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Language in Education — a Linguistic Perspective

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The discussion of language in education following in the wake of the Bullock Report has raised several overlapping and theoretically controversial linguistic themes, such as the desirability of linguistic screening for children held to be particularly 'at risk', and the choice of situations and materials felt to be appropriate for developing sensitivity to linguistic structure. In the last analysis, all such themes presuppose a common practical purpose: a concern to improve standards of language use in children. But in attempting to bridge the gap between theoretical debate and teaching practice, it is easy to underestimate the several kinds of linguistic knowledge that are needed. In fact, the aim of improving linguistic standards — which I take to be axiomatic — presupposes seven major stages, all of which relate to commonly-recognized educational tasks. These stages involve:

- (a) identifying the specific linguistic problems in a sample of work of an individual child (or adult);
- (b) describing the problematic features in a consistent and coherent manner;
- (c) judging the typicality of these features for the child's language use as a whole (or as near to the whole as one can get); that is, classifying the problems into types;
- (d) comparing individual children with respect to specific problems

and types; that is, ultimately establishing normative characteristics for groups;

- (e) setting up a developmental scale in terms of which children can be rated;
- (f) selecting immediate teaching goals, arising out of a comparison between target standard and attainment;
- (g) devising and evaluating remedial techniques.

It will be evident that each stage presupposes the one(s) preceding. There are no short cuts. Remediation (f,g) presupposes assessment (c,d,e), which presupposes identification of the existence of a problem (a,b). The surer our knowledge of the foundation stages, accordingly, the more confident subsequent pedagogical work will be. Which, then, are the weakest links in this chain of reasoning, and which stages can be most assisted by recent advances in linguistics?

It is usually assumed that (b), the need to master a terminology for the description of language, is a major problem facing any teacher wishing to investigate language problems systematically. It is certainly true that the precise use of technical terms is an invaluable aid to thinking, but learning *how* to describe is by no means the primary problem. Far more important is the need to be clear in one's mind as to exactly *what* the nature of the problem is. This is perhaps the most neglected of all the variables implicit in the list above, and yet it is pivotal. It is of little value to provide detailed techniques to facilitate (b), statistical techniques for (d), or language acquisitional scales for (e), if there is no agreement as to the end of the exercise. To what extent, therefore, is there agreement among teachers (or, for that matter, in society at large) that there is a problem? I am not referring here to a general sense of unease, which affects everyone, that 'standards' are deteriorating, but to the awareness of *specific* linguistic problems. To what extent would it be possible for a given group of teachers to agree that, for a given group of children, a specific set of linguistic difficulties constitutes the primary education problem? After this question is answered, we can then address the question of how far traditional techniques help in solving these problems, and how urgently new techniques are needed.

Localizing problems is, however, by no means straightforward. Addressing a given group of teachers and asking them to identify a 'top five' list of inadequacies that they would like to eradicate in their pupils' linguistic behaviour produces an extremely wide range of topics, and little agreement about priorities. Classifying reactions

obtained in this way illustrates very well the range of interpretations given to the 'language' problem. The following discussion is based upon the replies of 200 teachers from the junior/middle school range.

1 Most teachers concentrated their remarks on their children's productive, rather than receptive use of language. Several concerned criticisms of pupils' inadequacies in writing and speaking. Hardly any reference was made to problems of reading comprehension; no reference at all was made to listening comprehension (in contrast with the emphasis given to this topic in the other branch of remedial linguistic training, speech therapy). On the other hand, several issues raised under the heading of *language* problems were, rather, *pre-language* problems — for example, poor memory, erratic attention, lack of confidence, or no imagination. These are all factors crucial for successful language development. However, it should be emphasized that they are not linguistic problems as such, and should not be confused with those difficulties which are susceptible to a specifically linguistic solution.

2 The majority of the reactions focused on what was actually there — the real or imagined errors in the child's use of language. Less attention was paid to what was *not* there; for example, the limitations on the child's expression, as viewed from the perspective of the teachers' experience of the desired level of children's language for that group. It is of course always more difficult to be confident and systematic about errors of omission than about errors of commission, and remarks were accordingly rather vague; for example, 'limited vocabulary', 'no development of ideas', and (a little more specifically) 'poor use of adjectives'. But both of these dimensions are essential for a complete assessment of a child's difficulties, and they should complement each other. It is particularly important to bear the existence of these two dimensions in mind in the primary age range, where the learning of several central features of the adult language is still going on. (The developing use of patterns of emphatic word order and of sentence connectivity is discussed below; see Crystal, 1976, Chapter 2.)

