CURRICULUM AND METHODS IN EDUCATION

Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading

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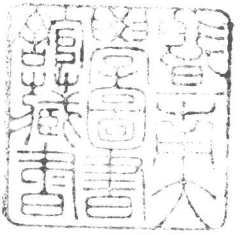

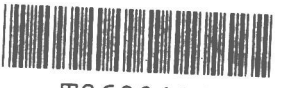

McGRAW-HILL SERIES IN EDUCATION

CURRICULUM AND METHODS IN EDUCATION

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Carl A. Lefevre

Professor of English
Chicago Teachers College North

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Preface

This volume presents a basic exploration of the contribution that twentieth-century language scholarship can make to teaching the skills of literacy—reading and writing, the first two of the three R's. It is intended to have a broad appeal to parents and other laymen as well as students and teachers.

The method proposed in this book is a whole-sentence method that applies a scientific description of American English utterances to the problems of teaching reading. No one can get meaning from the printed page without taking in whole language patterns at the sentence level, because these are the minimal meaning-bearing structures of most written communications. While this ability in itself is no warranty of success in reading, it is a minimum requirement. The new and distinctive feature of this sen-

tence method is the application of a modern linguistic description of speech patterns to their graphic counterparts, or equivalent patterns in writing and print. Also included is more accurate information on the relationships of basic sounds and letters (spelling) than is provided in most phonics systems. Although the linguistic materials are steadily focused throughout the book on reading and the teaching of reading, the same approach is applicable to the different but related problems of writing.

In both style and content the Introduction is quite different from the text proper. Because it summarizes important theoretical framework and linguistic detail, the Introduction is concentrated and proceeds by straight-line exposition; its pages are numbered as preliminary matter. Grasp of the basic points covered in this Introduction is required for any rigorous understanding of descriptive linguistics and structural grammar. Readers who prefer to get into the more practical discussion of applications first, however, may choose to skip the Introduction and return to it when they have read the book.

Beginning with Chapter 1 and continuing to the end, this book is not written in textbook style. It is meant to be readable and persuasive. I hope it sounds alive and interesting. Presentation of certain technical points goes by a kind of incremental repetition rather than by the straight-line expository method of the Introduction. Sometimes a restatement may have value as a simple reminder of an important point, or as a reminder in a new context; or a statement may acquire a new value because the reader's understanding has reached a higher level.

This volume as a whole is designed to provide an accessible introduction to modern linguistics and some of its applications to teaching the skills of literacy at all levels; it is designed to provide an essential minimum of information, adequate in linguistic rigor, for this purpose. It may also chance to interest the specialist who has not previously entered its domain.*

* This book is a complete revision of the book entitled *Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading*, copyrighted by the author in January, 1962, and published first in a multilith edition in April, 1962, by the Institute for Educational Theory. The present Preface and Introduction are the outgrowth of reorganization and a complete rewriting of the original Preface, including material previously in

Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading owes a great deal to those scientific language scholars of this century, the descriptive linguists and structural grammarians, some of whose important works are mentioned at the end of the Introduction; more are included in the bibliographical appendix. These scholars are not responsible for any shortcomings, errors, or omissions that may be noted; the author hereby acknowledges his responsibility.

A distillation of many years of teaching, this book inevitably owes much to professional colleagues. It owes perhaps even more to students, especially at Chicago Teachers College North, where over one thousand have studied the multilith trial edition as a basic text in their first college course in English, or in the language arts methods course. The students' tenacity and their pride in collaboration contributed in many ways to rounding out the first edition to the shape of the present one. Unnumbered helpful persons must remain anonymous. Only a few who made special contributions can be cited by name.

Early in 1961, Adrian Sanford helped to focus the original idea of the book; he offered constant encouragement during its shaping and reshaping. Richard S. Rudner's precise insights were uniquely helpful in clarifying the theoretical framework of substantive and methodological assumptions set forth in the Introduction: Contributions to the Theory of Reading. H. A. Gleason, Jr., wrote a detailed critique of the trial edition that influenced

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the Notes at the end of the book; these two new preliminary sections embody fresh material as well as important revisions. Other extensive revisions, including both new substantive matter and new interpretations, have been made in the following chapters at the heart of the book: Chapter 3. "The Child's Language from Cradle to Kindergarten"; Chapter 4. "Intonation. The Melodies of the Printed Page"; Chapter 5. "Sentence Patterns, Function Order, Word Groups." Chapter 8 has been retitled. Numerous corrections, restatements, and expansions have been incorporated throughout the book in response to suggestions from consultants, colleagues, friends—and as result of working closely with several hundred college students who used the multilith trial edition of the book during three regular semesters. The Notes at the end have also been augmented. Four entirely new sections have been added: a summary of the abbreviations and special symbols used throughout the book; an illustrated description of the human speech apparatus, with reference to the phonemic system of American English; a select bibliography, classified and annotated; and an index of 519 entries.

the present version in important particulars. Finally, and most inadequately, I express my appreciation for the help of Helen Lefevre, my wife and fellow scholar-teacher, who kept the work under scrutiny and made substantive contributions to it.

