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CH ACC. NO.	P.A.	PUBL. DATE	ISSUE	ERIC REPRODUCTION RELEASE?	YES ☒ NO ☐
TE 001 495		Dec 67	RIE JAN 70	LEVEL OF AVAILABILITY	I ☐ II ☒ III ☐

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TITLE
Some Linguistic Features of Five Literature Books for Children.

SOURCE CODE	INSTITUTION (SOURCE)

SP. AG. CODE	SPONSORING AGENCY

EDRS PRICE	CONTRACT NO.	GRANT NO.
0.25		

REPORT NO.		BUREAU NO.

AVAILABILITY

DESCRIPTIVE NOTE
6p.

DESCRIPTORS
*English Instruction; *Beginning Reading; *Linguistic Patterns; *Childrens Books; Child Language; Reading; Language Ability; Verbal Development; Applied Linguistics; Structural Analysis; Sentence Structure

IDENTIFIERS

ABSTRACT
A linguistic analysis of five children's books, randomly selected from the "Modern Masters Books for Children" series, described the features of language found in books for beginning readers and demonstrated the value of structural analysis in reading research. Four linguistic measures were applied to each book: 1) the average number of words in a communication unit (any independent clause with its modifiers), 2) types of structural patterns within the communication units, 3) quantity and complexity of structures, and 4) movables (words, phrases, and clauses with no fixed position). Results of the study revealed that the average number of words in a communication unit ranged from 6.99 to 12.37; that the subject-verb-complement or subject-verb-direct object pattern appeared most frequently; that words and phrases were used most commonly as movables; and that subordination complexities were not above the children's grasp. The five books considered were found suitable for beginning readers, but more extensive application of such linguistic analysis to children's literature should improve elementary reading. (JM)

ED032297

ELEMENTARY ENGLISH

XLIV   December, 1967   No. 8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TE 001 495

O. L. DAVIS, JR. AND JOAN G. SEIFERT

Some Linguistic Features of Five Literature Books for Children

Introduction

The important relationship between children's language and the language of their books is commonly recognized. This awareness has been evident, particularly, by the attention given to textbook readability, a concept based largely upon vocabulary and sentence length. Structural patterns, grammatical elements within structures, and other dimensions of language, long the special interest of linguists, have only recently been employed productively in the analysis of children's reading materials.[1,2] Most of these studies focused on the congruities and dissimilarities between the language produced by children and the language of textbooks, primarily readers, used in school instruction. Probably because of time limits rather than interest, this line of inquiry has not been extended to include attention to children's literature books, stories, poetry, and classroom pamphlets. That trade books, in particular, have not received this type of attention is the more noteworthy in light of the prominence of individualized reading programs premised on the basic use of such books.[3] Many authors of trade books, indeed, make no pretense of deliberately structuring their books' language for children; probably the best writers invariably manipulate the language to please themselves and to develop an artistic product. On the other hand, standard literature, including the Bible and works authored by British and American masters, has not been immune from detailed linguistic analysis.[4,5] Understanding of children's literature, surely, would be increased and its use more wisely planned with the results of such analyses. This paper reports a modest study designed: (1) to reveal some features of language used by authors of five children's literature books; and (2) to demonstrate the power of the analytic procedures in hopes of stimulating more substantial research.

Procedure

Five children's books were selected for

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[1] Mildred E. Riling, Oral and Written Languages of Children in Grades 4 and 6 Compared with the Language of Their Textbooks. USOE Cooperative Research Project No. 2410. Durant, Oklahoma: Southeastern State College, 1965.

[2] Ruth G. Strickland, "The Language of Elementary School Children: Its Relationship to the Language of Reading Textbooks and the Quality of Reading of Selected Children," Indiana University School of Education Bulletin, 38 (July, 1962), 1-131.

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[3] Enthusiasts for a cause seldom seem influenced by research, much less that which fails to substantiate their position. Too, the mass of opinion, belligerently advanced by advocates and resisters, likely obscures the solid study offered for reflective consideration. Surely a case in point is the paper by David H. Russell, "An Evaluation of Some Easy-to-Read Trade Books for Children," Elementary English 38 (November, 1961), 475-482.

[4] John B. Carroll, "Vectors of Prose Style," Style in Language. (Edited by Thomas A. Sebeok.) Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1960, pp. 283-292.

[5] Jacob Leed (Ed.), The Computer and Literary Style. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1966.

this first analysis. Each was a member of a series, "Modern Masters Books for Children," published by Crowell-Collier Press under the general editorship of Louis Untermeyer. Books in this series were written by adult authors especially for beginning readers. The authors wrote their books using a vocabulary list especially developed for the series by three university authorities in reading instruction (Professors Robert Karlin, Helen Murphy, and Nila Banton Smith). In all, the series attempted to bring great writing by master authors to American children. Chosen for this study were five books randomly selected from the series.