3 In concentrating on what was evident in a child's language, most teachers focussed on a particular sample of usage they had obtained, such as an essay, a taped dialogue, or a reading aloud

task. The theoretical limitations of such sampling were generally appreciated, but on the whole the features selected for comment were presented for discussion without reference to the characteristics of the particular sample used. Yet to label a linguistic feature an 'error', without further qualification, can be highly misleading. At least the three following distinctions should be taken into account.

First, one should ask, with reference to one's sample, whether the language feature in question has been used consistently or inconsistently throughout. If the former, is the feature consistently correct or incorrect? The diagnostic value of this question is significant. One assumes that consistently correct usage denotes acquisition, and that consistently incorrect usage denotes the opposite. Absence of structures proves very little — it may suggest significant lack of ability, or there may be a sampling limitation. But inconsistent usage is potentially important. Both in speech and writing, areas of inconsistency show the linguistic features currently being acquired by the child, and suggest the need for extra attention. For example, one child wrote: *The man broke his arm because he fell off the ladder and his foot slipped.* The teacher had corrected *and* to *when*. What is the error? On the face of it, two interpretations suggest themselves: over-use of *and*; inadequate command of the use of *when*. Looking elsewhere in this child's work, neither explanation seemed to hold up. The child did sometimes over-use *and*, but only when long strings of events were being described. He was also able to write such sentences as *They went home when it was tea-time.* This leaves one further possibility — that the problem has arisen because of the structural complexity of the sentence which contains a main clause with two subordinate clauses of different semantic types. It may be that a child can cope with one main clause plus one subordinate clause, and get the right conjunction, the right sequence of tenses, and so on; but when faced with two subordinate clauses, he finds the second one difficult to process, and thus opts for 'and' as the easiest way out. 'At least this way (he might reason), I can get in the relevant fact (that the foot slipped) and this is a move in the right direction, in expressing what I want to say.'

This explanation is plausible, for children do have difficulty developing control over the range and sequencing of subordinate clause types (see, e.g., Clark, 1973; French & Brown, 1977) and this process is by no means complete for speech by the time a child gets to school. It is therefore highly unlikely that a great deal of control

would manifest itself in the written medium. And one would expect to find, in the work of this child, a range of similar errors as he experimented with various combinations of clause types. One would at least have to look elsewhere in his work before one could decide on the significance of the error in the example given above.

In short, this example illustrates a general principle: that description of the *whole* sample of work must precede any evaluation of the child's linguistic ability. A natural tendency is to see an error at the beginning of a piece of written work, and to mark it as such; but how serious the error is, and what kind of constructive comment to write in the margin, will only emerge once one has seen a particular error in relation to other instances of its use and with reference to relevant process of language acquisition.

A second distinction, a prerequisite for a clear discussion of the notion of 'error', is that between impossibility and undesirability. An error may be *impossible*, in the sense that no natural dialect of English uses it, or *undesirable*, in that it breaks some real or imagined sociolinguistic or stylistic norm. Teacher reaction varied widely on this point, reflecting traditional controversy. For some, traditional shibboleths, such as split infinitives, ranked highly as errors; for others, these were of little consequence as long as intelligibility remained. Other aspects of undesirability related to an inspecific notion of frequency. Over-use of 'and' in written work was one of the most commonly cited errors, but there was considerable difference of opinion as to how many instances of 'and' constituted an acceptable string.

Third, one should bear in mind the fact that the gravity of a large number of errors can be established only in the light of what the child intended to say or write. But it is very rarely the case that the adult view of what constitutes an appropriate use of language is checked by explicitly referring to the intuitions of the child. The practical and theoretical problems involved in discovering a child's intentions are very great, of course; but these should not blind us to the possibility that sometimes we may be considering as inadequate a use of language which was a deliberate choice on the child's part, and which he might have been able to justify, given the chance. Ambiguous usage is the crux of the problem. In the sentence (used in the essay analysed below) *She sat down looking at her cards*, several teachers corrected *looking* to *to look*, though whether this is the right thing to do clearly depends on what was meant. But it is not solely a

matter of ambiguity. It must not be forgotten that the distance between an adult's and a child's language is still quite marked at age 10, especially as regards their relative awareness of vocabulary, figurative language, etc. (see Gardner *et al.*, 1975). One must therefore always be aware of the danger of seeing a child's usage as poor, by adult standards, whereas in fact it may be advanced, or innovative, when judged in its own terms.

