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ABSTRACT

Linguistics is not a single field of learning but is rather a collection of fields of study, all concerned with the scientific study of language. There is no single linguistic method of teaching reading but rather each field of linguistics influences reading in varying degrees. Phonology and its subbranches (phonetics, phonemics, and phonics) influence reading instruction--phonemics sheds light on the decoding process, and phonics cannot be completely omitted from the reading program. Orthography is especially important to reading when it emphasizes spelling. Psycholinguistics holds great potential for aiding the reading teacher, but until the psychologist and the linguist add the neurologist to their study, the help from psycholinguistics will be incomplete. Reading instruction is also aided by lexicography and etymology; dictionary usage is a valuable word attack skill, and tracing word origins is a source of pleasure for some students. The potentially most important field of linguistics as far as reading is concerned is semantics, but it needs more good research before its full benefits can be used. Educators and publishers should stop referring to "the" linguistic method of reading instruction and begin to make use of knowledge in each field. (VJ)

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"LINGUISTIC" PROGRAMS--ARE THEY REALLY DIFFERENT?*

Part of the confusion--if not outright bewilderment--that has prevented linguistics from making contributions to reading instruction in consonance with its undeniably great potential arises from the syntactical truth that the word, linguistics, is a singular noun; therefore, it properly takes a singular verb. We say, "Linguistics is," not "Linguistics are." It is understandable, then, that great numbers of people who have not had direct training in linguistic science have assumed it to be a unitary branch of learning--comparable, for instance, to chemistry or psychology. As it is syntactically correct to speak of the science of linguistics, it would appear reasonable to expect its contribution to reading instruction to be made under a more-or- less unitary system that might be spoken of as the linguistic method of teaching reading.

The difficulty arises from the fact that, although the word, linguistics, is syntactically singular, it is logically and pragmatically plural. Logically, we should say not, "Linguistics is," but "Linguistics are." Linguistics is not a simple, unitary branch of learning. Rather, if is made up of a remarkably diverse--and diversified--collection of fields of study which are loosely related through the correlative fact that they are all concerned with the scientific study of language.

Sharply here, however, their unitary relationships end. The various and independent branches which go to make up this loosely defined science of linguistics each has its own central points of focus, its own special

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methodoligies, and its own special ground-and house rules for carrying on workaday affairs.

Orthography, morphology, lexicography, syntax, dialectology, linguistic geography, etymology, and semantics are but a representative few of the many disciplinary mansions which make up the collective house of linguistics. Each of these and other branches of linguistic science proceeds relatively independently of every other branch.

Obviously, then, the linguistic method of teaching reading must await that probably remote day when some linguistic Copernicus will discover the key which will unify the various fields of linguistics into a truly monolithic whole.

Until that day arrives, we reading specialists will do well to organize our attempts to apply linguistic knowledge to reading in accord with facts as they are.

For the time being, at least, we must reject the linguistic method of teaching reading as nothing more than a rather ill-conceived academic shibboleth. By the same token, we must reject, also, all programs which have the temerity to represent themselves as being the linguistic method of teaching reading, or as being based on the linguistic method.

There go, then, most of the currently available "linguistic" programs of reading instruction. And there stands, also, by implication, at least, my answer to the question, "Linguistic Programs, Are They Really Different?" Let me spell it out more plainly. To some degree, of course, every reading program is influenced by knowledge from all fields of linguistics. Beyound that basic input common to all, so-called "linguistic" programs of reading instruction are likely to be uniquely different to the degree that they have been deliberately shaped by

specialized input from one or more branches of linguistic science. Unquestionably, some "linguistic" reading programs really are different from what may be described as a typical reading program. "Different," however, is not necessarily synonomcus with "better."

During the time remaining to me, I shall attempt first to reason out with you some of the contributions that selected branches of linguistics may offer the reading teacher. I shall then terminate my remarks with a general conclusion and two specific recommendations.

Phonology--phono, sound; logos, study--that broad branch of linguistics which deals with the sound structure of language numbers among its sub-branches two, and, if you are willing to be broad minded about it, three, which are of particular interest to the reading teacher. Phonetics focuses primarily on the production of speech sounds, and phonemics focuses on the function of speech sounds. If you will forgive an oversimplification in the interest of clarity, we can say that a difference between two speech sounds is phonetic if it can be discerned and phonemic if it makes a difference in meaning. The difference between /pæt/ and /pæt⁻/ is phonetic. The difference between /pæt/ and /pæd/ is phonemic.

