

SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROBLEMS IN
CURRENT SED THEORY AND PRACTICE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The black population of the United States is making itself increasingly heard, seen, and recognized today. Whites are becoming aware at the very least that Blacks are dissatisfied with their lot in life. Those Americans who are more sensitive, interested, perceptive are finding a new culture that is very much a part of America.

Ever since the Civil War there has been the traditional controversy between the respective proponents of segregation and integration. More recently, Civil Rights has been an issue of major importance. In keeping with American ideals of democracy and equality, pro-Civil Rights spokesmen have demanded that all men be treated as equals. At times this idea has gone so far as almost to see individuals as identical. However, the fact is that all Americans are not identical. The various sub-cultures found in this country lend (or could lend, if properly understood) rich color and special character to America. The old idea of the 'melting pot' is being attacked and new ideas of preserving cultures while gaining in understanding and acceptance of one another are making themselves heard.

This new turn in events leaves linguists and English teachers in something of a quandary. The new SE3D (standard English as a second dialect) trends which seemed so wonderful and so humanitarian are now being attacked as undemocratic

and anti-American. It is the job of the linguist and English teacher to examine the facts, to listen thoughtfully to the arguments pro and con, and then to decide what he or she will do about teaching Blacks.

Statement of the Problem

Until very recently, the problem in SEED was one of describing the points of difference between standard English and Black dialect and deciding what measures could be used to overcome the difficulties. We assume here that Black dialect is accepted as a valid and respectable form of speech and that standard English is taught as an alternate (not replacement) dialect to be used as a tool. This tool could be used to give the Black a choice of staying in his small corner or getting out into the world. The assumption is that standard English would give the Black the key to entry into the White world.

The problem today is much more complex. Can we as linguists or English teachers realistically say that standard English is the key to White society? Can we guarantee the Black that job discrimination will end once he can command standard English? These are the questions that many concerned professionals in the field are raising today.

On the other hand, suppose we accept the fact that standard English is a desirable dialect for every American to command. What then are the problems? The problems of contrastive analysis leading to various oral-aural drills and other classroom