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LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF READING

by

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ABSTRACT

A review of much of the literature available in the linguistics and reading field has demonstrated that much of the early work of linguists in this area was concerned with creating beginning reading material which presented regular word patterns --can, fan, an. These linguists considered traditional readers to be haphazardly constructed, since new words were presented as needed in each story. There was no logical sequence of word presentation. In addition, the linguists claimed that phonics was a pseudo-science, teaching 'rules' about the nature of language which the linguist considered false.

Recently, other linguists have entered the teaching of reading field. After reviewing the work of early language scientists, many have decided that early material, while generally accurate, took into account only certain aspects of linguistic science, ignoring a number of very important concepts. Linguists have recently contributed knowledge about sentence structure, dialect, and function words to the study of linguistics and reading.

A review of literature in linguistics and reading has indicated that there is adequate evidence to support the following teaching of reading practices at this time: (1) The teaching of regular word patterns (2) The allotting of more time for oral reading, insisting on proper intonation (3) The presenting of function words in such a way that their function is observable.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Primary teachers are presently confronted with an insuperable amount of research concerning the teaching of reading.¹ The subject of much published research data is whether teachers of reading should use a "meaning approach" or a "decoding approach" during early stages of reading instruction. The "meaning approach" is generally associated with such widely used basal reading series as the Scott Foresman and the Ginn readers. "Decoding approaches," formerly considered phonics approaches, now include not only phonics programs, but newly developed linguistic programs as well.

Unfortunately for those seeking to identify materials which are linguistics oriented, phonics oriented, or meaning oriented, there are relatively few definite demarcations to distinguish these approaches. Often reading series are labeled phonics readers one time and linguistics readers another time; and some series claiming to be linguistics readers can hardly be distinguished from meaning series.

Such vagueness is only part of the problem. In addition, linguists have often disagreed among themselves as to what constituted a linguistic approach to teaching reading. While some linguists have

felt that they were qualified to propose a linguistic method of teaching reading, others have concluded that they were only justified in giving technical advise to reading experts. However, if one believes that research can influence teachers to improve, and if one accepts recent findings which seem to indicate that beginning readers read significantly better if taught by a code-emphasis process, an effort must be made to understand basis differences between code-emphasis programs and meaning-emphasis programs.

Linguistic pupils were better in oral word pronunciation and silent reading word recognition at the ends of both grades one and two. Pupils in the code-emphasis linguistic programs were also better spellers at the end of grade two, although the reverse was true at the end of the first grade. Therefore, it is apparent that early emphasis on learning the alphabetic code resulted in superior ability at decoding words in isolation as well as superior ability at encoding spoken words by the end of second grade.

Statement of Purpose

Through examination of research data on linguistics and reading, an attempt was made to determine those concepts linguists agreed upon as opposed to areas which merely indicated personal preferences. Secondly, an attempt was made to use this information to establish some guidelines for primary teachers in altering their reading lessons to conform to those linguistics concepts.

2Ibid., pp. 12-14.

Procedures

The first procedure was to review literature to determine the individual conclusions of linguists as far as reading and language were concerned. From a comparison of these ideas, an attempt was made to determine areas of agreement among linguists. Finally, an attempt was made to present suggestions for improving and revising reading instruction in accord with linguistically sound data.

Definition of terms

**Linguistics.** The scientific study of the nature of language.

**Phonetics.** That branch of linguistics dealing with analysis, description, and classification of speech sounds.

**Phonics.** "The word phonics will be used to represent the various sets of teaching practices that aim to develop the pupil's ability to 'sound out a word.'"^4

**Synthetic Phonics.** "A process of learning the sounds corresponding to separate letters and letter groups...then blending these elements to form words."^5

**Analytic Phonics.** A system which begins with common words understood by the child. "The more common sounds that recur in words

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^5Ibid., p. 143.  
^6Ibid.
are first met within the framework of the total word, then through a 
generalizing process, the children learn to identify common recurring 
sounds in unfamiliar words."6

Meaning approach. "Meaning-emphasis [reading] programs are those 
which emphasize from the very beginning the necessity of reading for 
meaning... ."7

Decoding approach. Reading approaches "which aim at the begin-
nings to teach the pupil mastery of the alphabetic code rather than 
expecting from him a mature reading performance."8

Limitations of Study

The review of literature contained in this study was made from 
sources from the Montana State University Library.

This review, contained in Chapter Two, presents the views of a 
number of linguists interested in the teaching of reading. An 
attempt was made to identify areas of agreement and disagreement 
among them.

7Dykstra, op. cit., p. 17.  
8Ibid.
Chapter 2

LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF READING

In 1942, Leonard Bloomfield published articles in the *Elementary English Review* criticizing the then current approaches to beginning reading instruction. After his death, the materials Bloomfield developed for use in teaching his young son to read were published by Clarence Barnhart in a book entitled *Let's Read—A Linguistic Approach*. Since publication of this text in 1961, a number of linguists have entered the teaching of reading field, some offering only suggestions, others offering linguistic-approach reading materials for children. Each of these linguists has interpreted the relevance of linguistics in initial reading instruction quite differently, and the programs developed differ as a result.