CARL A. LEFEVRE

Introduction

Basic linguistic theory: Contributions to a theory of reading

Reading and reading theory are of great practical significance to everyone. Traditional reading methodology, however, does not concern itself *rigorously* with language. Instead, it concerns itself largely with psychological problems, with visual perception especially. The question is, visual perception of what, exactly, if not of the graphic counterparts in printed form of meaning-bearing language patterns? To comprehend printed matter, the reader must perceive entire language structures as wholes—as unitary meaning-bearing patterns. Short of this level of perception, the reader simply does not perceive those total language structures

that alone are capable of carrying meaning. He may perceive individual words as if words were meaning-bearing units in themselves, one of the most serious of all reading disabilities. Or he may group words visually in structureless pattern-fragments that do not and cannot bear meaning. What such readers do not do is read total language patterns for total comprehension of meaning. My basic assumption is that reading must be regarded as a language-related process; reading and the teaching of reading must therefore be rigorously studied in relation to language. Today, rigorous study of language means structural linguistics.

Current reading methods and materials reflect little or no acquaintance with the structural linguistic rationale. This scientific basis of twentieth-century advancement in language scholarship was foreshadowed in Sapir's *Language* (1921) and then catalyzed in 1933 by Bloomfield's *Language*. This is thirty to forty years ago now. Since 1933, the scientific study of languages, including American English, has laid the foundation for a new approach to language learning, both native and foreign. In essence, structural linguistics is cultural-anthropological: language is studied objectively and systematically as a learned arbitrary code of vocal symbols through which men in a given culture communicate with each other, interact, and cooperate.

It makes little difference whether a language has an ancient and honorable tradition of literacy, or is simply the speech of a people who have never developed a writing system. Language is viewed as a vocal symbol-system from which a graphic symbol-system may or may not have been derived. Handwriting and print are seen as secondary, derivative codes of visual symbols that reflect the basic language learned before formal schooling begins. This is a position of far-reaching consequences for education, pointing toward new theories of language learning and teaching, new methods, and new materials.

But linguists and linguistics cannot do this vital educational work by themselves. Professionally qualified, experienced teachers must study linguistics and discover for themselves how to apply new knowledge and new insights to old problems. Teachers must teach themselves and they must teach the teachers—teachers in service and teachers in preparation—for a more effective attack

on the development of literacy in our schools. This whole range of activity is the professional concern of teaching, not of linguistics. It is also the concern of parents, and of all citizens who take an active interest in education. Few linguists are capable and experienced as English or language arts teachers; and technical linguists have many problems of their own, still to be solved. In the meantime, linguistics has a very great deal to offer that is sorely needed; the results of linguistic science are there for the taking. Reading instruction should make full use of this new knowledge.

As for myself, I am primarily a humanist rather than a linguistic scientist, though I do not feel that science is alien to the humanities. On the contrary, science is one of the humanities—or should be. As a scholar-teacher of English, I have made it my professional business to apply relevant findings of structural linguistics in teaching language and literature to students of all ages. I have also tried to determine just what and how much linguistic knowledge of English is needed by persons who introduce the young to the basic skills of literacy. In language arts methods and other college English courses I have made it a point to integrate linguistic knowledge with the more traditional subject matter. Structural linguistics can enrich as well as clarify many areas of the language arts.

This book presents the basic linguistic knowledge of English that my experience suggests is needed by persons who introduce the young to literacy—parents as well as teachers. My purpose throughout has been to explain English speech in relation to reading as simply and clearly as possible, without compromising the rigor of the underlying linguistic principles and data.

This book is intended for all who have a part in developing literacy in the young: school, college, and university teachers; of English language and literature, of language arts methods, and of reading; students preparing to teach, in-service teachers; school administrators, program supervisors, curriculum specialists; parents, relatives, and friends of children. It is a basic work on reading.

A number of broad substantive and methodological assumptions underlie this linguistic approach to a theory of reading. Two basic substantive assumptions are as follows:

1. Language is human behavior.

2. Each language has its own independent and unique structure; it requires its own independent and unique description. This structure or system, taken as a whole, is the grammar of the language.

Four basic methodological assumptions are as follows:

1. Language may be studied objectively and systematically.

2. Objective study of a language yields an accurate, orderly, comprehensive description of the language system, or structure.

