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ABSTRACT

In response to a study group concerned with the spoken word and the integrity of English instruction, Walter Loban traces speech and its development, examines oral language proficiency, discusses one study of oral language, discusses language and social class and language and learning, and concludes by commenting on the neglect speech instruction suffers in education. The second paper concurs with Loban's concern over speech instruction and urges an approach to oral language instruction which emphasizes situations relating the sequence in language to the developmental needs of the child. The concern is with the danger that unself-consciousness in the use of speech (the basis of confident expression and behavior) may be adversely affected if the planned procedure for speech instruction is introduced prematurely or is handled in an awkward and mechanical fashion. (HOD)

STUDY GROUP PAPER NO. 1

The Spoken Word and the Integrity of English Instruction

by

Walter Loban

I

Speech and Its Development

Regardless of any philosophical differences men may have about education, they agree in assigning great importance to thinking and reasoning. Most thinking and reasoning, however, depend upon ability with language. Although language was at first a means of communication for man, it has become far more than that. Now it is also one of the principal means of thought. Man's control over nature depends upon his skill with language as a means of thought, his ability to use words as symbols. Without language human thought is severely limited.

A fundamental difference between the animal and human worlds is linguistic: animals can use and understand cues; they cannot cope with symbols. A growl, a call, even a green traffic light--communication cues directly tied to concrete situations--can take on meaning for animals as well as for human beings. Symbols, however, are instruments of complicated thought. Unlike cues they are not necessarily tied to the immediate situation. By means of symbols human beings can allude to objects or concepts even in the absence of those objects or concepts. The language human beings use for discourse is therefore a system of arbitrary symbols used to designate concepts, relationships, and things, thus making complex thought and reason possible.

This oral language system has some amazing features. It associates symbols with concepts arbitrarily, and it can be enlarged to name new concepts, such as camouflage in 1918 or jet plane in 1960. The meaning of a linguistic symbol in the system is, furthermore, contingent upon the other symbols with which it is combined. For instance, in English-speaking communities, response to the symbol crop differs in the following four sets of utterances because of the accompanying symbols:

The stone stuck in the bird's crop.

She carried a riding crop in her hand.

The shepherd watched his sheep crop the grass.

The farmer reaped a crop of barley.

The next two utterances elicit strikingly different responses because of a single symbol, not.

Go away!

Do not go away!

Similarly in any human language, a system of arbitrary symbols in contingencies of relationship makes possible advanced thought.

Without symbolic language, there would be among men no civilization, no passing on of cultures. The cues or signs used by animals never become language for discourse because animals are incapable of separating the cues from the particular concrete situations in which the signs are embedded. No evidence of animals having made the leap from cues to symbolic language, to words freed from concrete situations and arranged in systems and contingencies, has ever been verified (Brown). Until the day she learned

w-a-t-e-r as a symbol, and thereby disassociated it from any particular wetness, Helen Keller lived the life of a gifted animal using cues. On that day, in a spectacular leap, she extended her potential limits to the mental horizon of the human family. Human beings use cues, of course, but they also use symbols. Without symbolic language there would be no formation of concepts, no dominance of abstract knowledge over concrete knowledge. Consequently, power over language is becoming a central concern of good education in all modern nations (Vygotsky).

Growth in this use of symbolic language involves a complex of factors. Presumably the development of an individual's proficiency with language depends upon the relation between the individual and his environment. The child who is acquiring oral linguistic skill should have vitality and health; he should also have an environment fostering exploration, an active approach to experience, and a confident attitude toward trying and using language. Thus language development appears to be affected by numerous factors, all varying simultaneously and in complex interrelationships. In the interests of establishing a guiding theory for this paper, some of these factors have been identified tentatively. An attempt has been made to list here, in the order of their presumed importance, those biological and environmental factors contributing most prominently to language development.