In an attempt to determine areas of agreement among various linguists, it will be necessary to review the publications of these people, as well as examine contributions made by reading specialists.

Leonard Bloomfield

In his article in the *Elementary English Review*, Bloomfield questioned emphasis on meaning during the early stages of reading instruction and advocated the learning of the "code" or "the alphabetic habit" as the initial step. Since children enter first grade with an adequate command of spoken language, reading instruction
should begin by teaching children the printed symbols representing words in his oral vocabulary. This is best accomplished by teaching regularly spelled words first, presenting irregularly spelled words at a later stage.¹

In *Let's Read—A Linguistic Approach*, Bloomfield began his reading lesson by presenting words with the short a medial vowel sound, varying initial and final consonants until most of the possibilities for three letter words of this pattern were exhausted. First he used the an pattern—can, fan, Dan—followed by the at pattern—bat, cat, fat—then the ad pattern—had, bad, dad. When the short a medial vowel patterns were exhausted, he proceeded to patterns with the short i medial vowel, etc. Such function words as "a," "the," and "of," were presented at spaced intervals because many of them are irregular.²

In the very early stages, the Bloomfield approach resulted in reading material that appeared to be sheer nonsense, and critics of his approach often use this as their basis for criticism. For example, the following is the often quoted reading material from the first lesson:


Can Dan fan Nan?
Nan, fan Dan.
Dan, fan Nan.\(^3\)

Critics of this lesson fail to mention that very soon in the lessons such stories as the following appear:

THE SAILBOAT
Dad got Jack a big sailboat.
"Let's see it sail. Let's sail the boat on the pond."
Jack set the boat in the pond, and away it went. See the boat sail! When the wind hits the big sail, the boat just scoots! See it skim on the pond.
The boat will not tip and it will not sink.
It will just sail on the pond in the wind.\(^4\)

This story, far from being ridiculous, is probably as interesting as other stories found on this level in traditional readers. However, Henry Lee Smith in a review of Let's Read has disclosed some very valid weaknesses in Bloomfield's methods and materials. According to Smith, Bloomfield failed to consider variances in dialect when he devised his list of word patterns:

There seems to be no concern about the /æ/-/əh/ variation which occurs in Eastern dialects...The word can in A cat can nap is obviously assumed to have the same phonemic structure as the can in a can, but, again, this is not the case for some twenty-five million speakers of American English with dialects like mine.\(^5\)

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 60. \(^4\)Ibid., p. 186.

Concerning Bloomfield's stories, Smith stated:

Part V for example, the reading material in 'story' form seems not to have been selected to illustrate the new words or their patterns but just to have been provided as something to read. As stories, they are for the most part natural and colloquial in style, but, nowhere is there an explanation or treatment of punctuation marks or the other conventions in which they abound...  

Unlike the phonics approaches of its time, the Bloomfield approach was severely critical of teaching phonemes in isolation.

According to Bloomfield:

The second error of the phonic method is that of isolating the speech-sounds. The authors of these methods tell us to show the children a letter, say t, and to make him react by uttering the (t) sound. This sound is to be uttered either all by itself, or else with an obscure vowel sound after it. Now English-speaking people, children or adults, are not accustomed to make that kind of noise. The sound (t) does not occur alone in English utterances; neither does the sound (t) followed by an obscure vowel sound. If we insist on making the child perform unaccustomed feats with his vocal organs, we are bound to confuse his response to the printed signs.

In order to avoid teaching isolated sounds in the initial stage of learning the first word of a pattern, Bloomfield advocated having the child spell the word. The child, then, would repeat, "c-a-t, cat; c-a-t, cat" until he was able to recognize that these symbols represented cat, then he would proceed to fat, hat, sat, etc.

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6 Ibid.


The Bloomfield method differed from other methods in that it advocated the use of far more oral reading than is generally recommended by basal readers:

The child does his first reading out loud. Then, under the instruction or example of his elders, he economizes by reading in a whisper. Soon he reduces this to scarcely audible movements of speech. Later these become inaudible.\(^9\)

Secondly, in the Bloomfield approach, such "high frequency" words as "come," "to," and "look" are among the last to be presented. Most basal readers include these irregular words among the first words taught.\(^10\) And finally, nowhere in Bloomfield's materials for children can one find pictures.

From the preceding presentation it can be stated that Bloomfield's linguistic approach differed from traditional teaching of reading in the following ways:

1. In teaching the alphabet as the initial step of reading readiness.

2. In presentation of only regularly spelled words in the initial stages of reading.

3. In presentation of "word patterns," never presentation of the individual phonemes that make up a word.

4. In advocating spelling unknown words, then speaking them aloud until they are known.

\(^9\)Bloomfield and Barnhart, op. cit., p. 31.

\(^10\)Chall, op. cit., p. 34.
5. In placing primary emphasis on learning to decode in the initial stages of beginning reading.

