

pedagogical value. True education can only occur where there is dialogue that is the difference between education and mere posturing.

Stanley M. Stein  
University of Calgary

Atkinson, Paul. *Language, Structure and Reproduction: An Introduction to the Sociology of Basil Bernstein*. London: Methuen Co., Ltd., 1985, 224 pp. \$17.95 (paperback).

Paul Atkinson provides a comprehensive overview of more than two decades of Bernstein's writings. Bernstein's works are presented as being based on European structuralism rather than on the pragmatism of an intellectual maverick, his background sociological rather than linguistic, and his conceptualization intricate rather than simplistic.

To North American educators and linguists, Basil Bernstein is synonymous with Verbal Deficit Theory. The version of this theory which has been embraced by educators suggests that culturally and economically disadvantaged children do poorly in school because they speak a dialect which is restricted in its register and function. In this book, Atkinson debunks the myth that Bernstein ever proposed a notion so simplistic as the Verbal Deficit Hypothesis. The book is in essence a protestation of what Atkinson considers to be the conventional approach to Bernstein. Rather than providing a detailed study of Bernstein's writings, Atkinson deals with the issues in Bernstein's own spirit by examining general features of the criticisms directed at his works and dissecting them in a logical manner.

The book has three themes: (1) the nature and diversity of Bernstein's conceptual framework; (2) the continuity of sociological themes that appear developmentally in his writings; and, (3) the misinterpretation of his theories by his peers. Rather than providing an organizational framework for the book, these three themes are interwoven into the context of each chapter.

Atkinson guides us on a chronological journey through the pre-1962 writings (Chapters 2-3) where Bernstein grapples with the notion of the school and the family as agents of socio-cultural transmission. These early writings attempted to make clear the critical role that language plays in the reproductive language process.

In chapters four to six, Atkinson tackles the most maligned and misunderstood of Bernstein's writings when he (Bernstein) postulated a set of dichotomous terms to encode the relationship between social class and language — elaborated and restricted code. Atkinson demonstrates that predigested and masticated material interpreted by scholars from secondary research sources simplistically equated "codes" with contrasting dialects based on social class differences, a notion contrary to Bernstein's theoretical framework. Bernstein intended codes "to be underlying principles which regulate and reproduce" (p. 74) differing capacities for "power, control, self-regulation and determination" (p. 76). Atkinson claims that the popularly held notion that the distribution of codes based on class lines explains educational inadequacy and linguistic incompetence of the working class is a gross misinterpretation of his work. We are told that Bernstein sees the distribution of these codes as reflecting relations of power and control rather than explaining them. As a sociologist and a structuralist, Bernstein's concern lies with codification and reproduction of inequality in dominating/dominated relationships in general, rather than to class differences. He sees power and control as being attributed to ethnicity and gender as well as class.

In conclusion to a discussion of Bernstein's theory of language, Atkinson finds logical flaws in the arguments which sociolinguists, such as Labov and Dittmar, have expounded to discount Bernstein's work. Atkinson defends Bernstein on the grounds that his theory was not intended to be tested in the tradition of North American empirical sociolinguists. Halliday is cited in his defense:

"(Halliday) acknowledges that Bernstein's is not a characterization of the surface structure of language behaviour, but should be thought of as a 'social semiotic', located at a level 'above' the linguistic system per se." (p. 114)

In the final section of the book (Chapters 7-8), Atkinson reviews Bernstein's most recent writings and looks at the critical role that curriculum and pedagogy play in the reproduction of a social order which reflects the hierachial distribution of wealth and labour within our society. Atkinson reminds us that when reading Bernstein one must always bear in mind that what is significant is the systemic relations between the domains of school, family and work. He explains that Bernstein is proposing that working-class parents have limited access to the invisible pedagogy, while the visible pedagogy is immediately understandable to them, and that differing access has major implications for the effectiveness of different types of schooling for different groups in society.

In summary, it can be said that Atkinson's book is definitely not an introduction; there are all too numerous concepts, research studies in sociology, anthropology and linguistics, inclusive of all the prefixes (i.e., sociolinguistic) which must be understood if the clarity of daylight is to be perceived. The book is well written, disturbing, and revealing. How often do readers fall victim to a myth based on simplistic and incorrect interpretations of complex theoretical notions? In completing the task of interpreting and explicating many years of writing on complex and wide-ranging theoretical issues, Atkinson made a major contribution both to our understanding of Bernstein as a social thinker and to our understanding of the role that language plays in all settings that contribute to the continuation of the social orders. I cannot leave the summary, however, without thinking of a statement made by one of my graduate students after reading Atkinson's book: "Bernstein casts a large shadow and Atkinson's shadowed view is not clear. One must question whether it is indeed Bernstein's vision or Paul Atkinson's vision we are privy to at this point. But in any case, it could be 'just another interpretation.' "

Arthur Olson  
University of Victoria

Hull, Robert. *The Language Gap*. London: Methuen, 1985, 232 pp., \$10.95 (paperback).

Just in case the question occurred to any sports-minded reader, the answer is no; there is no connection between author Robert Hull and a famous Canadian of the same name. Hull is a British teacher and researcher who, with *The Language Gap*, has made a valuable contribution to at least two areas of pedagogy that are currently receiving considerable attention. The first of these is classroom talk, or the kind of language that occurs in the normal events of the classroom. This is the primary focus of the book, and while Hull's position may be summed up in the book's subtitle, "How classroom dialogue fails," the reader should not therefore presume that the view presented is an entirely negative one, nor that Hull thinks that classroom dialogue *necessarily* fails. Rather, this is a much more balanced, even-handed picture, about which I'll comment further later. The second area of pedagogy addressed, although much less obvious, is language across the curriculum, including oral language and, to some extent, reading and writing in the content areas.

Hull is an experienced teacher who spent eighteen months as a careful participant observer in a large British comprehensive school, with most of the examples drawn from 12- to 14- year old (i.e., junior high age) students. That level, in itself, is helpful, since much of the North American work on classroom talk is centered on the primary grades. The data for the book then are a combination of lessons observed, discussions with students about their lessons, textbooks, and teacher prepared worksheets, all gathered during the observation time. In addition, Hull includes examples from his own teaching, and examines his work just as rigorously as that of other teachers. He states in the preface (p. xiii) that, "This is a teachers' book, written by a schoolteacher for schoolteachers," and he asks teachers to use their "intuitive skills and empathizing observation" to question and re-examine how language is used for learning.

I agree that the book can be very helpful to teachers, although I think the readership should also include others interested in how learning occurs in classrooms. But I doubt that this book will reach the breadth of readers who might benefit from it. The title is apt as an encapsulation of the central thesis, but it may not get the book into the hands of some readers, both teachers and other scholars, who would find it helpful.

Hull began with the idea of observing students in difficulty at school, but instead of assuming that they needed a remedial reading class, his idea was to examine the suitability, for all students, of the regularly assigned classroom tasks.