For the reading teacher, phonemics and the light which it can shed on the forty-odd phonemes or individual speech sounds of English, has a great deal to offer.

Witness SRA's DISTAR program as an example of a formal attempt to harness the tremendous linguistic horsepower of phonemics directly to reading's wagon. I have no quarrel with this or the many similar programs which will probably be available in great abundance soon. It takes

little imagination to see that a multi-marriage involving phoneme-grapheme realtionships, programmed organization, audio-visual presentation, and modular packaging offers virtually unlimited possibilities to enterprising publishers. Surely, excellent decoding materials will issue from this marriage.

In my opinion, however, the most valuable contribution phonemics can make to the reading teacher must follow a somewhat more indirect path. Every reading teacher should take a course in phonemics. Not for the purpose of acquiring content which she will teach directly to children, but rather to gain solid foundation material for her own understanding of a related, albeit perhaps somewhat illegitimate member of the linguistic family.

You will recall my suggestion of a few minutes ago that a sufficiently broadminded view would include as sub-branches of phonology, not only phonetics and phonemics, but a third member as well. As many of you have guessed, my tentative additional candidate is phonics.

Orthodox linguists would, for the most part, take a dim view of phonics' bid for membership in the family. Quite properly, they would insist that linguistics encompasses only those branches devoted to the scientific study of language. And it is not to be denied that phonics is hardly scientifically based. Instead of following the prescribed laws of discovery and organization which generate the content of other branches of linguistic inquiry, phonics can only be described as loosely associated collections of rules which have been iterated and preserved over the years by practicing primary school teachers. If there is one thing about which they would agree, it is that there is disagreement concerning the true

set of phonic rules which leads to reading Mecca. In short, phonics can aptly be described as the folk medicine of linguistics.

At the same time, however, there are few today who would relegate phonics to the educational limbo to which it was assigned between Wars I and II. We may not agree about the proper content of phonics, but we are agreed that--no matter what else it is--reading is decoding. And decoding requires the use of phonics.

The task of the phonemicist is a relatively simple one. He has only to learn the forty or so phonemes of English, learn to describe and recognize them, learn the proper symbol or grapheme to represent each speech sound--and he's in business. His task is that of going from the spoken sound to a graphic representation of it.

The task of the teacher who attempts to help a child go from the grapheme to the phoneme which it represents is vastly more difficult. Because our conventional alphabet of 26 letters must represent forty-odd phonemes, the orthographer or spelling specialist must resort to various ruses to stretch the 26 sumbols to cover their assigned task.

Precisely here must the reading teacher appeal to the at best only near-scientific field of phonics. Fortunately, serious students are working to move phonics into full scientific membership in the academic community. Witness the work of Ted Clymer and his bellweather study of the utility of phonic generalizations.

By now the literature offers extensive guidance concerning the long-enduring question of just what phonics generalizations should be taught. My own very ~~education-professorish~~ evasive answer is that there is no proper comprehensive answer to the question and that it must be answered separately

for each child. Having now cleared by academic skirts, I may boldly state that the typical child can probably profit from a direct knowledge of:

1. the letters of the alphabet name, form, and serial order
2. the short sounds of the vowels together with the notion that closed syllables usually contain short vowels
3. the sounds usually represented by single consonant letters and consonant digraphs
4. soft c and g and their usual orthographic diacritics
5. the long sounds of the vowels; the final e diacritic is probably worth knowing if it is clearly understood that it doesn't work every time; in the case of single vowel letters, a sensible procedure is to try the short sound first, if that doesn't make sense, try the long sound; so far as vowel digraphs are concerned, awareness is probably enough
6. the diphthongs and their usual spelling patterns are certainly worth knowing
7. the knowledge that post-vocalic r usually causes the preceding vowel to have a sound which is neither its long nor short sound is an easy generalization--so easy, in fact, that most youngsters pick it up unaided.

Average readers, actually all readers, have grapheme-phoneme relationship knowledge far beyond my little recommended catalog. If much formal attention is required beyond this, however, the case is probably bordering on the clinical.

Having devoted a disproportionate amount of time and space to members of the phonology family, I will say only that orthography, ortho--right, graph--write, the science of writing (actually spelling) words right, has a great deal to offer the reading teacher. Spelling is well worth teaching well. I think I am on solid ground in defending the position that practically everything a child learns about spelling has direct or carry-over value to reading.