6. In not using illustrations of any sort in the material designed for use by children.

Ronald Wardhaugh has come to the following conclusions about the significance of Bloomfield's work in the reading field:

The Bloomfield system has many advocates and has profoundly influenced the writings of several other people on linguistics and reading, notably Charles Fries. While the Bloomfield system has much to recommend it, it also has very definite weaknesses. There is perhaps too much emphasis on phonemic-graphemic regularities and on word recognition and not enough acknowledgement that some inconsistently spelled English words must be introduced very early in reading texts in order to make reading material interesting from the beginning. Sometimes the method has been modified to introduce a minimum of "sight words" so that stories can be made more interesting. Such modifications have never appeared to be very important ones, because Bloomfield and his followers considered that the intrinsic reward of being able to read would tend to compensate a child for any lack of interest the material might have. Actually the Bloomfield method has much more to say about linguistic content of reading material than about any method of teaching reading. What comments on methodology there are in Bloomfield's writings seem to be based on an extrapolation of some procedures, such as contrast which linguists have found useful in their work, and not on procedures derived from teaching reading.\(^\text{11}\)

Charles C. Fries

Charles C. Fries, like Bloomfield, opposed sounding and blending of isolated phonemes to form words. He also agreed with Bloomfield that beginning reading is different from reading in later stages of development. Fries divided reading instruction into three stages:

\(^{11}\)Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. 19.
The first stage Fries called the "transfer" stage, in which the child learns the visual language symbols which stand for the language he has heard and spoken all his life. Fries recommended that during the transfer stage, the child learn words grouped according to contrasting spelling patterns—can-cane, rat-rate—presenting the most common patterns first, and letting the child discover relationships between sounds and letters himself. Bloomfield, on the other hand, presented all the short vowel patterns before progressing to long vowel patterns.

The second stage is the "productive" stage in which the child's responses to visual symbols become automatic or "unconscious." The third stage is the "imaginative" stage when the reading process is so automatic that it may be used equally as well as oral language.12

Fries agreed with Bloomfield that the teaching of the alphabet is essential to reading readiness.13 However, Fries sought to minimize any factor that would result in the child focusing on units smaller than words, while Bloomfield often introduced nonsense words and syllables in his program. Fries felt that, more important, the child should learn to associate words and meanings, making his method essentially a "word" method.14

12Chall, op. cit., p. 31.
14Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. 23.
Both Fries and Bloomfield stressed the importance of oral reading. Fries believed that written words are representations of oral language, though the final objective was still silent reading. Fries did not agree that Bloomfield's spell-say process for initial learning of unknown words was valuable. "To learn the 'letters' often means pronouncing the names in order to 'spell' words. This again contributes little to the beginning stage of reading."^16

While Bloomfield hesitated to introduce irregular English words until very late in his program, Fries constructed a list of the most common irregular words and suggested that they be presented when needed in the program so the stories to be read would be more interesting. He further emphasized the point that written English is alphabetic in nature and that spelling is not as inconsistent as some say it is, if spelling is regarded as a representation of significant speech sounds. He insisted that there are regular spelling patterns in English, and it is the duty of the teacher to present these patterns in a carefully arranged sequence.^18

Pictures are missing from both the Bloomfield and the Fries

^15 Ibid.
^16 Fries, op. cit., p. 124.
^17 Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. 23.
^18 Ibid., p. 22.
reading material. Fries did not favor pictures because he felt that
they distracted from the reading process itself. This is frequently
a factor in criticism of Bloomfield and Fries reading material. 19

In the teacher's guide for the *Merrill Linguistics Readers*
which Fries has helped develop, the following statement of philosophy
concerning pictures is stated:

In order to focus the pupils' attention upon the reading materials
themselves, pictures must be excluded from the basic series. Experience has consistently demonstrated that (a) pictures constitute
a distracting element in the process of learning to read, and
(b) because pictures furnish clues to meaning, they lead the pupils
to guess at words rather than to read them. (Incidentally, the
absence of pictures permits the release of highly individualized
creativity when the pupils are encouraged to illustrate the stories,
for they are not hampered by the interpretation of another "artist." ) 20

Reading comprehension did not seem to pose any particular problem
for either Bloomfield or Fries. Assuming that reading was a decoding
process in which one learned to correlate written symbols for auditory
speech sounds already familiar to him, comprehension would depend on
intellect—what one could comprehend from the spoken word, one could
also comprehend from the written word if he were adept at decoding.

One notes a great deal of similarity in considering the

19 Robert Emans and Carl A. Walz, "For Beginning Readers—What
Kind of Materials?" *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 2
(November, 1969), pp. 91-98.

20 Fries, Wilson, & Rudolph, "Teacher's Guide for Reader 2,"
*Merrill Linguistics Readers, Teachers Edition* (Columbus Ohio,
Bloomfield and Fries linguistic approaches to reading. Areas of difference seem to center around four factors:

1. Whether or not to have the child spell unknown words aloud in an attempt to learn them.

2. Whether or not to present words with contrasting patterns simultaneously, expecting the child to note which pattern has the long vowel sound and which has the short vowel sound, or whether to present all the short vowel sound patterns first, then the long vowel sound patterns.