Environmental Factors	Biological Factors
security in relations with parents (or parent surrogates) and other authority symbols	glandular balance and total biological homeostasis
degree of facility in family use of language (usually, but not always, this factor will vary in the same direction as socioeconomic status)	energy (rate and balance of metabolism and whatever else contributes to energy)
amount, variety, and quality of language heard and used in the family (conversation, stories, table talk, etc.)	physical facility in speech production; motor controls of speech organs
variety of experience including much nonthreatening, self-enhancing interaction with other people and opportunity to verbalize this experience	visual acuity and spatial perception
encouragement and opportunity for self-expression, not only in language but in other ways also	hearing acuity
adequate balanced diet (over a period of time)	tactile acuity
sufficient rest (over a period of time)	immunity to disease
instruction that focuses attention on the principles of effectiveness in language (such instruction would occur as much as possible in problem situations involving the child's interests and drives)	

Certainly, one can agree that regardless of biological endowment, positive changes in the environmental factors listed above should contribute to improved language skill. Children with the most fortunate combination of both biological and environmental factors should develop controls over

symbolic language earlier and more effectively than children with less fortunate combinations of these factors.

II

Proficiency with the Spoken Word

In cultural matters, therefore, where symbols occupy a central position, oral language is a common means of adjustment, so much so that a child who is either deprived, isolated, or overly protected may acquire only the lowest levels of language skill. Language develops best in situations where individuals feel a need to express themselves and seek to be understood and where individuals have a deep interest in receiving communication. This would mean that children who are, for whatever reason, much alone or who play with only one other child, such as a twin, will develop less skill in language than those who have genuine language interaction with other children and adults. This language interaction, often called reciprocal reinforcement of language, is an important form of learning symbols as a means of adjustment to the social environment.

Oral language proficiency develops through a sequence, a series of developing controls of meaningful forms--for instance, the ability to handle pronouns according to convention; the use of subordination instead of co-ordination to show relationships more adequately; the accurate and consistent use of verb tense; the exact use of relational words such as until, although, however. All these and more develop earlier in some children than in others. The rapidity with which these attainments occur and the order in which they occur probably vary among individuals, but a general

picture of the situation is now being revealed empirically. Base lines will be charted for more effective instruction, and for individual children the relative stages of growth can be determined.

Which of such identifiable language attainments will appear early and which ones late? Their order, presumably, will be conditioned by the requirements of language situations as well as by the successful combinations the speaker has already mastered. Regressions will occur in situations of social threat, and previous accomplishments will require relearning in the setting of new, more complicated expressions. Very likely, the order and duration of these stages of growth will vary with individuals. Although no precise formula can be imposed on this development of language power, an accurate description should reveal order and pattern rather than obscure accident.

These stages of oral language growth are also related to socioeconomic status and to home environment. In an increasing number of research studies, socioeconomic status shows a positive relation to language proficiency, and the extent to which a child utilizes his linguistic abilities and potential is influenced by his home environment. It is not at all impossible that by finding out more concerning language and how children use language in thinking and learning we can increase the educational potential of large numbers of children, especially those from the least favored socioeconomic groups of society.

III

One Study of Oral Language

Structural patterns

Research has shown that those who lack skill with the spoken word use many more partial expressions--sentence patterns that are incomplete--than does a group high in language proficiency.

The proficient subjects employ the linking verb sentence pattern to a greater extent than does the low group, but this is accounted for by the fact that more Negroes who use dialect (and thus avoid the verb to be) are in the low group. This omission of the linking verb is also true of Pidgin dialects. The presence and absence of linking verb sentence pattern are exemplified in such sentences as "He is a good dog" versus "He a good dog."

Except for this linking verb pattern in social class dialect and the use of partials, the differences in structural patterns used by the two groups are negligible. This similarity in the use of patterns in oral language is important, especially when considered in relation to the findings which immediately follow.

Elements within the structural patterns

Although differences in structural patterns are not notable, very important differences do show up in the dexterity with which subjects use elements within these structures. For instance, in the English language a nominal such as the subject of a sentence may be a single noun, a gerund phrase, an infinitive, a dependent clause, or several other syntactical

arrangements of words. The nominals, whether in subject or object position, and the movable elements of any expression show marked differences when low and high groups are compared. The high group always has a larger repertoire. This holds true consistently for any syntactical nominal structure. Not pattern but what is done to achieve flexibility within the pattern proves to be a measure of effectiveness and control of oral language (Loban).

In the movable elements of the spoken patterns (such as adverbs, many phrases, and clauses) the high group consistently shows a greater repertoire.