Psycholinguistics seems to be delving ground that clearly holds potential for aiding the reading teacher. Surely the study of an area which promises an exploration of both psyche, the mind, and linguistics, language, behavior must go right to the heart of many difficult and enduring problems.

I am afraid, however, that what the term, psycholinguistics, calls most readily to mind is a confusing array of scientific, near-scientific, and out-right pseudo-scientific theorizings concerning more the abnormal than the normal, reading process. The academic journeyer into this area is likely to find himself soon lost in the Never-Never land of dyslexia, minimal brain damage, cerebral dysfunction, and language learning disability.

As one who works directly with children who have severe reading problems, I have been particularly disappointed with the elaborate tests which purport to measure psycholinguistic abilities. I have been even more disappointed with the programs of therapy which have been built up around these and related tests.

Reading is a physical process--beginning, middle, and end--exclusively a physical process. It is my judgment that the reading teacher can continue to expect limited practical assistance from this camp until the psychologist and the linguist who occupy it add a third member to their team.

When it becomes neuro-psycho-linguistics, we may begin to hear reliable answers to straight-forward questions about the reading process itself.

Both lexicography, the dictionary makers number one tool, and its companion, etymology, that linguistic branch which attempts to trace out histories and origins of words, have been used directly by good reading teachers for a great many years.

At its lowest level of child usage, lexicography is a valuable and sophisticated word attack skill. (When all else fails, look the new or unfamiliar word up in the dictionary.) At its inspiring best, lexicography is one of the creative teacher's most direct ~~answers~~ avenues to vocabulary enlargement and enrichment. I have known some children who "read" the dictionary for fun. Almost all of them have the capacity for genuinely enjoying tracing out the histories of interesting words.

Once he has heard the story of Tantalus, who chould forget the meaning of tantalize? Here are half-a-dozen sure-fire winners: (1) sabotage, (2) taxicab, (3) companion, (4) abet, (5) calculate, (6) infant.

Somewhere in my files is a list of a hundred or so words with interesting histories. I have found that all children seem to enjoy playing with a few of them. Some children find them a virtually endless source of delight. If you would like to have a copy of this list of words, I'll be happy to send it to you.

If any branch of linguistics has a claim to the title of potentially most important contributor to reading instruction, semantics is certainly a chief contender.

Semantics is the science of meaning in communication--and without meaning there is no reading. Probably nothing associated with reading

instruction is more in need of a new, hard look than comprehension and the reading-study jobs. Good research in this area is scarce indeed. What we have is largely out of date and inadequate.

Here is a real frontier challenge to linguistics. Beginning reading instruction, decoding, and work attack have all received generous contributions from linguistics. It is now comprehension's time--and none too soon. For starters, it would be nice to have a definitive analysis of the skills involved. It hardly seems possible that after so many years of teaching them, we are not at all sure what the real comprehension skills are.

As we approach the end of our section's allotted time, it seems appropriate that a summary statement of conclusions and recommendations should begin to emerge.

A proper summary statement must encompass not only the ideas that Dr. Gunderson and I have developed here this morning, but the essence, at least, of the millions of words that have been written and the thousands of talks that have been made about this topic during the last ten or twelve years.

After some thought, I have decided to resort to a similie that may be a classic non-sequitor. You must be the judge of that.

Sixty or seventy years ago, when reading instruction was just emerging as a fit matter for academic concern at the normal college level, a fresh new discipline was evolving across campus in the College of Arts and Sciences. The name of this discipline was psychology.

Immediately, scholars from both campuses saw the tremendous potential that the discoveries of the one held for the improvement of the other.

Ergo, the psychological method of teaching reading was born. The psychology-reading relationship must surely have been exciting to our colleagues of fifty years ago. It is exciting still today.

But who would dare deliver a paper before the International Reading Association on the topic, "The Psychological Method of Reading Instruction," or "Psychological Programs of Reading Instruction, Are They Really Different?" What publisher would be foolish enough to advertise its program as being based on the psychological method of teaching reading?

As a matter of course, we expect methods to be psychologically sound; and the program without psychological integrity is not long for this world.

My conclusion is that talking about "the linguistic method" of reading instruction or "linguistic programs" of reading instruction is like talking about "the psychological method" of reading instruction or "psychological programs" of reading instruction -- woefully out of date.

My recommendations are: (1) that this be the last I.R.A. program to include a general linguistics-reading section, (2) that publishers quit exploiting the linguistic label and strive for true linguistic integrity instead.