3. Whether or not to present syllables and nonsense words as part of the reading program.

4. When to present irregular words.

Ronald Wardhaugh has expressed the following opinions about the work of Fries and Bloomfield:

It would not be unfair to say that what has become known as the linguistic method of teaching reading relies heavily on the work of Bloomfield and Fries. In essence, the method entails little more than the presentation of regular phoneme-grapheme, or sound-spelling, relationships in beginning reading texts, a kind of new phonics with a good, undoubtedly much needed, dose of linguistic common sense added. The materials developed by the followers of Bloomfield and Fries reflect this concern and they contain virtually no indication that the possible linguistic contribution to reading involves anything more than the systematic introduction of the regularities and irregularities of English spelling. There is, in fact, scarcely more than an occasional passing reference to any other point that linguists have made about English.  

Carl A. Lefevre

Unlike Bloomfield and Fries, the structural linguist Carl Lefevre

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21 Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. 25.
considered the sentence the basic unit to be considered in beginning reading, not the word:

...in my approach to reading instruction, the word is treated as a minor language unit for many reasons... In English the word is an unstable element, whether it is taken as a semantic or a structural unit. The most significant structures in English are intonation patterns, grammatical and syntactical word groups, clauses and sentences.

Single words analyzed and spoken in isolation assume the intonation contours of whole utterances. Single words thus lose the characteristic pitch and stress they normally carry in the larger constructions that comprise the flow of speech and bear meaning. This upgrading may thus contribute to the frequency and extent of serious reading disability among pupils of all ages. So far, little has been done to develop reading of American English by its known structures instead of by its vocabulary.22

Like Bloomfield and Fries, Lefevre advocated far more oral reading than is presently being done in primary grades. He felt that much attention should be given to being certain that the child's intonation patterns in reading are the same as those in speech.23

Lefevre was very emphatic in his statements about such function words as "the," "about," "was," "is," "but," etc. These words have no meaning in themselves; they are structure or functional words of the English language. Lefevre believed that they should never be presented


23Ibid., p. 43.
in isolation. They take on stress, and are therefore pronounced quite differently from the way they would be pronounced in fluent speech. It was on this point that Lefevre became very critical of Charles Fries. He felt that Fries' list of the 300 most commonly used words in the English language contributed to reading isolated structure words.

Ronald Wardhaugh

Ronald Wardhaugh began his book, Reading: A Linguistic Perspective, by stating that a linguistic "method" of teaching reading was nonexistent, that the linguist can offer a body of technical information about language which can certainly be used in teaching reading, but he cannot offer a method of teaching.

Wardhaugh also contended that present research in the reading field is inadequate, contradictory, and ineffectual in promoting change:

More recently, Chall has come out in favor of a phonics approach in the teaching of beginning reading as a result of her own investigation. ...the nature of the controversies over methodology has not changed much over the years...while the quantity of evidence supporting or refuting a particular method has increased quite rapidly, the quality of that evidence remains very poor indeed. In such circumstances it is not surprising that the results of reading investigations are often inconclusive or contradictory. ...investigations are usually made by protagonists

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24 Ibid., pp. 115-120.
25 Ibid., pp. 140-141.
26 Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. vii.
or antagonists of a particular method working within a system in which there is a great weight of "conventional wisdom," and a marked resistance to any but very slow change.\textsuperscript{27}

One of the clearest ways of illustrating some of the inadequacies and inconsistencies of reading research, according to Wardhaugh, is to examine phonics. Much of what has been written on the subject of phonics is inaccurate in light of what linguists have taught us about the nature of language.

Like Bloomfield and Fries, Wardhaugh attacked those who described English as an "unphonetic" language. While it is true that English spelling seems to be inconsistent, this has nothing to do with its phonetic nature:

> Phonetics is that branch of linguistic science which is concerned with how sounds may be produced, analyzed and recorded in all their possible variety and, as a discipline, has nothing to do with spelling systems as such... The term phonetics refers to sounds and should not be lightly used to refer to the regularity or irregularity of sound-symbol relationships. Misuse of the term is likely to result in the confused thinking and writing already too prevalent in the literature on phonics and reading instruction.\textsuperscript{28}

Wardhaugh has continued his argument by demonstrating that a number of phonics rules and definitions often presented in traditional textbooks and phonics workbooks are erroneous. For example, teachers often tell students that English has five (or six or seven) vowels. Actually, there are probably twice that number for any speaker of English. According to Wardhaugh, "A native speaker of English can

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 6. \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 7.
demonstrate these facts for himself by repeating beat, bead, bee, or loop, lube, Lou, or place, plays, play."29

Other linguistically inaccurate phonics rules and generalizations include the following: TH, SH, QU, AND WH ARE CONSONANT DIGRAPHS, TWO LETTERS COMBINING TO PRODUCE A NEW SOUND. While the voiced and unvoiced th and sh may represent one sound in English, the qu represents two sounds, and the wh may represent one or two sounds. (Children's English and reading textbooks often attempt to get them to distinguish between /wh/ as in which and /w/ as in witch, when in actuality there is no contrast between these two words to millions of speakers of English—both are pronounced as /wɪtʃ/. This, according to Wardhaugh, is an absolute waste of time since speakers of English determine the difference in meanings of these two words from contextual clues, not from sound.30)