4 Beneath this last distinction lies the contrast between the two main dimensions of linguistic analysis: language *use* and language *structure*. Distinguishing clearly between these dimensions is fundamental in any application of linguistic ideas, but in the present case the two were frequently confused. Under the heading of language use, one is referring to the choice of a particular style or dialect on the part of a child, and therefore to his sense of linguistic appropriateness. Examples of 'errors' here would be the use of local dialect forms, or informal constructions such as contractions in formal written contexts where the standard language is required. As has frequently been pointed out in recent years (e.g., Trudgill 1975; Crystal 1976), the use of dialect or informal language may be appropriate on other occasions. Rather, one should develop an awareness of the coexistence of several different varieties of language within a community, and aim to instil in the child a functional command of them. It was nonetheless common to see in the present exercise the assumed existence of a single standard of correctness, 'errors' being identified without regard to the context in which the language was used. The dangers that this attitude gives rise to have been well discussed (e.g., by Doughty *et al.*, 1971; Martin *et al.*, 1976), so I will not go into them here. Errors 'common to children and their parents' were listed by one teacher, and this heading summarizes well the underlying misconception.

Particularly important with reference to language use, especially in the early school period, is the contrast between the language demands and expectations of the school and those of the home. It is axiomatic that one should build in school on the foundations of what the child already has, but it is by no means uncommon to see building going ahead with no systematic cognizance being taken of what is already there. The following topic area provides an example.

In written work, one of the most common criticisms was a child's failure to complete sentences, or his omission of important

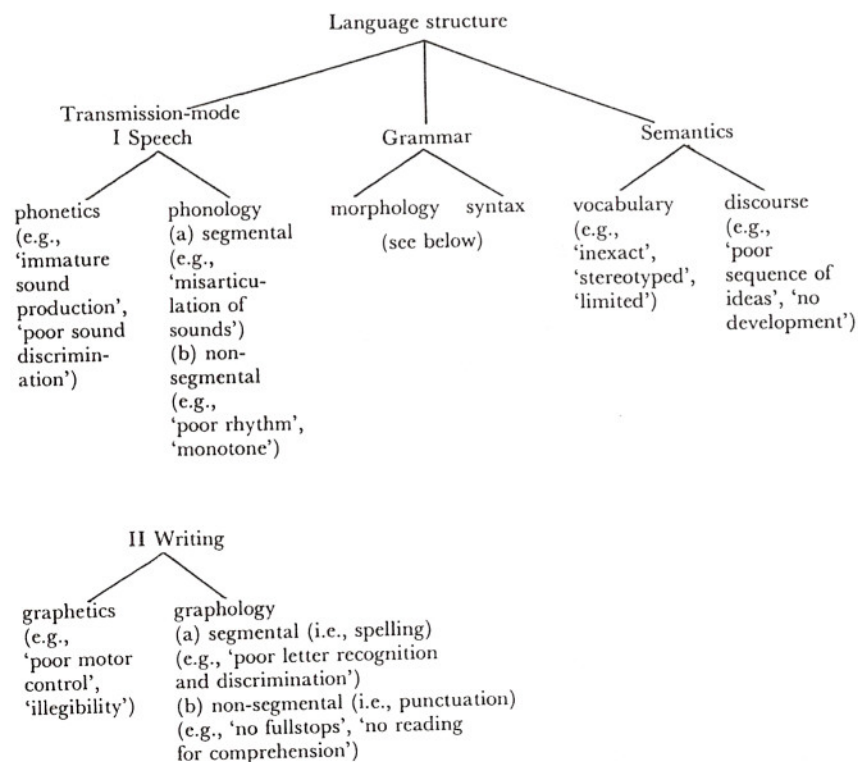
information such as the subject of the sentence, or an adverbial (e.g., 'when did the event take place?'), or his use of ambiguous pronouns ('Who does the *he* refer to?'). But we must not forget how distinctive the written language is in its sentence construction, and how great the distance is between most styles of writing and conversational speech, which provides the norm of our linguistic consciousness. Colloquial speech is generally in dialogue form, for example; hence the child is used to responding to others' stimuli while he is communicating, thus producing elliptical constructions; for example, *To the library* said in response to *Where are you going?* In colloquial speech, too, the subject is frequently omitted, because it is obvious to whom the action refers when the speaker and listener share the same context; for example, *Having a nice time?*, *Got a new car!* The ever-present context makes several linguistic features redundant, and promotes in particular the frequent use of *deictic* words (words that point directly to features of the non-linguistic world), such as *this*, *that*, *here*, *there* or *one*. Whole sentences can be totally context-bound in this way; for example, *And so she did*, *That one does too*. These are some of the features that characterize the economy and fluency of conversational speech; they would obviously be out of place in most kinds of writing. But given the fact that children are well-versed in their use, being fluent users of informal speech, it is not at all surprising that these features will emerge in their early attempts to master the rules of the written language.

