s school writing. The chapter concludes that both pure and applied research on dialect is essential in order to develop realistic and effective educational policies, and that there is much evidence to show that children reach higher levels of educational attainment when their dialect has a recognised and explicitly valued place within the educational system.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, pragmatics, classrooms, writing, identity

Introduction

In countries where there is a standardised variety of language that is not the mother tongue of most school pupils, teachers and educationists at all levels have to decide what can be done to ensure that all children, whatever their
linguistic background, have an equal chance of acquiring the standard variety. It might be thought that the main issue is simply how best to teach the standard to dialect speakers, but the situation is complicated by a range of social and cultural factors such as attitudes to dialects and standard (see, for example, Papapavlou 2001, Sachdev et al 1998, Siegel 1999), problems of defining the standard (Milroy and Milroy 1998, Cheshire 1999), or the imposition of a standard that is external to the country in which it is taught (as seems to be the case in Cyprus; see Pavlou and Papapavlou 2004). Responses to the challenge have been varied, and some have been more successful than others. The responses from sociolinguists, whose work on language in its social context might reasonably be expected to contribute to the question, have been equally varied. In this paper I will review two aspects of their work that have been specifically directed towards the question of the place of dialect in education. The first derives from research in social dialectology, and has been mainly concerned with decisions about which aspect of the research are relevant to teaching, and how best to present the research to schoolteachers. The second is research carried out in the classroom, examining how dialect is used in the classroom and evaluating the educational consequences of integrating dialect into the school curriculum. The main focus will be research conducted in English-speaking countries, but the implications are more general.

Research in social dialectology: some educational implications

In dialectology dialects are often described with reference to the standard variety in society, because the codification process that is part of standardisation usually involves extensive description of the standard variety. It makes sense, therefore, to take existing descriptions as a baseline against which dialect forms can be compared. In some countries there is a long tradition of sociolinguists and dialectologists attempting to make their contrastive analyses of different dialects available to schoolteachers, often motivated by the belief that a contrastive analysis of a dialect and the standard variety can help teachers distinguish genuine errors from cases of language transfer, and teach schoolchildren some of the systematic differences between the dialect and the standard. There is evidence that dialect-speaking children acquire the standard variety better and more quickly when they are taught in this way: indeed, the Ebonics controversy in the USA began precisely because schools in Oakland, California that taught systematic differences between African American Vernacular English and standard English were producing better educational results than schools that allowed only standard English in the classroom. It is not always clear, however, exactly what kind of information from dialect
research is most useful for schoolteachers, nor how the information can most usefully be presented.

This point was made by Ammon (1989), with reference to Germany. Here linguists had been producing publications designed for schoolteachers from as long ago as 1908, but in the 1980s a new set of booklets was produced, on Ammon’s initiative. There were eight booklets, each covering a different German dialect area. Each one contained a contrastive analysis of the vocabulary, phonological and grammatical systems of the local dialect and the standard, together with an account of research findings on social attitudes towards spoken standard German and spoken dialect. Some of the booklets also suggested methods for teaching the standard to dialect speakers, and included material thought to be useful for the acquisition of standard German.

However, the booklets were relatively expensive, and teachers had to purchase them from their own income, and the extent to which teachers used them is not known. More importantly, it is not known whether the booklets were in fact useful, as no follow-up assessment was ever carried out. What was needed, it seems, is government backing for the initiative so that all teachers in the relevant dialect areas could have been supplied with the booklets, and a formal assessment and evaluation of their effect carried out. A similar comment can be made with reference to the UK volume ‘Real English’ (Milroy and Milroy 1989), which filled a similar perceived need for systematic descriptions of dialect grammar in the British Isles. The volume was organised in a similar way to the German booklets, with general research findings presented in a first section, followed by a semi-contrastive analysis in the second section, and lists of dialect materials that could be used as a teaching resource in the third section. The book sold well, but again there was no systematic evaluation of its effectiveness as a teaching resource.

In fact, a wide range of sociolinguistic research seems to have the potential to contribute to the teaching of the systematic differences between dialects and standard. I will illustrate this with some examples from our own recent research into British English dialects. First, for some dialect forms, especially syntactic or discourse forms, it may be helpful to abandon an approach based on contrastive analysis and instead to consider examples of their use in context. Example 1, from recordings made for a research project in social dialectology based in Hull (Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams 1999), shows pronoun tags (in bold type in the extract), in constructions that are quite widespread in the north of England. For these tags it could be more useful to consider the function of the forms than to attempt to compare them with standard English: a useful exercise, for example, might be to discuss with pupils the meaning the tags have in different contexts. In extract 1, they seem to have a
contrastive function, displaying the contrast between what the current speaker is saying and what the previous speaker had said.

