

Sociolinguistic Aspects of Foreigner Talk

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1. Introduction

Linguists are beginning to show a growing interest in marginal varieties of language, for these reveal the limits of human language (Ferguson and DeBose, 1977: 99) and also offer illuminating insights in such areas as language development, linguistic change and linguistic universals. Marginal varieties that have been receiving particular attention are those associated in some way with the process of pidginization, foreigner talk and broken language. Ferguson (1975) defines foreigner talk (FT) as an imitation on the part of native speakers of the way foreigners speak. Very seldom will native speakers admit that they would use FT in actual verbal interactions with foreigners, and in fact well-documented instances of such use are scarce. FT is one of the special reduced registers available to members of a linguistic community to carry out certain communicative functions and, as such, is conventional in nature. But there also exists an interactive relationship between FT and broken language (BL), foreigners' approximations to a target language. Finally, S. Pit Corder (1977) postulates that all types of reduced registers have their source in speakers' ability to decomplexify speech under certain circumstances, and, according to him, the similarities between FT and BL would stem from a shared universal linguistic base. The source of FT and its role in second language acquisition are indicated by the model depicted in Figure 1.

Studies of FT (Ferguson, 1975, Corder, 1975) have focused on its linguistic features. In the present paper I should like to discuss two sociolinguistic aspects of FT: the functions or ends it serves, and, in particular, the variation it shows depending on the participants in communicative encounters. I am using these two terms in the specialized sense given to them in Dell Hymes' S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model, which attempts to describe communicative competence in terms of seven parameters (Hymes, 1972).

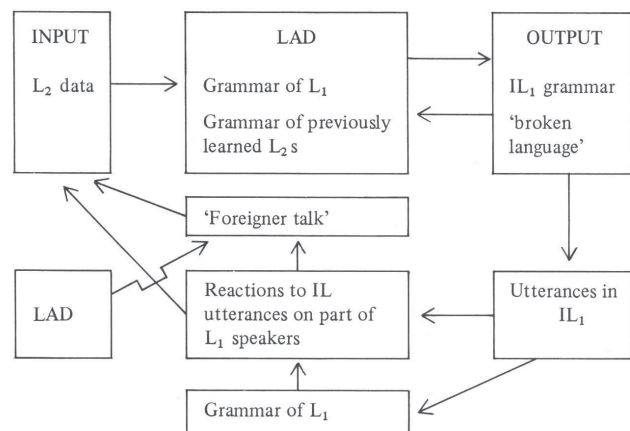


Figure 1. Relationship between foreigner talk (FT) and broken language (BL)

2. The data base for the study of FT: fact and fiction

The data base for the study of FT is meager indeed. Available data are of three types: (1) interactional, (2) ideological and (3) fictional. Actually observed use of FT, particularly in an interactional setting that contains use of BL, obviously constitutes the most reliable type of data for the study of FT. But they occur in studies whose focus is narrowly linguistic and descriptive and are therefore impoverished from a sociolinguistic perspective. Ideological data are elicited by asking native speakers how they think they or members of their linguistic community would modify their speech in communicating with various types of foreigners (Ferguson, 1975) or by asking them to imitate various types of foreigners. The most plentiful and varied samples of FT at our disposal are fictional; these consist of writers' or cartoonists' portrayal of foreigners or of the way native speakers modify their speech in communicating with foreigners.

Ideological and fictional samples of FT have a common source, and their utilization in serious studies of FT poses the same problems. According to one view of stylistics (Enkvist, Spencer and Gregory, 1964), an author's use of FT is entirely unconscious and, as such, reflects the patterning of his culture, including the function of special registers and general attitudes toward

