Personality Organization and Language Behavior: The Imprint of Psychological Differentiation on Language Behavior in Varying Communication Conditions

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The language behavior of field-independent (F-I) and field-dependent (F-D) clinically normal, verbally resourceful female college students was examined in three different communication conditions: Dialogue, Warm (visually supportive) monologue, and Cold (visually nonsupportive and stressful) Monologue. F-I and F-D Ss produced similar amounts of the different types of language behavior evaluated in each of the three communicative conditions. However, they differed with respect to verbal output and length of sentence “packaging” unit in Monologue conditions. F-D Ss talked considerably less but at the same time produced different types of grammatically more elaborate language behavior in Warm and Cold Monologue compared to their Dialogue language behavior. F-I Ss talked considerably more but also showed a type of language autonomy. The pattern of language behavior which characterized F-I speech in Dialogue remained the same in both Monologue conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Leaving aside the important but sometimes quite ethereal preoccupation of contemporary psycholinguistic literature with the question of the psychological reality of generative-transformational rules, there is at least some solid...
observational footing about how language behavior actually does change with age. Developmental studies of changes in language behavior demonstrate an increase in words per sentence but also add important qualifications about such growth (Hunt, 1970; Loban, 1963; O'Donnell et al., 1967). Sentence elaboration via coordination devices, which can be referred roughly to deep structures effected by Chomsky's "conjoining transformations" (Lyons, 1968) and which shows in surface structure as compound sentences, is something that "seems to be learned relatively early" (Hunt, 1970, p. 35). Sixth graders can accomplish such sentence elaboration via coordination (together with deletion of redundant material) with a skill equal to that of a superior adult.

Another finding (Hunt, 1970) is that even superior adults do not produce more full dependent clause formations per main clause than do eighth graders, which can be referred roughly to deep structures affected by Chomsky's "embedding transformations" and shows in surface structure as complex sentences (Lyons, 1968). What does distinguish the superior adult's grammatical skill—and what really accounts for significant increases in the amount of information "packaged" into longer surface sentences—is the skillful way in which the superior adult can delete verbal material into a variety of less than full clause formations (Hunt, 1970). Such clause reduction activity, according to a generative-transformational grammar, results from the application of deletion rules (Lyons, 1968) upon kernel strings. Recent developmental research by Hunt (1970) indicates that the ability to use such deletion rules especially to produce less than clause formation embeddings is a particularly important yardstick of syntactic maturity. Hunt's work (1970) and especially work by O'Donnell et al. (1967), which used a more spontaneous type of speech sample such as we employ, indicate that a simple and satisfactory measure exists for evaluating the extent of deletional, clause-reducing activity which has gone into the production of the surface structure sentence—and this is the average number of words per sentence (AWS) which characterizes the speaker's language behavior.

Along with these increases in syntactic skill per se, another distinction between adult language behavior and that of the young child has to do with the functional uses made of language skills for the structuring of experience. The development of language behavior shows distinct changes in this regard: At first, language functions only to describe rather isolated, perceptually impelling, concrete frames of experience (Piaget, 1960). This changes into more complexly patterned but still descriptive portrayals of experiences. And, finally, language can function so as to structure some type of explanatory, deductive, purposive (i.e., conditional or contingency) matrix which is applied to immediate experience. As Hunt puts it, with development the language user