1. Charlie: I don’t like smoking or anything like that. no that’s disgusting
Matt: **I used to me** …well I tried it
Charlie: **I haven’t even tried it me**
Matt: my mum wouldn’t say nowt
Interviewer: do your parents smoke?
Charlie: my mum does
Matt: all of them do .. got my real dad my stepdad and my mum
Charlie: **I don’t like it me**

Pupils could be invited to consider alternative ways of showing disagreement, in order to bring out the ‘localness’ of the pronoun tags, and to draw a comparison with more formal speech styles and with written English. In other contexts, however, the tags have different functions (see Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams 2005). Thus discussion of dialect and standard would be linked to more general issues of pragmatic variation, and could help to reinforce an understanding of the differences between spoken and written language.

In fact, pragmatic aspects of dialect are very relevant to education, though they are rarely included in contrastive analyses of dialect and standard varieties. For example, the young people who participated in the research project mentioned above sometimes framed their replies to the interviewer’s question with *dunno*, as in 2-4.

2. *(the interviewer has been asking about Will’s roles in the school play)*
Will: I’ve got a like a skeleton mask thing I’m a warrior a carnival dancer and a rock and roll dancer
Interviewer: so how many dancers are there then?
Will: dunno loads

3. Interviewer: what would you like to do?
Pete: dunno I want to join the army

4. *(the interviewer and Mick have been talking about a cookery lesson at school)*
Interviewer: what did you make then?
Mick: dunno biscuits and cakes

*I don’t know* is grammaticalising in present-day English, becoming phonetically reduced and taking on new interpersonal meanings (Bybee and Scheibman 1999), but its use in question and answer sequences had not previously been noted. It appears to be a negative politeness strategy, framing the reply as tentative. There are many situations, however, where framing a reply in such a way could be inappropriate, and teachers who are preparing their
pupils for job interviews or interviews for university entrance might wish to draw their attention to the fact that politeness strategies such as these might not work to their advantage.

Certain forms used at the ends of replies in our interviews may have similar consequences in formal interviews. In 5, Jerry ends his utterance with what a non-linguist colleague has termed “the irritating dangling so”. Again, this form seems to be used as a politeness strategy: it leaves open the opportunity for the other speaker to contribute, as happens in 5, where the interviewer shows that she understands Jerry’s implication.

5. Interviewer: what do you think of Newcastle?
Jerry: oh it’s really good
Interviewer: do you like it better than Reading?
Jerry: yeah it’s bigger and there’s lots to do so
Interviewer: it seems quite an exciting place

When the interlocutor does not contribute, the current speaker usually completes the utterance herself, as in 6.

6. Interviewer: and do you go to church as well?
Carol: um sometimes and I also help with Sunday school so
Interviewer: oh goodness
Carol: so I’m on the rota so when it’s my turn I you know go along

The young people we interviewed used but in a similar way (see Cheshire and Williams 2002 for details). Teachers might like to discuss strategies of this kind with their pupils as part of their development of oral skills, this time in terms of situations when it is appropriate to leave space for other speakers to contribute to the construction of the discourse, and when, conversely, it is more appropriate to make a point and follow it through oneself. Again, this could be useful for pupils preparing their interviewing techniques for jobs and for university entrance.

A more subtle pragmatic aspect of dialect is the marking of new information in spontaneous speech. Cheshire (2005) analysed the range of linguistic strategies used to introduce a discourse-new entity by the 14-15 year olds who participated in the research project from which these examples have been drawn. Some strategies were syntactic, as in 7, where Sally uses the empty verb HAVE GOT to place the new information (my sister’s friend) in clause final position, making processing easier for the addressee.

7. Interviewer: so who do you live with then who’s in your family?
Sally: my mum and my dad and my three sisters and we’ve got my sister’s friend staying with us since Christmas.

Other strategies used included focus marker _like_, as in 8, noun phrase expansion, as in 9, repetition, as in 10, and careful articulation, as in 11.

8. Interviewer: do you work with your dad as well?
Karen: no <GIGGLES>
Interviewer: what does he do?
Karen: he erm sells like hygienic baths you know to like supermarkets you know the big ones

9. Joanne: some nights we sit in the house in somebody’s house in the bedroom

10. (Sally is talking about her brother)
Sally: he lives with his with his girlfriend

11. (Jake has been talking about his father’s job as a university lecturer)
Interviewer: does he have a lot of lecturing?
Jake: yes he does and he’s got to write a lot of uh
Interviewer: papers and things?
Jake: yeah and he’s just finished a book so
Interviewer: oh really? what about?
Jake: about the ethics of war <SLOW CAREFUL ARTICULATION>
Interviewer: the ethics of war
Jake: yeah

Of course, speakers did not always mark new discourse entities: 12, for example, shows a ‘bare NP’, where there is nothing to indicate that the new information, _instruction sheets_, had not previously been mentioned.