"CONSONANT BLENDS CONSIST OF TWO OR MORE LETTERS WHICH ARE BLENDED INTO A SINGLE SPEECH SOUND"31 is a second frequently taught misconception. "Letters do not blend to make sounds," according to Wardhaugh.32

29Ibid., p. 8.  
30Ibid., p. 9.  
32Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. 10.
Dorothy Seymour, in an article in the November 1969, *Reading Teacher*, has explained the reasoning behind the preceding statement by Wardhaugh, a statement which may be considered basic linguistic knowledge:

The assumption that "words" meant "written words" gave children the impression that words were not first oral words or mental words before the author put them into symbols. Another way of saying this is that words were words before they were printed words...What they need is not to learn a series of sounds the "letters have," but which symbols (letters) go with the sounds they already know..."Each letter has a sound." The truth is that the sounds have been around a lot longer than the letters, and the letters merely stand for sounds; they do not "have" the sounds somewhere inside them...Linguistics points to the priority of speech and demonstrates that writing is merely a way of recording that speech by the use of symbols.\(^{33}\)

Another useless feature of phonics is the emphasis on rules for syllabication and word division, in Wardhaugh's opinion:

Reading teachers are asked to teach their children to divide words as follows: *but-ter, mon-key, rob-in, ro-bot,* even though...such rules are often circular, have almost nothing to do with the actual sound patterns of English, and almost everything to do with line-breaking conventions, and have hardly any possible applications beyond the typesetter's domain. They certainly do not make sense as a systematic statement about the syllables of the spoken language nor are they entirely consistent with one another. The "rules" for syllabication are extremely complicated, in fact so complicated that if children can use them, they do not really need them, because their use requires that children have the very knowledge the rules are supposed to be teaching. On the other hand, statements about units such as prefixes, roots, and suffixes and for compounding do have some value.\(^{34}\)


\(^{33}\)Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. 9.
Wardhaugh was not alone in criticizing phonics as it is taught in our schools. Harold Allen has said:

Phonics beguiles the teacher into thinking that here is something pretty scientific. Phonics is not really very scientific, although more recent textbooks have adopted some content that appears deceptively so. The trouble with phonics is that it begins at the wrong end. Its origin is in the thinking of medieval grammarians who tried to describe the relation between writing and speaking. They took the letter as the norm and considered that the speech sounds it stood for were its powers. A letter could, of course, have more than one power—*potestas* as they called it. The idea was repeated in Latin grammars used in England and in the late eighteenth century, was drawn upon in the first English pronouncing dictionaries...This curious medieval notion was picked up by reading teachers in the 19th century and has persisted in one form or another since then.  

While linguists are not qualified to prescribe a method for teaching reading, he can contribute what Wardhaugh has referred to as a "linguistic perspective" to teaching reading. For example, the linguist can describe ways in which adults demonstrate linguistic competence in using their language, and ways linguistic performance of people varies from this competence. "The idea of linguistic competence itself," said Wardhaugh, "the idea that it is possible to characterize a linguistic system that every speaker of the language shares, is an extremely important contribution."  

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36 Wardhaugh, op. cit., p. 60.
Secondly, the linguist can offer descriptions of the linguistic competence of children at different stages of language development. "It is extremely important that children who are learning to read be given credit for what they already know intuitively about their language, even though they may not be able to verbalize this knowledge. By the age of six every normal child has learned to control a very complicated linguistic system..."37 (This knowledge could prove most valuable in developing more interesting and more appropriate reading materials for first year readers.)

Thirdly, said Wardhaugh, the linguist can offer descriptions of the structure, phonology and content of English sentences. The linguist can also describe how the deep and surface structure of sentences relate to each other, and how understanding of surface structure in both speech and writing "may be subject to various performance factors."38

The linguist can also offer knowledge of the way symbols represent linguistic structures. He can offer explanations of the semantic structure of English. "...a complete study of language requires a study of the semantic relationships in that language."39

And finally, the linguist can offer information concerning the

37 Ibid., p. 60.
38 Ibid., p. 61.
39 Ibid., p. 62.
regularities and irregularities which exist in our written language.

The linguist can point out that pat and bat are a minimal pair... The linguist can say that in the writing system /ai/ is generally represented as y before a space, as igh in certain morphemes, or as i-consonant, e-consonant in others, and he can even calculate the various frequencies of representation.\footnote{Ibid.}

From the preceding presentation of Wardhaugh's work, it can be seen that he has rejected the idea that all the linguist has to offer is reading material containing regularly spelled words; that he has rejected the idea that Bloomfield and Fries were anything but pedagogical in suggesting such things as: "Spell the word and pronounce it to learn it," "Present opposite patterns such as bat and beat at the same time," and "Pictures are detrimental to reading progress in primary grades." These statements are not based on linguistic facts.