> Phyllis McGinley, *The B Book* (1962)
> Robert Graves, *The Big Green Book* (1962)
> Richard Wilbur, *Loudmouse* (1963)
> Shirley Jackson, *Nine Magic Wishes* (1963)
> Jay Williams, *Puppy Pie* (1962)

Four linguistic measures were applied to the entire verbal content of the five books. The criteria were among those, with minor modifications, used by Loban[6] and Strickland[7] in their extensive studies of children's oral and written language. The measures included:

1. *Communication units and average number of words in a communication unit.* The communication unit, as defined by Watts[8], is a group of words which cannot

be further divided without loss of its essential meaning. In this study, the communication unit was any independent clause with all of its modifiers. No communication unit contains more than one such clause.

2. *Patterns of structure within the communication units.* Classification of these structural patterns followed Loban's procedure: *1* = subject; *2* and *(2)* = verbs used as predicates; *3* = inner complement (indirect object); *4* = transitive verb complement (direct object); *5* = linking verb complement (adjectival, nominal, or other element used as subjective complement); *6* = outer (objective) complement; *M* = movable parts of a sentence (words, phrases, or clauses) with no fixed position. The ten most common structural patterns found by Loban served as a guide in this study and are described below.

Pattern	Symbol	Examples
1	1 2 or 1 (2)	Helen runs. Helen is home.
2	1 2 4	Helen eats peaches.
3	1 (2) 5	Peaches are fruit, Peaches are good.
4	1 2 3 4	Helen threw the cat some liver.
5	1 2 4 6	They elected George president. They thought Helen bashful.
6	[1] (2) 1	Here is Helen. There are three apartments on second street.
7	Questions	Where is she going?
8	Passive forms	Peaches were eaten by Helen.
9	Requests, Commands	Move back. Let us move back.
10	Partials	(Any incomplete unit)

Patterns not categorized were pooled as "others."

[6]Walter I. Loban, *The Language of Elementary School Children*. National Council of Teachers of English, Research Report No. 1. Champaign, Illinois: The Council, 1963.

[7]Ruth G. Strickland, "The Language of Elementary School Children: Its Relationship to the Language of Reading Textbooks and the Quality of Reading of Selected Children," *Indiana University School of Education Bulletin* 38 (July, 1962), 1-131.

[8]A. F. Watts, *The Language and Mental Development of Children*. London: George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1944.

3. *Movables.* These components (parts of a sentence with no fixed position) were identified by linguists as bearing upon children's effectiveness and control of language. The four types of movables identified here were words, phrases, clauses, and multiple movables (combinations of the first three types).

4. *Subordinating structures.* Previous studies have noted that use of subordinating structures is a mature and difficult form of language expression. In this study, a weighted index of clause subordination, modified from Loban's research by Kean[9], was employed. This index simplifies accounting for complex structures of clauses within clauses often found in speaking and writing.

Results and Discussion

The average number of words in a communication unit in the five books ranged from 6.99 to 12.37 (See Table 1). Loban found that the highest average number of

Table 1
Number of Words and Communication Units
and Average Number of Words in
Communication Units in Five
Literature Books for Children

Name of Book	Total Words	Total Communication Units	Average Number of Words in Communication Unit
The B Book	1369	167	8.20
The Big Green Book	1681	150	11.21
Loudmouse	2313	187	12.37
Nine Magic Wishes	447	42	10.64
Puppy Pie	1637	234	6.99

words in a communication unit for children's spoken language was 8.37 and that this level was not reached until grade six. These books, particularly since they were

9John M. Kean, *An Exploration of the Linguistic Structure of Second and Fifth Grade Teachers' Oral Classroom Language,* unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, 1965.

written as "beginning" books, might be considered too difficult for the children for whom they were intended. On the other hand, a reduction of the average number of words in communication units in children's literature books might serve to inhibit children's language development. Loban did document a steady, if slow, increase in the number of communication units as well as the average number of words spoken in a communication unit as children grow older. Consequently, children might be served best by literature books which incorporate usage at a somewhat higher level than that used by children in their own speech. Such "high" lengths of communication units might act as spurs to children's development of language fluency. Too, the literary merit of the books, also important to child readers as well as to the authors, undoubtedly would be damaged seriously by the imposition of an arbitrary standard of communication unit length.