various groups of foreigners, just as would other aspects of his behavior. Alternatively, fictional samples of FT may result from conscious stylistic intentions. These two views are in fact complementary and entirely compatible, for a speaker's statement about FT or a writer of fiction's representation of it may reflect unconscious attitudes and values shared widely by members of a social group while at the same time containing consciously manipulated stereotypic features. In fact, both views are provided for neatly by William Labov's model for native speakers' perception and manipulation of sociolinguistic variables. Labov (1972: 178-79) classifies sociolinguistic variables as indicators, markers and stereotypes. *Indicators* are uniformly distributed variable linguistic features below the level of speakers' awareness that characterize particular subgroups of a linguistic community. *Markers*, while also below the threshold of speakers' awareness, are subject to stylistic shift and correlate with social factors. *Stereotypes*, which may or may not reflect actual behavior, exist within speakers' level of conscious awareness and are associated with different subgroups. In Labovian terms, a speaker's comments or a fictional sample of FT are analogous to sociolinguistic indicators or markers. At best, they provide data that accurately reflect real-world communicative interactions. At worst, they correspond to sociolinguistic stereotypes. While they might diverge significantly from observable phenomena, they would nonetheless accurately reflect actual attitudes and values toward FT. Thus, the use of fictional samples as a data base for the study of FT possesses the potential to reveal much, not only about actual use of FT, but about a linguistic community's attitudes towards it.

3. The ends of FT

It is generally thought that FT serves to maintain the social distance between native speakers and foreign learners considered inferior or subservient. 'Talking down' to foreigners not only keeps them at arm's length (Hall, 1966: 8) but, by denying them opportunities to hear fully formed samples of the target language, effectively prevents them from acquiring total communicative competence. Stated differently, the use of FT signals to foreigners that they are unwanted guests whose acculturation to the host community is not desired. Since acculturation provides the most potent psychological and social factors for second language acquisition (Schumann, 1978), FT reduces the foreign learner's motivation and induces fossilization of a highly deviant stage of learner's interlanguage. In addition to simplifying processes (reduction, simplification, etc.) FT is characterized by clarifying processes that facilitate comprehension (addition of redundancy, use of paraphrases and periphrastic devices) and by expressive processes (e.g., the generalized use of formal terms

of address). Simplification and reduction of fully formed varieties of the target language imply that native speakers equate social inferiority with intellectual limitations. One would therefore expect varieties of FT used in non-egalitarian situations to stress simplifying processes. One would also expect these varieties to contain the most highly stereotypic features of BL known to members of the host community.

But FT is also characterized by clarifying processes that may serve to facilitate a foreign learner's comprehension by providing the morphophonemically fullest forms of the target language, by maximally linearizing the message through the use of periphrastic constructions and paraphrases, etc. Thus, theoretically, FT may function as a facilitative device in initial contacts between native speakers and certain categories of foreign learners. Related to this function of FT is 'talking up' in which native speakers employ a formal style variety of the target language containing lento speed and maximally redundant forms and features (Henzl, 1974: 79). Contact situations are complex and speakers' ends may vary even in the course of a simple speech act. Accordingly, varieties of FT may contain both types of modifications and may alternately stress one or the other.

In our society native speakers deny resorting to FT, and fiction provides few examples of the actual use of FT. Most fictional instances of FT illustrate the 'displaced' (Ferguson and De Bose 1977) use of that register to depict foreigners' use of the target language. One work of fiction examined, *Watership Down*, a best-selling novel by Robert Adams (1972), does however contain contrastive examples of the use of FT for both facilitative and 'talking down' functions.

Watership Down is the story, set in rural England, of a group of rabbits who undertake an expedition in search of a new warren. The author narrates the adventures of their journey and their struggles to establish a new warren and to secure female mates. As a speech community — as wild members of their class and as members of a particular warren subculture — the rabbits speak their own dialect of Lapine. Adams represents dialogue between various types of interlocutors by alternating between formal and colloquial style and by recourse to dialect forms (to depict the speech of local farmers), to fictional terms for the portrayal of Lapine (e.g., silflay 'food', elil 'natural enemies', hrududu 'car'), and to FT. Most of the instances of FT in *Watership Down* are uttered by Kehaar, a seagull, in his exchanges with Hazel, the head rabbit of the warren and the novel's central protagonist. Injured, Kehaar is nursed by the rabbits and, in exchange, helps them in combatting an enemy warren and in obtaining female companions (does). FT is also employed in two short interactions between Hazel and a mouse from a neighboring colony.

Kehaar's language is depicted as a highly deviant and reduced form of English with a certain Germanic flavoring (Corder, 1975):

- (1) Ya, ya 'elp you get mudders. But now ees dis, Meester 'Azel. Always I vant Peeg Vater [the sea] now — always, always. Ees hearing Peeg vader, vant to fly Peeg vader. Now soon you go for get Mudders, I 'elp you 'ow you like. Den, ven you getting mudders, I leave you dere, fly away, no come back. But I come back anudder time, ya? Come in autumn, in vinter I come live 'ere vid you, ya?