For nominals in the subject position, the low group depends almost exclusively on nouns and pronouns. The high group can use noun clauses, infinitives, and other verbals, a larger repertoire for achieving flexibility of structure and nuances of meaning.

For nominals used as complements, both groups use nouns and pronouns with the same frequency, but the high group invariably exceeds the low group in the use of infinitives and clauses, another example of flexible structure to achieve shades of meaning in the spoken word.

Tentative thinking through the use of provisional and conditional statements

Those subjects most proficient with spoken language are the ones who most frequently use language to express tentativeness. Supposition, hypothesis, and conditional or concession statements occur much less frequently in the spoken language of those lacking skill in language.

Coherence through the use of subordination

All children show an increasing use of subordination and number of words in subordination as chronological age increases. They achieve coherence and emphasis in a sentence by subordinating some ideas to others, using dependent clauses, participial and infinitive phrases, gerunds, and appositives. The use of subordinating connectives increases with chronological age, mental ability, language ability, and socioeconomic status.

All these findings are most logically accounted for by the differences between the two groups in experience with communicating thought of a fairly complex nature. Thinking and communicating thought to others are the key fundamentals. Some teachers, like Sister Mary Theodore Boesen (The Instructor, March 1966, pp. 103-7), are teaching children to stretch sentences in situations where meaningful thinking and communication are featured. In the elementary school, "sentence and thought stretching" can be encouraged in science, social studies, and mathematics as well as in English lessons.

IV

Language and Social Class

The importance of social class in relation to oral language appears not only on this matter of subordination, but also on the measures of writing, reading, and standard oral usage. Bernstein (1960), on the basis of research with British working-class youth, found language proficiency grossly depressed in relation to scores on a nonverbal intelligence test. He believes the low level of linguistic skill may be independent of potential intelligence and that differenct environments affect language

structure. The linguistic differences he finds between working-class youth and middle-class youth do not, in his view, reflect differences in potential capacity. Rather they represent entirely different ways of using the English language, ways which systematically orient children to differing relationships with people and the world about them. The middle class, for instance, uses elaborated forms of speech "in which the arrangement of syntax varies greatly from one individual to another and in which the possibilities of sentence organization are used to clarify meaning and make it more explicit" (p. 273). The lower working classes show a "rigidity of syntax, a limited and restricted use of the structural possibilities for sentence organization, a form of relatively condensed speech in which certain meanings are restricted and the possibility of their elaboration...reduced" (p. 274).

The need for a true understanding about regional and social class dialects also enters into any concern with the spoken word. Many teachers and students are unaware of the varieties of spoken English and are insular in their attitudes toward variation.

V

Language and Learning

"Give me the right word and the right accent, and I will move the world." Thus Joseph Conrad paid tribute to the power of language to influence the thought, feeling, and action of others. But language is also the means by which an individual exercises some degree of control over his own thinking and receives the culture. His language does not stand apart

from experience but interpenetrates with it. Nor is language merely a vehicle for thought; rather both are interdependent. If children from the least favored classes do not have the development of language which makes possible more exact or more insightful thought, they will be handicapped in their learning and in their ability to cope with life's problems. Milner's study (1951) shows that differences in readiness to read are related to verbal attainment. A richer verbal environment in the home, more books, being read to by adults, meals with parents, and talking with parents characterize the backgrounds of children advanced enough in language to read. They do not characterize the backgrounds of comparable children whose development is not sufficient for starting reading.

One behavior category is built upon another. Just as a hierarchy of prerequisite learning is necessary in mathematics, so too does it seem sensible to look for hierarchical sequences of verbal learning. If there are deficiencies at the lower levels of the hierarchy of tasks, there will be failures and difficulties at the later levels. It is entirely possible that many children of the least favored economic levels are not as dull or slow or incapable of learning as their school marks and IQ scores indicate. More likely they are in a situation of not knowing how to learn their present tasks because they have not had assistance in learning prerequisite verbal tasks.

VI

Some Implications and Issues

These days, language is the preoccupation of many different scholars:

anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, educators, psychologists, and psycholinguists, not to omit the linguists themselves. Almost everyone agrees upon the crucial significance of the spoken word and the dependence upon it of writing, reading, and listening.