Wardhaugh has presented suggestions for technical linguistic contributions to the teaching of reading which as yet have not been used. In the opinion of this investigator, such technical knowledge as descriptions of exactly what the typical language structure of a child is at a certain age, for example, could do much to help improve the controlled vocabularies and sentence structure of primary readers. From experience, this investigator has found that often the language is so unnatural that even the child who reads fluently stumbles over the words because of unusual structure.
Henry Lee Smith

Henry Lee Smith, in an article in the 1963 Journal of the Linguistic Society of America, has offered the following criticisms, which this writer feels are applicable to most of the linguists' work in the reading field to date: First of all, many linguists seem to feel that since the educator knows little about linguistics, he also has learned nothing about the teaching of reading, despite the fact that educators have devoted years to research with real children in real classroom situations. Secondly, many of the reading materials prepared by linguists to date ignore some very important findings by educational psychologists in the area of learning theory. Often the analysis upon which these linguistic materials are based is not complete and not consistently applied.

A fourth criticism is the fact that few linguists have graded the materials in terms of difficulty, and few have actually done adequate research in the classroom to determine whether or not the materials were appropriate for the average child of a particular grade level.

And finally, according to Smith, pictures are needed. "They do not have to tell the story, but children are helped by pictures and expect them."^41

As did Wardhaugh, Smith has concluded that no one discipline has

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^41Smith, op. cit., p. 77.
the knowledge to solve the problem of improving reading instruction singlehanded. Educators, psychologists, researchers, and linguists are going to have to work jointly toward this goal.\textsuperscript{42}

He further concluded that there are six essential criteria for preparation of primary reading materials: (1) Printed pages, in order to be recognized as a recording of speech, must be prepared in the informal style which most people use in daily communication. (2) Stories should be interesting and children should be able to identify with the characters. (3) "Pictures should be used to illustrate the story, not to tell it."\textsuperscript{43} (4) Words used in reading material should be those already familiar to children. (5) New words should register first as whole words, distinct from other whole words. In other words, such words as \textit{dull} and \textit{doll} should not be presented together or within a short distance of each other since they confuse beginning readers. (6) New words should be repeated frequently so the child has practice in recognizing them again and again.\textsuperscript{44}

As can be seen from the preceding discussions, all linguists do not agree as to what the role of linguistics in the teaching of reading should be. Areas of agreement and practical application of this knowledge are discussed in Chapter Three.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid. \textsuperscript{43}Ibid. \textsuperscript{44}Ibid., pp. 77-78.
Chapter 3

APPLICATION OF LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE IN THE TEACHING OF READING

From the review of literature in Chapter 2, it can be seen that linguists are not in agreement as to what their contribution to teaching reading should be. Nevertheless, an examination of their work has revealed areas in which all linguists discussed in the preceding chapter have agreed. In the opinion of this writer, it is these areas which should presently concern the teacher of reading interested in upgrading his reading instruction.

Areas of Agreement

Bloomfield (p. 8), Fries (p. 11), Lefevre (p. 15), Wardhaugh (p. 18), Seymour (p. 19), and Allen (p. 20) have all related the importance of concentrating on units no smaller than the word. (Lefevre, of course, has gone farther, and insisted that the sentence is the basic unit of the English language.) This idea is significant because, to date, many publishers of children's readers do not adhere to this belief. Some of the first lessons in word analysis are concerned with identification of 'consonant blends,' though no information in the teachers' manuals stating exactly how it helped the child to read better, or exactly why it was necessary to teach these blends was found. In light of this, and in light of the linguists' insistence that such information is inaccurate, the concerned teacher should view such lessons in reading manuals with reservations.
For example, the following lesson from the 2^1^ Scott, Foresman reader, *Friends Old and New*, might be considered of doubtful value:

With this lesson pupils review blends of two consonant sounds in which the s, r, or l sound forms part of the blend and associate the blends with the letters that represent them in printed words.

1. To begin, pronounce the words so and toy and have the initial sound in each identified. Then recall with the group that the s and the t sounds are consonant sounds. Comment that many words begin with two consonant sounds and ask children to listen carefully to the two consonant sounds at the beginning of the word *stick* as you, and then they, pronounce the word. What two consonant sounds do pupils hear at the beginning of *stick*. Which comes first—the s or the t sound? Then write the word *stick* and ask with what two letters it begins. Repeat with the other words in the first column below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>stick</th>
<th>train</th>
<th>black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sleep</td>
<td>from</td>
<td>clown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spot</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swish</td>
<td>pretty</td>
<td>glad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>brown</td>
<td>slow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To review initial blends with s, use procedures similar to those suggested for initial s blends. Begin with *take* and *rain* and continue with the words in the second column on the preceding page. In the same manner review initial blends with l, pronouncing *back* and *let* and continuing with the words in the third column. Then as children pronounce the words in each column again, underline the initial consonant blend in each word. Finally point to the first column and ask, "What is the first sound you hear in all these words? What is the first letter?"
With each of the remaining columns ask, "What is the second sound you hear in all these words? What is the second letter?"\(^1\)

From reading the above lesson plan, a marked emphasis on isolated sounds and letters of the alphabet can be noted. This writer has serious doubts that underlining the 'consonant blends' in each of these words and spending time asking children to identify the letters which make up the 'blends' will do anything for the child, except possibly waste time which could be devoted to more profitable exercises in helping him learn to read.