The author stresses the strange and foreign nature of Kehaar's speech and the difficult nature of communication between him and his rabbit friends:

- (2) The answer was a harsh gabbling which they [the rabbits] felt immediately to be exotic. Wherever the bird came from, it was somewhere far away. The accent was strange and guttural, the speech distorted. They could catch only a word here and there.

In their first encounter, Hazel addresses the strange sea gull in a special inter-species register described by the narrator as 'the hedgerow patois' and 'a very simple, limited *lingua franca* of the hedgerow and woodland'. To achieve communication, Hazel focuses on lexical items, eliminating grammatical machinery, and reducing the number of function words:

- (3) Hazel: You no fly?
 Kehaar: Come keel — kah! kah! You come keel — yark! — t'ink me finish — me no finish — 'urt you damn plenty — ...
 Kehaar: Finish eat ... Vat for you do?
 Hazel: You hurt?
 Kehaar: No hurt. Plenty fight. Stay small time, den go.
 Hazel: You stay here you finish. Bad place. Come homba [foxes in lapine]. Come kestrel [hawks].
 Kehaar: Damn de lot. Fight plenty.
 Hazel: We no want you finish. — You stay here you finish. We help you maybe.
 Kehaar: Piss off!

In terms of the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G paradigm, the first encounters between Kehaar and his rabbit hosts may be interpreted as follows:¹

S(ituation): Brief helping oriented encounters; social distance due to cultural differences; formality level lowered due to Kehaar's immediate needs.

P(articipants): Rabbits — friendly; impatient; rational; somewhat fearful of sea gull's size; Kehaar — defensive, frightened; distrustful; injured; in pain; hungry.

E(nds): Rabbits — to help Kehaar, to save life, to enlist his aid in future projects; Kehaar — to fly away from the rabbits, to return to the 'Big Water'.

A(ct sequences): (1) greetings, (2) initial attempts to open communication channels, (3) communication of basic needs, (4) increased intimacy.

K(ey): Hurried, excited expression, confusion in communication, crisis situation.

I(nstrumentalities): Facial expressions, gesturing, brief utterances.

N(orms): Rabbits follow usual 'helper' norms; Kehaar behaves like a victim.

G(enre): Participants take turns in speaking, except that Kehaar deviates from norm with interruptions and interjections.

Overall, the initial social intercourse between the rabbits and Kehaar may be described as egalitarian. Very soon the rabbits switch to fully formed Lapine in addressing their guest. On the other hand, throughout the duration of his stay with them, Kehaar is portrayed as speaking in a broken manner and as being difficult to understand:

- (4) He never said much in any case and what he did say was always restricted to the simplest, since he spoke no Lapine.

It is noteworthy that in addressing Kehaar the rabbits consistently use formal style standard Lapine:

- (5) Yes, we can swim as long as it's not very far. But the banks are too steep for us, Kehaar. We wouldn't be able to stop the current from taking us down one of these tunnels.

whereas in conversing among themselves, they alternate between formal style and another more colloquial variety marked by hesitations, interruptions, interjections, incomplete sentences, and false starts:

- (6) Er — what did you say, Hazel? . . . Worms . . . Me dig for worms? Didn't the Owslo [guard of a former warren] teach — oh, all right, I'll do it . . . You and Silver wait here . . . What about beetles? Wood lice? Something like that?

These features of normal colloquial speech do not occur with FT. This suggests that it is a formal register requiring considerable monitoring for correct use.