But this awareness of the spoken word's importance faces education with an enormous and rather amazing fact: not only is speech seldom linked with school writing, reading, and literature in order to illuminate them; it is seldom taught. Both in Great Britain and the United States, the primary schools do very little with oral language other than to drill on standard usage. In the secondary schools, speech, if handled at all, is usually separated from English and taught by speech teachers, frequently with an emphasis upon public speaking, the curriculum of the specialist. Yet the spoken word is the very foundation upon which any sound curriculum in English can be built.

"The spoken language in England has been shamefully neglected," says Andrew Wilkinson (1965) in the first sentence of Spoken English. He points out all the curricular silences or pious evasions of the problem in his own country, but he could just as easily be writing about Canada or the United States. In England, as on this continent, "speech training" has come to be a distant matter from what is really needed by learners. In his chapter on "Spoken English in School" (pp. 62-63) Wilkinson says:

> Speech training, as the term is usually understood, is not suitable for use in schools. There are many reasons for this. One is that it is too abstract. Behind it there lurks a belief in the value of exercises unrelated to specific speech situations (the case has some parallels with that of grammatical exercises unrelated to written

composition). A second is that it has an over-riding concern with accent. One studies frightening anatomical diagrams of the mouth and lip positions; one may be required to acquire the phonetic alphabet. The assumption is that there is a "correct" accent, and the vocabulary used to describe any variations from this accent is tendentious in the highest degree--thu hear of "ugly" sounds (as though all beauty were enshrined on ea in the BBC); we hear of "slovenly" and "lazy" pronunciations (as though all moral virtue were similarly enshrined)--though it is the RP speaker who is too "lazy" to pronounce the "h" in words like "what", which some non-RP pronunciations include. If one is to make judgments like this one must be clear that one is doing so entirely on social and not on scientific grounds.

A third difficulty with speech training lies in the rarefied atmosphere in which it has been developed. It has been concerned to train actors, elocutionists, and other small self-selected groups whose motivation is high. This means that the material and the approach are not of general application....

We must be very careful not to give the impression that good speech is to be identified only with poetry festivals, and similar events. If so, children, especially non-academic children, would be rightly suspicious. It would seem that, having failed to sell them literature, particularly poetry, in the open market, we were now offering it to them as part of a package deal along with a product they had no alternative but to buy.

If the foregoing appears unduly critical of speech training it is because it is important to bring out that an approach designed for specialists will not do in the schools.

What must be done to restore the spoken word to its important and necessary position in the English curriculum? One is tempted to say, now that the tape recorders are available, "Build oral language proficiency into standard achievement tests and administer them in all schools. Give us the power to evaluate and we will control the curriculum. Oral language has dropped from the English curriculum because achievement tests have not measured its growth in pupils, and the curriculum always shrinks to the boundaries of the testing."

On a deeper level, however, the answer has already been given in an address at the conference on English Education at the University of Illinois in April of 1964. At that conference Donald K. Smith asked:

> Where is speech taught in the secondary schools? Is it a part of the English class, or is it a separate course or sequence? What is the content of the speech curriculum, and how does this relate to the content of the English curriculum? The questions are baffling because in some schools it is assumed that the required English or language arts sequence includes systematic instruction in speech; this has been the historic position of the NCTE, and it is given more than lip service at times. In other schools the assumption is made that the study of English does not include the study of speech. In some schools speech units are taught as part of the English sequence; in others a semester or year course in speech appears as part of this sequence; in others elective courses in speech are taught alongside the English sequence. I have only begun to describe the various options now in practice, including the option selected by some schools of ignoring speech altogether.
>
> Equally confusing is the task of rationalizing our present patterns of teacher preparation for the high school. If speech instruction is indeed an integral part of the high school English curriculum, how do we explain a teacher preparation curriculum which ignores the question of college preparation in speech?
>
> The secondary school English field has survived for the last half century without discovering any commonly accepted body of knowledge about language thought clearly to be teachable and worth teaching to high school students. The problem of sequence and structure for the content of instruction about the English language remains for the most part an unsolved problem. It is extraordinarily difficult to discover principles of order and sequence for a body of knowledge if you don't know what goes into the body. And this, I think, is not an inappropriate description of our situation. One must be cautious of praise about the amount of knowledge shared by our population about the physical universe, about history, about politics and government, about personal health, or about literature and music. But I think it is fair to say that substantive illiteracy about the nature and functioning of language runs deeper in our culture than any other intellectual shortcoming.
>
> Lacking a frame of reference for defining the nature and scope of the study of language, the high school English field has been ill