The simple 1 2 4 structure (subject, verb, and complement or direct object), the pattern most used by children, appeared most frequently in the five books (See Table 2). The authors of the books, thus, employed most the sentence structure that all English speakers use most and will probably find easy to read and understand. The second most used structure in the books was the 1 2 (subject, verb) pattern. While used by children, this basic pattern is usually elaborated in speech and seems not to occur with the frequency that it did in these books. Too, it ranked very low in usage in the reading textbooks analyzed by Riling. The 1 (2) 5 pattern, very common in children's speech, ranked third in use by authors of these books. Partials were the fourth most used structure although they were used only about half as frequently as the next highest used pattern. Loban noted that low ability children used more partials when speaking than did high ability children, and for both

Table 2
Frequencies and Percentages of Ten Structural Patterns
Found in Five Children's Literature Books

Structural Patterns	The B Book		The Big Green Book		Loudmouse		Nine Magic Wishes		Puppy Pie	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1 2 4	35	21.73	44	29.53	55	29.10	11	26.19	120	50.21
1 2 or 1 (2)	40	24.84	30	20.13	29	15.34	3	7.14	36	15.06
1 (2) 5	21	13.04	27	18.12	23	12.17	17	40.48	31	12.97
Partials	21	13.04	8	5.36	18	9.52	0	0.0	17	7.11
Requests, commands	10	6.21	13	8.72	25	13.23	0	0.0	3	1.26
Questions	16	9.93	5	3.36	9	4.76	1	2.38	13	5.44
[1] (2) 1	1	.62	2	1.34	7	3.70	3	7.14	6	2.51
1 2 3 4	5	3.11	5	3.36	3	1.58	1	2.38	5	2.09
Passive forms	0	0.0	5	3.36	3	1.58	0	0.0	1	.42
1 2 4 6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	.42
Others	12	7.45	10	6.71	20	10.58	6	14.29	6	2.51

groups, use of partials decreased with chronological age. On the basis of children's language, therefore, partials probably should appear in beginner's books. Too, partials add an element of style commonly unknown in books written to the textbook dictum: Every sentence is a complete sentence. Three patterns, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 4 6, and the passive, seldom appearing in children's speech, in addition to the [1] (2) 1 structure, appeared very infrequently in the books. In general, then, usage of the ten structural patterns in the books, seems not inconsistent with usage by children.

In all five books, and consistent with children's usage, words and phrases were used as movables more than were clauses and combinations (See Table 3). Use of

Table 3
Number and Types of Movables Found in
Five Children's Literature Books

Name of Book	Words	Phrases	Clauses	Combinations	Total
The B Book	46	49	9	8	112
The Big Green Book	51	49	12	23	135
Loudmouse	35	84	16	40	175
Nine Magic Wishes	3	5	0	2	10
Puppy Pie	33	57	6	11	107
Totals for Types of Movables	168	244	43	84	

clauses and combinations as movables in children's literature books probably should increase at the upper levels when increasing complexity of thought and language usage are desirable. Nevertheless, one might hypothesize that these five books may be difficult for children because of their high use of combinations as movables. This usage, however, may very well be an element of style that differentiates these books from others.

These books, as revealed in Table 4,

Table 4
Number of Subordinate Clauses Found in and
Subordination Indexes for
Five Children's Literature Books

Name of Book	Number of Subordinate Clauses	Subordination Index
The B Book	30	38
The Big Green Book	54	73
Loudmouse	98	134
Nine Magic Wishes	5	6
Puppy Pie	56	66

varied widely in the amount of subordination in their sentences. While the subordination index is only a gross approximation of the amount and complexity of subordination, it provides evidence that grammatical and semantic complexity is present in each of these books. In only one book was the subordination index so high as to raise a question about the appropriateness

of the book as one for beginning readers. As a book to be read aloud, however, the amount of subordination might offer little problem to children who listen to it and add considerably to its appeal.

Conclusion

These findings indicate that the five books studied contained structural patterns and some important elements within structures which were, in the main, consistent with the language development of children for whom the books were written. Five books certainly are neither representative nor an appropriate sample of children's books and the results must not be generalized. Evidence from the analysis does indicate, however, the general suitability of these five books for beginners *on the basis of children's language.* Application of criteria, among them literary merit and readability, should be expected to add relevant dimensions of appropriateness. Perhaps more important than the specific findings themselves is the application of the analytic method to children's literature. The study of reading materials has been far too restricted by reliance on the various readability formulae. Now, a number of linguistic criteria provide access to an understanding of the nature of language in verbal materials. As they are applied to literary works for children, as well as textbooks and other instructional materials, the research results thus obtained should add substantially to improved reading materials and programs for children in school.

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