12. (David has been telling the interviewer about his stick insects)
Interviewer: and are you going to breed some more?
David: I doubt it. we run out of people to give them to. they bred so quickly we had to sell them with instruction sheets at the summer fair

In each of the three towns where we recorded interviews with young speakers, there was a consistent gender and social class difference in the use of bare NPs. Figure 1 shows the combined scores for the three towns: boys, especially middle class boys, rarely introduce new discourse entities without
flagging them for their interlocutor, whereas girls, especially working class girls, use high numbers of bare NPs.

**Figure 1. Proportions of discourse-new bare NPs (relative to all discourse-new NPs) by gender and social class (all speakers)**

![Bar chart showing proportions of discourse-new bare NPs by gender and social class](image)

Key:  
- m.cl. = middle class
- w.cl. = working class

The impact on the interlocutor of marking discourse-new entities has not been researched, but the sociolinguistic difference seems to exist in written English as well as spoken English, as far as gender is concerned at least (Argamon et al 2003), and may well be relevant in oral skills teaching when the focus is on individual presentations or on contributing to group discussions.

In summary, a wide range of sociolinguistic research may have both direct and indirect relevance to the educational issues caused by the coexistence of dialects and standard varieties in school. I have focused particularly here on pragmatic aspects of dialect. As with the earlier contrastive analyses between dialects and the standard variety, however, there needs to be further research to consider how best to disseminate this information to those involved in teaching,
how best to present the information and, importantly, how to evaluate its potential.

**Research on the use of dialect in the classroom**

In some countries dialects are used in education for the early acquisition of literacy. In Norway, for example, where literacy rates are amongst the highest in Europe, dialects enjoy high prestige and it is illegal not to use the child’s dialect in school. In many Creole-speaking countries, on the other hand, where attitudes towards the non-standard variety are very different, there are often ambivalent attitudes towards the Creole, which may be seen as ‘broken language’ (see Siegel 1999). Siegel (1999) discusses educational programmes where Creoles have been used both as the medium of instruction and in the teaching of initial literacy, with the standard language introduced only at a later stage. Research indicates that these programmes, which in 1999 had been used in about twelve countries (Siegel 1999: 516), are helpful for the subsequent learning not only of English but also of other school subjects.

For example, Siegel (1997) evaluates the success of a two-year pre-school programme in Papua New Guinea where children were taught initial literacy in Tok Pisin, as well as initial numeracy and some other school subjects. At the end of the first grade, children who had been educated in this way scored higher in their school tests for English, Maths, and general subjects (which included health, social science and religion) than children who had not attended the pre-school, and still higher in the school tests at the end of the third grade (though the differences were less extreme for Maths). They were still scoring more highly than the other children by the end of the fifth grade, although the others were now beginning to catch up. Of course, children whose parents send them to a pre-school programme may come from homes where their parents value education highly, and this may well affect their test scores; furthermore, attending a pre-school programme may prepare children generally for school, which in turn may have a positive effect on their test scores. However, there were further aspects of the children’s performance that could be directly attributed to their bidialectal education. Siegel points out that by teaching Tok Pisin in the pre-school and standard English in the state school the children were better able to separate the two varieties. Language transfer is common between varieties of language that are closely related, but less frequent when the two varieties are taught separately. Research in Australia (Malcolm 1992, 1995) similarly found that children educated in a bidialectal programme, where English and the mother tongue (a Creole) were taught side by side, had greater proficiency in English than children taught in a monolingual programme using only English.
There is nothing new, of course, in the use of dialect in the initial teaching of literacy. American sociolinguists in the 1970s produced the first reading books written in dialect, on the assumption that children would learn to recognise in writing the words they knew from speaking and listening, and that they would then move on to books with standard English and the dialect side by side. The intention was to produce books for a wide range of American dialects, but in fact the only reading books produced in dialect were for speakers of African American Vernacular English. They were not popular with parents and teachers and were not used for long, but nevertheless it has been possible to evaluate the results of using the dialect readers. Wolfram, Adger and Christian (1999) report that over a four month period, children who used the dialect readers had an overall gain in their reading age of 6.2 months, compared to only 1.2 months for children who did not use the readers. The work of Rickford and Rickford (1995) is also relevant. They assessed the effect of using dialect readers in two schools in California, finding that the readers made a clear difference in only one of these schools. Here, children understood what they had read better when they had read it in dialect than when they had read it in standard English. In both schools, however, middle school boys, aged between 11 and 14, did better when they used dialect readers. As Rickford and Rickford point out, this is exactly the group who are most likely to become disaffected from school: they conclude that it is worth experimenting with new ways of presenting dialect readers in forms that are more acceptable to parents and teachers.