equipped to assimilate new knowledge about language as it appeared. New knowledge about language has been piling up in our century not only faster than we have been able to consider its uses to our instruction, but often in places that we haven't even been examining. The knowledge has been the product of linguistic scientists, linquistically oriented anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, a new cross-bred genus called psycholinguists, and most recently even the mathematicians have been joining the hunt. The study of language has now become the traditional passion of philosophers, and it seems to be the emerging passion of nearly all parts of the sprawling establishment of the behavioral sciences. If I sense properly what is happening in the English field today, substantial progress is being made to absorb the materials and methods of linguistic science into the common school curriculum. The process of absorption will be slow, burdensome, and productive of many frustrations: old grammars never die, they just fade away. But the cause is well worth the effort since the name of the cause happens to be the pursuit of reliable knowledge.

But my real concern as you may gather is not that we shall fail to improve our instruction in the analysis of language as a code or sytem, and therby improve the condition of human understanding of language. We are not failing on this task. My real concern is that we shall stop short of any sustained effort to come to grips with the knowledge now available about language as a form of human behavior. It seems to me our students need to know something about how language is learned, about its functions, about the way it mirrors and shapes culture, about the conditions under which it produces certain effects, about the relationship of its larger forms to the forms of our various social institutions. I am prepared to accept the proposition that there is more known about language than any one of us is likely to know, and much more than we should ever try to teach in the common schools. But I am unprepared to accept the proposition that we can decide sensibly about what we should teach, and about the order and structure within which we should teach it, until we have looked at the shape and substance of the whole field of the study of language.

In short, I think the field of English education faces a formidable intellectual task. The task is so basic that it should take precedence over any of the immediate problems of instructional logistics that we all know so well, with the possible exception of the work of developing English language instruction for the large population we now refer to as culturally deprived. The task is this: the discovery of the content and sequence of knowledge about language which should be part of the secondary school language arts curriculum.

This work must be done, I believe, before we can get any very sensible answers about the form of the college major most suitable for the preparation of the high school language arts teacher. It must be done before we can get reasonable answers about the relationship of instruction in English to instruction in speech in the high school. It must be done before we can give any stable definition to the nature of the informational and conceptual content of the high school curriculum.

This work will be difficult. Knowledge about language is not now being systematically assembled, organized, and taught in any one of our existing college departments. The synthesis and systematization needed for the common school curriculum is not a work that those interested in English education can readily expect to be performed except as they themselves bring pressure and organization to the work. Since the work will be difficult, there is every reason we should be getting to it.

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The Role of the Spoken Word - I

(1) The major purpose of the school is to free as much rational and imaginative potential as possible. Other purposes such as social cohesion and socially necessary vocational skills, though important, are secondary purposes. In enabling a student to realize his "maximum capacity" speech has an enormously important part to play. Without power over speech (receptive and productive) a student has, normally, an unsatisfactory base from which to operate in attempting to improve his ability to read and write. Apart from the importance of speech to the acquisition of these other aspects of English, its development is perhaps the main function of the school - the way in which it can further the fullest personal development. Concern with this language and its relation to the child's thinking, embracing imaginative and intuitive expression (as well as logical and discursive activity) affects attitudes as well as skills and levels of proficiency. Furthermore the child's delight in speech and his desire to use it effectively and well are the necessary bases for instruction that seeks to increase proficiency in and power over language.

(2) Nevertheless, in spite of its importance at all levels and for almost every purpose, speech is usually neglected in most schools. It certainly deserves greater emphasis than it now receives.

(3) When speech is encouraged it is seen to depend on and to reflect the advance a child makes in most other directions. Since speech development is so clearly interwoven with general development we need to consider the pattern of such general development - whether for instance it follows in gross

terms an observable curve, and whether some speech forms and their related concepts occur in the development of some children in a different order from that which obtains in the development of other children.