Though far from being perfect, the approaches of Bloomfield and Fries would make such a presentation unnecessary. For example, the word *rip* might be presented as a sight word, and the child, knowing how to substitute initial and final consonants would also know the words *nip, rim, ram, sip, dip*, etc. Later, *rip* might be reviewed, and *trip* presented as a sight word. Since this would occur after the child knew other three-letter word patterns using other medial vowels, making him able to distinguish *rip* from *rap*, for example, then the child could automatically, from a knowledge of *trip*, identify *trap, tram, trim*, etc. He would be quite familiar with /tr/ without ever being told it was a 'blend' or without ever being asked

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to isolate it.

Such lesson plans as the previously cited plan from Scott, Foresman is hardly atypical. The following plan from a Ginn reader is very similar:

**Phonetic Analysis.** To give practice in perceiving the *st* consonant blend in the initial, medial, and final positions, write the following words in three columns as shown here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>standing</td>
<td>fasten</td>
<td>first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stone</td>
<td>postman</td>
<td>breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>starfish</td>
<td>rooster</td>
<td>just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>start</td>
<td>last</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>still</td>
<td>must</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>story</td>
<td>most</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have the children pronounce the words in the column, identify the *st* blend in its initial position and underline it. Have the words in column 2 pronounced. Then have the *st* blend in its medial position found and underlined. Have the words pronounced again as the class listens to the blend in a medial position. Follow the same procedure with the *st* blend in its final position. Then clear the chalkboard.

Test the children's ability to perceive the position of the *st* blend in a word by playing the Circle-the-Post game described on page 112. Since the game has been played previously as a chalkboard activity, the children will now be able to play it individually. Distribute lined paper to each child and have him write on it the numbers from 1 to 10. Opposite each number have the child draw three posts or lines. As the teacher pronounces each of the following words, the children will circle the post which indicates the position of the *st* blend in that word...

The value of the above lesson from the 21 Ginn reader is also very questionable. If the child is capable of reading all of the

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*Italics used for emphasis, not found in the original.*
words before he identifies the blends, why must he spend time identifying blends!

American Book Company's READ Series word pattern approach has eliminated at least some time-wasting factors in its lesson plans for word analysis. In addition, one notes no reference to "silent e making the vowel in the middle long" so frequently found in phonics and meaning approach readers. Only the patterns are presented:

Pattern Boxes (-one, -ose): Have pupils read words. How are they alike? What is the pattern? Follow the same procedure for -o-, then see marginal notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-one</th>
<th>-ose</th>
<th>-o-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bone</td>
<td>nose</td>
<td>bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stone</td>
<td>those</td>
<td>nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>those</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have pupils pronounce words in the last column. How are these words alike? (Same sound in the middle) What vowel letter appears in the middle of these words? (/o/) Which word in the Pattern Box stands for something a dog likes to chew on? (bone) For something a house can be made from?

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A second agreement among linguists seems to be an emphasis on the importance of oral reading. Their plea for more oral reading does not seem to be merely pedagogical in nature. Instead, it seems to be based on the fact that one cannot derive total meaning from a word-by-word recitation with level juncture, no change in pitch. Most reading series authors agree that oral reading gives the teacher an indication of what the child is doing when instructed to read silently. If he is not "reading with expression," as it is frequently called, chances are he is not getting meaning from the printed symbols. Teachers, then, should not accept word-by-word oral reading from a student. If a student is doing this, he may need to be placed in easier material where he can read with expression and proper intonation.4

While present day reading texts seem to stress the fact that beginning readers must be constantly reminded to read "silently," many linguists seem to feel that this reminder is unnecessary, that children will eventually do this without being told to do so.

Reminders to keep "mouths still" when reading begin very early in the Scott, Foresman program—the pre-primer level:

As early as is feasible, children should begin the practice of silent reading. In their progress through Fun with Our Family and Fun Wherever We Are, they are sent to the lines of printed language with a suggestion to "read just with your eyes" or

with a question that directs their attention to looking for a specific answer. This procedure is incorporated repeatedly into the lesson plans as children gain the assurance that comes with command of printed language.5

Fries, on the other hand, felt that such suggestions are unnecessary:

Pupils learning to read by means of the approach embodied in this Series are also learning from the first to figure out words for themselves. Guessing has been completely eliminated from the process. In these circumstances, it is quite normal for the pupils to say the words to themselves as they read. The teacher should therefore not be concerned at this beginning stage about vocalization during the "silent" reading period. Her attention and energy should be directed to seeing that each pupil acquires an understanding of the reading process along with constantly increasing facility in its use. Experience has proved that one result of this growing facility will be the tapering off of vocalization, and finally, its complete cessation.6

From Fries' statement, teachers may conclude that worry over vocalization is unnecessary, and that constant reminders to "read with your eyes" may be frustrating a child for no reason.

A third area of agreement seems to be the acknowledgement by linguists that function words are among the most frequently used, yet most irregular words in the English language. Most linguists agree that special care should be taken in teaching them, and that the teaching of these words should be carefully spaced so as to

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avoid confusion.