An important bridging operation on the teacher's part, accordingly, is to bring home to the child how independent of context the written language tends to be, and how important it is for the writer to be aware of the demands placed upon him by the varying situations in which written communication is appropriate (cf. Martin *et al.*, 1976). But the theoretical issue here is not restricted to the task of learning to write. If one takes the example of 'incomplete' sentences mentioned above, one finds that it needs to be considered with reference to both speech and writing. Most children have a colloquial speech background which involves a predominance of multiply-coordinated constructions of the kind illustrated in Crystal (1976, Chapter 1), with a high frequency of *ands* and filler clauses, such as *you know*.

If there have been no external forces disciplining their thinking (as with, say, parents using the Ladybird pre-reading books), then there could well be difficulties in teaching such children the stand-

ard notion of a 'complete' sentence. Under such circumstances, a great deal of cognitive foundation may need to be laid before one can satisfactorily proceed to such notions, whether in the written language or in speech. This problem faces all teachers in their initial assessment of error: is the incompleteness a linguistic or a pre-linguistic difficulty for the child?

5 The great majority of teacher responses, however, came under the heading of language structure, and here the need to use a linguistic model capable of classifying the diverse reactions was apparent. Using the model presented in previous work (Crystal, 1976), the comments could be grouped readily into three areas, and sub-classified:



A further classification of stated errors, based on this model, was

also useful:

A *single level* problem is solely one of spelling or syntax or vocabulary etc., for example, *john* for a proper name, *January*, *Peter threw the ball on the floor* (where 'dropped' is the required meaning). A *multi-level* error is more complex, involving problems at two or more levels; for example: spelling + vocabulary, for example, *The bare ate him*; vocabulary + grammar, for example, *all ready* for *already*, *after Sue went out* (where 'afterwards' was expected); spelling + grammar (a rare combination), for example, *its/it's* *their/they're/there*, *could of*; vocabulary + punctuation (a rare combination), for example, *Mr, Mister. Jones*; spelling + vocabulary + grammar, for example, *It is to early*.

The important point here is that, whereas most people assume that errors are identifiable at one level of language structure only, the majority of errors in a piece of work involve more than one, with consequent problems of analysis and exposition in remediation.

6 The majority of teachers' *complaints* about language came under the heading of grammar. This is not surprising. Grammar is the organizing principle of language, within which vocabulary, sounds and spellings are organized into meaningful units. Because of its basic role, accordingly, some further classification of errors, into the main types of grammatical problem posed, is urgent.¹ In fact, five areas of grammatical structure seem particularly important: (a) sentence-sequencing; (b) sentence structure; (c) clause structure; (d) phrase structure; (e) word structure. Typical comments were:

- (a) 'loose connection of ideas', 'poor paragraphing', 'the sentences come out in any order';
- (b) 'poor sequence of tenses', 'incomplete sentences', 'poor clause development';
- (c) 'bad word order', for example, '*hardly he had come*';
- (d) 'limited' phrases, for example, 'no use of adjectives';
- (e) 'confused word-endings', such as *-ed* and *-ing*.