(4) It is especially important to know this in connection with those children who require "compensatory education," though the issue has, of course, a more general relevance, and affects the speech education of all children. The school, almost by definition, has to accept the responsibility for providing a rich context of experience and significant motivation for speech activity. But the school cannot rely entirely and without question, in respect of most children, on that fortuitous combination of favourable circumstances which is a characteristic of the good home. Some would suggest that even with children brought up in good homes the school has a great deal to offer which results from the planning of activities and the conscious identification and persual of goals as part of the fostering of speech development. There is evidence, referred to in the study group, that explicit attention to speech does lead to control of the spoken language more rapidly and that such explicit attention does lead to an improvement in reading and writing that might not have occurred otherwise. For these reasons, so far as the majority of children go it is desirable to provide a planned procedure, in degrees varying with the individual children and their needs, bearing in mind at all times the danger that unself-consciousness in the use of speech, the basis of confident expression and behaviour, may be adversely affected if the planned procedure is introduced prematurely or is handled in an awkward and mechanical fashion.

(5) If the order of acquisition follows the observable curve of general development, especially so far as the acquisition of concepts is concerned, a principle for structuring and sequencing the programme is available. If speech development does not bear any significantly close relationship to the observable curve of general development we need to ask:

a) whether to be concerned with a sequenced programme at all, other than that which every individual teacher will presumably have to work out for herself in terms of her beliefs about children, her intuitions, and her experience

and, if we are to attempt to follow a sequence:

b) what such a principle should be.

In either case two ways are open to the teacher:

a) to introduce the speech forms, which it is felt the child requires as explicitly as possible, and to provide drills and practice in them. This is characteristic of at least one approach which insists on a task oriented, no-nonsense approach, involving and emphasizing mastery and attention." The advocates of this approach believe that the enrichment of experience, which they would also wish to provide, is not enough, partly because they are impressed by the overwhelming urgency of the task which has to be undertaken with certain groups of children. The approach is also based on a differentiation of those aspects of language which it

regards as necessary for communication - vocabulary, for instance, and those aspects, such as syntax, which it isolates as necessary for thinking. Basically this approach is structured on linguistic items and any criteria of general child development are subordinated to the linguistic structures thought to be necessary at any one time. This is an over-simplification of the approach, and in actual practice the structuring is not so exclusively linguistic or so mechanically presented as might be suggested by this description.

b) The second approach differs in that it emphasises situations rather than drills and speech practice, and because it relates the sequence in language to the developmental needs of the child. It believes in planning situations which will help promote speech development; that is, to create in the classroom the need to communicate with others; and because the situation has been devised in such a way, to communicate by using certain kinds of concepts and any alternative linguistic forms which may be appropriate to the expression of those concepts. These opportunities need not always be devised: sometimes, often perhaps, they emerge from the interests of a group of children spontaneously. Furthermore the advocates of this approach emphasise that motivation and interest are vital components of the teaching method, since an approach based by sequencing situations can, if abused, become lifeless and mechanical.

(6) Most of the situations will be dramatic or informal talk in small groups. Some situations will involve small groups around a table speaking informally. Sometimes the situation will necessitate individual presentations to the whole class. The subjects discussed or introduced into such situations often cover aspects of nature study, for example, or stories read by the teacher and others. The situations will also make use of a variety of different speech models. But whatever emphasis is placed upon the naturalness of the situational approach at certain stages in a child's development the teacher is entitled and, indeed, required to draw the attention of the child to the way in which he expresses himself and not simply accept what he says in the form in which he expresses it. Furthermore the teacher, insofar as he is there to encourage speech development and not only to consolidate each stage as it is reached by the child, will need to be aware of the next developmental step and judiciously provide the kind of challenge which will promote such development. In order to do this well the teacher needs to know both from research and from the accumulated experience of other teachers the relevant evidence about maturation. It is only in this way (together with his own sensitivity with regard to a particular child) that he can avoid wasteful introduction of goals too early, which is cramming, or too late--irrelevancy.

(7) The justification of this approach is that for economical learning (and the school is committed to the idea of economy of endeavour as much as it is to naturalness of approach) the pupils should judiciously be made aware of appropriate goals. In the elementary years of schooling these goals

are relatively unconscious; but in the secondary school they should be made more and more explicit. Selecting and learning the behavioural patterns that lead to the appropriate goals can be made more economical by teacher guidance, models, and practice. The teacher identifies goals which may be submerged in the situational complex.