4. Variations in FT determined by social relationship between participants

The FT employed by Richard Adams to depict Kehaar's BL contrasts sharply with that attributed to a mouse with which Hazel, the head rabbit, has two

brief interactions. As was the case with the sea gull, Hazel later switches to standard Lapine. The 'hedgerow patois or *lingua franca*' to which he resorts does not differ from the speech variety he used in his first encounters with Kehaar, but the BL attributed to the mouse differs strikingly from Kehaar's language. Its foreignness results less from simplifying and reduction processes than from the insertion of *a* before most words and its occasional suffixing after verbs:

- (7) Hazel: Run . . . Here; quick . . .
 Hazel: Perhaps hawk not gone . . . You stay now. Go later . . .
 Hazel: You go now? . . . You think safe?
 Mouse: Go now . . . No wait for owl. But a what I like a say. You 'elp a mouse. One time a mouse 'elp you. You want 'im 'e come . . .
 Mouse: No, sir. No, sir; no other rabbits, is a not a go for soon a rabbits, all stay 'ere are my friends, a save a me a very good a my life zen 'ow can I if she mek me?
 Mouse: . . . plenty for eata, keepa warm . . .
 Mouse: . . . keepa grass a short . . .

Whereas the model for Kehaar's speech is vaguely Germanic, that underlying the mouse's BL has a distinctly Romance flavor, witness the insertion of *a* and the replacement of interdental fricatives with sibilants instead of stops. The mouse is also said to chatter effusively and to twitter; both verbs no doubt are designed to transmit the stereotypic image of verbose and gesticulating Latins. On one instance one of the rabbits mockingly imitates mouse talk, though not in the direct presence of the small rodent:

- (8) Hawkbit: You like a nice a grass. 'E very fine grass.

From a sociolinguistic perspective the use of FT in Hazel's interaction with the mouse serves to signal the depreciated status of mice in the universe of *Watership Down* and reflects the existence in English society of a differential scale concerning the potential acculturation of foreigners based on their culture, perceived power relationship with the English and various other factors.

Support for the position advanced here, namely, that FT has a strong ideological and conventional basis, may be adduced by the existence of several varieties of French FT in the universe of the famous European comic strip character *Tintin*. Created in 1930 by the Belgian cartoonist Hergé (the pen name of Georges Rémi) the comic book series *The Adventures of Tintin* enjoys an enormous success in Europe; each of the volumes published up to 1960 has sold at least 500,000 copies. The hero of this comic strip series, Tintin, is the prototype of the Western boy scout: noble and courageous,

quick to rescue the poor and the oppressed and to punish the wicked and the covetous, ever ready to bear the white man's burden among uncivilized savages. Many of Tintin's exploits are set in third world countries, thus affording a study of the portrayal by his creator of verbal interactions between French speakers and various types of black-, red-, or yellow-skinned foreigners. In Tintin's world FT serves not only to convey the difficulties various types of foreigners experience in communicating with French speakers, but they also reflect the author's (and in general European French speakers') social and cultural perception of these types of foreigners.²

Three types of FT are used by Hergé. The first type involves slight stereotypical phonological modifications, and it is attributed to white Latin Americans of doubtful honesty. The following is the linguistic portrayal of a certain Ramon, a citizen of the fictional Republic of San Theodoros, where the deviant phonological features noted are very characteristic stereotypes of Spanish learners of French:

- (9) Yé n'y vois qu'oune seulé personne 'I see only one person.'
Moi, est-cé qué yé rêve? 'Me, am I dreaming?'

The two other varieties of FT are found among non-whites holding subservient status or depicted as primitive savages. For instance, except on rare occasions, Inca priests, Tibetan lamas, and African witch doctors speak French flawlessly. Both marked varieties of FT depart from Standard French by syntactic and morphological modifications but show, vis-à-vis each other, striking structural and sociolinguistic differences. One of the varieties of FT, which I will label generalized French FT, is attributed to all non-Caucasians except Africans: Amerindians, Arabs, Indians, Chinese, etc. Its chief structural features are: (i) the use of the infinitive for all inflected verb forms except those referring to past time; (ii) the use of zero copula; (iii) the generalized use of stressed pronouns, (iv) the elimination of noun determiners. These features are illustrated by the following examples:

- (10) Demain nous arriver pays des 'Tomorrow we'll arrive in
Arrumbayas. Arrumbaya country.'
Toi écouter moi. 'Listen to me.'
Moi savoir où être homme que 'I know where is the man you're
toi chercher. looking for.'
Voyage très long. The journey is very long.'
Si Indien voir moi te parler, 'If the Indian sees me speaking to
moi mourir tout de suite. to you, I'll die right away.'