3. Structural linguistics is not just another nomenclature for "the parts of speech" of traditional grammar, or another way of parsing and diagramming sentences. It is an entirely new way of looking at language, of sorting out the data, of classifying findings.

4. Structural linguistics leads to new data, new knowledge, new insights, new understandings.

Such broad substantive and methodological assumptions have illuminated my classroom experience as a teacher of literature and the skills of literacy—*and as a teacher of teachers.* They have led me to close study of basic linguistic principles and data, and eventually to the view of reading summarized in this Introduction and developed at length in the whole book.

Precise linguistic principles are embodied in the basic Trager-Smith system of language analysis at three levels: (1) phonemes, (2) morphemes, and (3) syntax. Familiarity with this analysis, though not required of the reader, is implicit in much of the discussion.[1] *

1. *Phonemes.* Phonemes are the basic sound units of language. A phoneme is the smallest class of significant speech sounds. The "segmental" phonemes are the nine simple vowels, the three semivowels and the twenty-one consonants of American English. The nine simple vowel phonemes are the short vowels of traditional terminology. The long vowels are not described by linguists as phonemes because every long vowel sound is composed of one simple vowel phoneme followed by one semivowel phoneme.

* All notes are at the end of the book, beginning page 199.

The technical term for such a combination of two phonemes is *complex vowel nucleus*. The vowel sounds in the words *grow* and *trees* are examples of long vowels, or complex vowel nuclei. Since long vowels are not phonemes, they are not represented in the phonemic alphabet. Unlike the Roman alphabet we use in English writing and print, the phonemic alphabet uses one symbol and only one symbol for one phoneme. The phonemic alphabet does use many of the letters of the Roman alphabet but adds special phonemic symbols to carry out the principle of one symbol, one phoneme. Each symbol in the phonemic alphabet stands for one basic speech sound in the language system. The phonemic alphabet makes possible linguistically accurate transcriptions of American English speech and all its dialects.

In addition to the segmental vowel and consonant phonemes, Trager and Smith also designate as phonemes four levels of pitch, four degrees of stress on syllables, and four junctures or ways of terminating the speech stream. These twelve phonemes of American English speech have special linguistic significance in the system or code of audio-lingual signals. In contradistinction to the thirty-three segmental phonemes, the twelve phonemes of pitch, stress, and juncture may be thought of as nonsegmental phonemes. The total number of phonemes is thus forty-five. In my approach to the language and to reading, I treat the twelve significant features of pitch, stress, and juncture under the heading of intonation.

2. *Morphemes.* Morphemes are the basic meaning-bearing units of language. A morpheme is an indivisible language element patterned out of phonemes. Morphemes include word bases (roots), prefixes, suffixes, and word-form changes, or inflections. A free morpheme may pattern by itself in larger language structures; a bound morpheme must combine with another morpheme. Such single words as *cat, go,* and *black* are examples of free morphemes; *pro-* and *-tect* in *protect* are examples of bound morphemes.

3. *Syntax.* Syntax includes the various patternings of morphemes into larger structural units: noun groups, verb groups, noun clusters, verb clusters, prepositional groups, clauses, and sentences.

Moreover, sentence-level utterances in American English make use of four signaling systems. These four signaling systems, in descending order of importance are, as I see them: (1) intonation, (2) syntactical-function order in sentence patterns, (3) structure words, and (4) word-form changes.

1. *Intonation.* Intonation is the generic term for significant and distinctive patterns of pitch, stress, and juncture. Comprising intricate patterns of obligatory and optional features, intonation is perhaps the least understood signaling system of American English. It has been intensively studied for no more than two decades.

2. *Syntactical-function order in sentence patterns.* There are possibly no more than four important sentence patterns in American English. Variety is achieved through nearly endless possibilities of expansion, substitution, inversion, and transformation of these important patterns.

3. *Structure words.* About three hundred "empty" words, having few referents outside the language system itself, and relatively lacking in meaning or content; contrasted to "full" words having referents in the real world outside language. Structure words include many sets, such as noun markers, verb markers, phrase markers, clause markers, question markers, and sentence connectors.

4. *Word-form changes* (grammatical inflections, prefixes, and suffixes). Word-form changes include noun plurals, possessives, verb parts, adjective comparison, and the like, as well as derivational prefixes and suffixes. Word-form changes include most of the bound morphemes.

I make explicit use of the three levels of language analysis and of the four signaling systems in my explanation of the interactions of speech and reading.

Beyond reading readiness, six methods of basic reading instruction that relate to language analysis have been traditionally suggested. Usually a sort of warning is added to the effect that an "eclectic," or "multilinear," method is best. "There is no one method of teaching reading" is the motto, or slogan. The terms *alphabet, phonic, word, phrase, sentence,* and *story* methods