In the Betts first-year reader, the irregular word, "again," is presented as a new word. There is no oral mention of it in the preparatory plan, nor is there any use of it in the follow-up plan. Children are expected to derive the word from the context clues, "And that old clock is broken again." and "'No! Guess again,' said Freddie." The word is used five times in the story, and is not used at all in the following story, nor in the word analysis lessons which complete the book. It is hard to conceive of the child actually knowing this word after so little exposure. This word is actually given less attention than many of the regularly spelled words in the reader.

On the other hand, the READ Series, also a publication of American Book Company, has done considerable research in the area of irregular words, and has made an effort to improve the teaching of such words:

3. The selection and the introduction of irregulars—often function words—and high frequency words have been carefully controlled. Research has reported interesting data regarding word usage. In order of frequency in a 100,000 word study, note the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>20,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>11,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>7,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>7,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>6,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>6,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>3,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>2,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>2,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>2,213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such words of high frequency are introduced as early as possible.

Irregulars, like the or of, are carefully spaced so that the beginning reader meets only one such word in a selection devoted primarily to a word pattern or application of a known pattern. The word the, for instance, appears later than -e /ə/ pattern—thus eliminating the possibility of confusion.

4. **Sentence structure and analysis** is studied at the very beginning and maintained at each level. For example, the function of and is studied in the first selection of the first pre-primer. The pupil is made aware of and as a connective of ideas side by side, as knife and fork (pictorial) and also as a connective of ideas which actually join, as bread and butter (pictorial). The pupil early learns to analyze ideas in terms of "Who did something?" and "What did he do?" (subject-predicate relationship)

(READ, of course, is not the only series which is aware of the difficulty of irregular words. The SRA Basic Reading Series, Lippincott Basic Reading Series, and the Merrill Linguistic Readers, to name a few, also give consideration to this problem.)

The implications that teachers may have to revise traditional phonics lesson plans to conform to linguistic knowledge of the nature of language, that teachers probably don't have to be concerned with vocalization during early stages of reading development, that more oral reading may be beneficial, and that careful attention must be paid to teaching irregular, function words were discussed in Chapter Three. A summary, conclusion, and recommendations for further research are contained in Chapter Four.

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8The Read System—Reading Experience and Development Series, American Book Company descriptive data (Mimeographed).
Chapter 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has been concerned with reviewing past linguistic contributions to the teaching of reading, and with discovering possible future contributions. From reviewing the work of various linguists in the field of reading, this investigator has concluded that there is no linguistic method of teaching reading, but that linguists have much technical knowledge which can play an important part in improving reading materials and teaching methods in the future.

Summary

This investigator, after reviewing much of the literature available in the linguistics and reading field, noted that much of the early work of linguists in the teaching of reading area was concerned with re-writing beginning reading materials so that words presented to young readers were regular and fit into patterns, giving the child an opportunity to learn many words from a knowledge of the pattern—\textit{an}, \textit{ran}, \textit{can}, \textit{Dan}. These early linguists advocated such an approach because traditional readers have often developed beginning reading materials containing some of the most irregular and difficult-to-learn words in the English language. In addition, the phonics programs developed with these traditional readers, and the supplementary phonics programs, were considered to be contradictory to facts linguists have learned about the nature of language.
Recently, other linguists have entered the teaching of reading field. After reviewing the work of early language scientists, many linguists have decided that early material, while generally accurate, took into account only certain aspects of linguistic science, ignoring a number of very important concepts. Linguists have recently contributed knowledge about sentence structure, dialect, and function words to the study of linguistics and reading.

As more linguists are specializing in the teaching of reading, they are discovering that they do not have all of the answers. The teaching of reading and the preparation of reading materials are very complex undertakings. Experts, not only in linguistics, but in psychology, learning theory, and education are needed to develop an adequate program.

Reading experts, as they become more sophisticated in linguistic knowledge, are discovering that they have only begun to tap the technical knowledge linguists can give them. Linguists can help develop more appropriate materials for beginning readers by providing textbook writers with descriptions of language typical for children of different age levels, and with descriptions of the Standard English teachers are trying to develop in their students. Linguists can also develop a new word analysis program consistent with what they have learned about the nature of language, thereby correcting the falsehoods they claim are existent in today's phonics programs.
Conclusions

The review of literature contained in this study has led this writer to conclude that there is adequate evidence to support the following teaching practices at this time:

1. The teaching of regular word patterns
2. The allotting of more time for oral reading, insisting on proper intonation
3. The presenting of function words in such a way that their function is observable.

Recommendations for Further Study

At this time a need for further research in the area of whether or not the teaching of isolated speech sounds and the letters representing them contributes to better reading is indicated. In light of linguistic opinion on this matter, teachers should not be expected to spend time in the classroom teaching these isolated sounds until it has been established that this practice is beneficial in improving reading. Secondly, it is very difficult to conceive of 'rules' which are considered false by experts in the science of language as being worthwhile. Publishers of textbooks need to consult linguists and make some effort to 'correct' the falsehoods they have asked teachers to teach.
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