The variety of FT used by Hergé's African characters comprises phono-

logical as well as morphosyntactic modifications. In addition to the morphosyntactic modifications that characterize generalized French FT, the special African variety is marked by the polyvalent function *y en a* 'there is'. That functional unit assumes at least five different functions:

- (i) the verb 'to have'
(11) Moi y en a chaud. 'I'm hot.'
(ii) copula:
(12) Ça y en a Tintin. 'There is Tintin.'
(iii) introducer *il y a*:
(13) Ça y en a Missié Blanc venir 'There's a White man who is coming
et battre petit Noir. to beat the little Negro.'
(iv) obligative modal with a futurity nuance:
(14) Toi y en a venir avec nous. 'You have to come with us.'
(v) auxiliary verb in past constructions:
(15) Li y en a volé mon beau 'He has stolen my beautiful straw
chapeau de paille. hat.'

The phonological features of African FT reflect African speakers' difficulties in producing front rounded vowels, for example the use of *li* for *lui* in (15) and of *Missié* for *Monsieur* in (13).³

5. Conclusion: the functions and sources of FT

In *Watership Down* and in the universe of Tintin the depreciatory intent of FT is conveyed by highly stereotypic devices, the use of the mock Italian English FT feature *a* and the generalized use of the verbal *y en a*, respectively. The rules underlying the three talking-down varieties of FT found in the Tintin comic books are relatively simple and readily acquired by French speakers. One need only use the infinitive forms of verbs, replace subject and clitic pronouns by corresponding stressed forms, delete determiners, etc. Thus one might hazard the following hypothesis:

- (16) The lower the status of a group of foreigners, the more stereotypic the FT used to portray their approximation to the target language and the simpler the rules that relate the fully formed variety of the target language and the FT.

Conversely, a FT, such as the one Hazel employs to address Kehaar in *Watership Down*, whose function is to facilitate communication between native

speakers and foreign learners would be expected to show few stereotypic features. In addition, the rules that generate it would be relatively complex and variable.

The sources of depreciatory FT may be found in cultural models widely known and readily available to native speakers. Paradoxically, these have their origin in stabilized forms of BL or even pidginized forms of the target language. The most stereotypic of the varieties of French FT constructed by Hergé is patterned on *petit-nègre* (also termed *Français tirailleur* or *petit-français*; see Valdman, 1977), a contact variety of French widely distributed in former French administered sub-Saharan Africa. Of the nine characteristic features of *petit nègre* listed by the Africanist Delafosse, two (an invariable verb form and the use of the polyvalent verbal *y en a*) coincide with those of Hergé's African FT.⁴ I would anticipate that varieties of English FT used with depreciatory intent would contain the most highly stereotypic pronunciation features of low-status groups of foreigners and would be patterned on such contact vernaculars as Pidgin English. The latter prediction is confirmed in part by the FT attributed to the African Queequeg in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Queequeg's restructuring of monosyllabic items is reminiscent of Tok Pisin (Melanesian Pidgin English) and African forms of Pidgin English:

- (17) Kill-e . . . ah! him bevy small-e fish-e; Queequeg no kill-e so small fish-e;
Queequeg kill-e big whale.

The exploratory sociolinguistic description of fictional FT attempted here suggests that such speech varieties have diametrically opposed social functions. On the one hand, they constitute a type of linguistic accommodation (Heidelberg Project, 1975) that facilitates the linguistic integration of outsiders. On the other hand, they serve as effective obstacles to the acculturation of foreigners. The questions I have raised, but which my meager data base does not permit me to answer with confidence, reside in possible correlations between structural features and the degree of stereotypy of the FT used to portray foreigners and the way the latter are perceived by native speakers. However, the high degree of stereotypy exhibited by depreciatory FT underscores its highly conventionalized nature. In switching to FT to facilitate contact with foreign learners, native speakers appear to resort to conventionalized models available in their community and neutralize them by the elimination of marked stereotypic features. Native speakers' reluctance to admit to the use of FT is reflected in fictional FT by the rapid switch to formal style varieties of the target language after initial contact is established.

Despite its obvious limitations the study of the use of FT in fiction provides a sufficient basis for the formulation of hypotheses to be tested on the richer and more complex data of real-world interactions. Finally, in the study

of the sociolinguistic aspects of FT one should consider the possibility that it might constitute a manifestation of the ethnocentrism of our society. It might well be absent from the interethnic contact of more multilingual so-called primitive peoples.