Whether or not dialect readers are used, Goodman and Goodman’s research on reading (2000) concludes that the most important factor is to show children that their dialect is valued in the classroom. Children need to read for comprehension rather than word for word accuracy, so it is perfectly acceptable for them to read out in dialect what they see in their reading books, even if the books are written in the standard variety – better still, they say, children could retell in their own dialect what they have read in the standard. There is a consensus, in fact, amongst educationists and sociolinguists alike, that valuing dialect in the classroom makes a real difference to the educational achievement of dialect speakers. In the following section, therefore, I will briefly discuss two initiatives from sociolinguists that aimed to bring dialect into the classroom in ways that are relevant to the acquisition of the standard variety.

Schoolchildren as researchers of dialect

The Survey of British Dialect Grammar (Cheshire and Edwards 1989) involved a national network of teachers in inner city schools who agreed to take part in collaborative teacher-pupil projects on language use in the local
community. The Survey had the dual aim of obtaining information about the regional distribution of morphological and syntactic dialect features, and incorporating sociolinguistics directly into the classroom by inviting pupils to explore their own personal reaction to linguistic diversity and to investigate linguistic variation in their local community. Edwards developed a series of lesson outlines and materials on topics such as multilingual Britain, language variation, language change, standard English, and 'talking proper', tried these out during the pilot stage of the research, and then sent the modified version to the teachers who participated in the survey. A questionnaire on local dialect usage was presented as the end point of the work on language awareness, with the intention of consulting pupils as the experts on their local variety of English in order to find out whether the forms listed on the questionnaire were used locally.

Cheshire and Edwards (1998) give details of how the pupils explored in their lessons their personal reactions to linguistic diversity, and how they discovered that their local dialect was part of a wider pattern of linguistic variation. For example, the wide range of idiosyncratic responses within a single class of pupils to the question of whether there were any particular dialects that they disliked, provided immediate evidence that prejudicial attitudes towards specific dialects are irrational. A few examples of the contradictory responses that were given in a single secondary school class in Widnes are shown in 13-16 below.

13. I like Cockney because it gives you a laugh. I also like American because it’s dead cool. Geordie is OK as well.

14. I dislike Geordie accent because of the way they say it, it just gets right up my nose.

15. I detest American accents because there is too much of it going on TV.

16. I don’t like Cockney accents because it sounds like they’re talking out of their nose.

The children also explored their own attitudes to the way they spoke, discovering how language can be a symbol of personal or local identity (see 17, 18 and 19), of peer group identity (see 19) and even of the reason why one may wish to accommodate to the speech of others (see 20).

17. I enjoy speaking the way I do as I think it’s me.

18. I like the way I speak because it sounds normal in this town.
19. I like Widnes accent best because it goes with the town and it’s different from all the others.

20. If you go to Liverpool you might change the way you talk because you might get beat up.

Through their participation in the national Survey, reporting on the dialect forms that were used in their locality, the pupils also learned how research adds to an existing knowledge base, and that their knowledge about their own language was of value to the wider research community. Although there was no direct link to the acquisition of standard English, it could be argued that this kind of exploration of linguistic diversity paves the way for direct teaching of the differences between standard and nonstandard grammar (Cheshire and Edwards 1998:210). It constitutes a valuable educational experience in its own right, empowering children to face the attitudes towards sociolinguistic variation that they will encounter in the adult world (Fairclough 1992).

A more recent initiative comes from the work of Wolfram and his colleagues, who designed a series of experimental dialect awareness programs for primary school students in the United States (see, for example, Wolfram 1998, Wolfram 1999). These, they say, have both humanistic and scientific goals (Wolfram and Friday 1997). The humanistic goals include tackling social myths about language variation and prejudices about socially disfavoured varieties of language. The scientific aim involves students examining carefully described sets of dialect data, forming hypotheses about the language structures and then checking them out against usage patterns. An example is shown in the pairs of sentences in 21-23, all of which contain forms ending in -ing. Pupils were required to use their own intuition and also to ask other people for their views on when it was acceptable to add an a- prefix to the –ing forms. They were also asked to construct new sentences with and without the a- prefix. In the American English variety in question this can be added before –ing forms that are past participles, but not when they are functioning as nouns or adjectives.

21a. Building is hard work
21b. She was building a house

22a. He likes hunting
22b. He went hunting

23a. The child was charming the adults
23b. The child was very charming

Thus the prefix can be added to 21b, 22b and 23a: ‘to give She was a-building a house, He went a-hunting and The child was a-charming the adults’.