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Notes

1. I am indebted to Dawn Hornbeck, a student in a graduate course in sociolinguistics, for this analysis and some of the interpretations of the function of FT in *Watership Down*.
2. Interestingly enough, the hero of Hergé's comic books, Tintin, avoids the use of FT. The only bilateral use of FT I was able to find in the works examined (see references) occurred in a conversation between Tintin and a Quechua Indian (*Le Temple du Soleil*). When the European asks him *Comment le savez-vous?* the Indian replies in BT: *Toi écouter moi, Toi pas partir*, whereupon Tintin accommodates to his interlocutor by using generalized French FT: *Moi remercier toi mais moi partir tout de même*. That this constitutes an instance of genuine accommodation rather than talking down is supported by the use of the formal *vous* form rather than the condescending use of the informal *tu*.
3. In the second edition of *Tintin au Congo*, the source of my examples of African FT, Hergé attempted to regularize the variety of FT used in the direction of greater stereotypy. Zero copula is replaced by the general verbal *y en a* (*Moi fatigué* vs. *moi y en a fatigué*), differentiated forms of the definite article by the marked African FT form *li* (*la machine* vs. *li machine*), and the reduction of determiners (*attrape moussi le chien* vs. *attrape missiè chien*). In addition, the sorcerer who, in the first edition was seldom depicted as employing FT, makes more frequent use of it. Compare, for example:

1st edition	2nd edition
Ce petit Blanc a pris ici trop d'autorité.	Ce petit Blanc li a pris trop d'autorité.
Il pourrait bientôt me supplanter.	Bientôt li Noirs n'écouteront plus moi, le sorcier.

4. The nine features of *petit-tirailleur* (*petit-nègre*, etc.) listed by Delafosse include:
 - i. Invariable verb form: *je fini, il vu, nous vouloir*
 - ii. Use of post-posed *pas* for Neg.: *il parti pas*
 - iii. Agglutination of Det. with nouns: *son lamaison*
 - iv. Elimination of number and gender distinction: *il a gagné*
 - v. Use of *-là* as determiner: *homme-là*
 - vi. Parataxis and elimination of functives: *le fusil mon camarade/mon camarade son fusil*
 - vii. Polyvalent verbal *y en a*
 - viii. *gagner* for *avoir*
 - ix. Lexicon of 'nautical' or slang origin

For Delafosse, *Petit-tirailleur* was a relatively stabilized contact language, and he criticizes French officers who in addressing native troops used a more stereotypic and variable pidginized form of French.

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Children's Second-Language Acquisition: The Role of Foreigner Talk in Child-Child Interaction

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Among researchers interested in first-language acquisition, the relationship between linguistic input to young learners and children's language development is a perennial question (cf. Skinner, 1957, Chomsky, 1959, Brown, 1973, Newport, 1975, Snow and Ferguson, 1977, Curtiss, 1977). For instance, Brown's research on the acquisition of English grammatical morpheme has shown that while morpheme acquisition order may be highly similar across children and while morpheme frequency profiles may be strikingly similar across those children's parents, parental frequency of use nevertheless fails to correlate significantly with the children's observed acquisition orders.

In comparison to native-language (L1) acquisition, our understanding of the role of linguistic input in child second-language (L2) acquisition is much less clear: there is a paucity of research on this topic (although see Boyd, 1975, Hakuta, 1975, Wagner-Gough and Hatch, 1975, Fillmore, 1976, Hatch 1978).¹ The present article aims to offset this situation by focusing on a phenomenon that has received scant attention in the child L2 literature: foreigner-talk (FT) input.² By FT I mean the speech register regarded by native speakers as appropriate for addressing foreigners who have (or are presumed to have) limited competence in the language of the host country (cf. Ferguson, 1975, Ferguson and DeBose, 1977). The following examples (from Hatch, 1978: 146) illustrate the use of adult-to-adult FT by an instructor in an adult school:

In your house. You . . . house. A tub. You [gestures] wash.
(explaining the meaning of 'bath' and 'to bathe')

I want speak other person. He not here. What good thing for say now?
(explaining how to take telephone messages)

Not other student listen. I no want. Necessary *you* speak. Maybe I say
'What is your name?' The writing not important.
(explaining interviews)