¹One should note here the contrast between a linguistic orientation to grammatical work and the aims of traditional parsing and clause analysis. The present approach never treats the analysis of language in the classroom as an end in itself, merely to develop a mastery of terminology. The primary aim is to analyse in order to assess and thus develop ability. Consequently, no language analysis should ever take place until one has first established the nature of the language problem which has given rise to it, and has a subsequent remedial aim in mind (see below).

A useful way of illustrating the various stages listed at the beginning of this paper is to take one of these areas and look at the issues that emerge in constructing a remedial programme. In a recent discussion-group, involving mainly teachers of 9–10 year-olds, it was finally agreed that area (a) was a particular problem. As one teacher put it, wearily: 'With several in my class, one could take their story, cut out each sentence, shuffle the sentences and "deal" a new story, and the result would be no better and no worse than the first effort!' Identification of a problem, the first stage discussed at the beginning of this chapter, was achieved.

The second stage was deciding how to describe these features. It was felt likely that the means the children used to connect their sentences was inadequate. Unfortunately, traditional handbooks do not pay much attention to this problem² though it has come to the fore in recent descriptions of English (as in Quirk *et al.*, 1972, Chapter 10; Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Consequently, it was necessary to spend some time establishing what the potential of the language is, as far as sentence connectivity is concerned. Before one can establish what is missing in a child's language, one must first know precisely what could have been there. Accordingly, it was asked: How many kinds of sentence connectivity are there in English? *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Quirk *et al.*, 1972) shows that there are four main grammatical means:

- (1) By no explicit marker, symbolized as S/S (S = Sentence): For example, when one uses a series of parallel structures, the very use of parallelism causes one to see the sentences as working together to communicate a particular meaning, as with a string of rhetorical questions in a political speech, or a series of italicised lines in a written text.
- (2) The use of a linking word: $S \times S$. Here, two types are possible:
 - (a) A time/place word; for example, *here, there, then, earlier, already . . .*. The connectivity function of such words is clear if one tries to start an utterance with one: 'Then John came in' can hardly be one's opening remark.
 - (b) Logical connectors, such as *and, or, but*, and the various

²Grammatical features are not the only ones which connect sentences, of course; other semantic or situational features may, as in: *The Prime Minister . . . Mr. Callaghan . . . , or He died . . . He was buried*. Graphic layout, such as in official forms, may also connect groups of sentences. The point made above is that the fewer the grammatical clues to the organization of a text, the more difficult it will be to understand, as more has to be 'read in' by the text user.

related words that reinforce their meanings, such as *moreover, however, actually*. One should note here the several underlying senses of a word like *and*, embracing such diverse meanings in a sentence as *X happened and Y happened*. The sense may be result (*and* = 'and therefore'), chronology (*and* = 'and then', as in so much story-telling), or addition (*and* = 'and also', as in a great deal of descriptive writing), as well as other things.

- (3) The use of a replacement: x in sentence 1 is replaced by y in sentence 2 (S / S). The total substitution of a stretch of

$$\begin{array}{c} \downarrow \quad \downarrow \\ x \rightarrow y \end{array}$$

language by a word may be symbolized by y . The best examples are the pronouns (*he, she*, etc.) or words such as *do, so* and *one*. y may also be the partial repetition of a phrase, as in the anaphoric (i.e., backwards-referring) use of the definite article, for example, *the boy* presupposes a previously mentioned *boy*, whereas *a boy* does not.

- (4) Deletion: x in sentence 1 is omitted in sentence 2 (viz. $s \quad s$).

$$\begin{array}{c} \downarrow \quad \downarrow \\ x \rightarrow - \end{array}$$

There are also two types here: *ellipsis* is the absence of part of a sentence, which thereby shows the dependence of that sentence on some other sentence, for example, *To town*, following *Where are you going?*; *comparison* makes it quite clear from the form of the sentence used that a contrast is being made with something previously stated or understood, as in *That's bigger*.

In theory, then, one can see how sentence-connectivity can go wrong:

- (1) There may be no explicit connectivity at all, and no parallelism of structure to justify its absence ($S / S / S / S . . .$)
- (2) Only some types of connectivity may be used. Usually parts of types (2) and (3) above are used, but with significant omissions (see below).
- (3) Some types may be over-used, especially:
 - (a) over-use of *and, then*, etc.;
 - (b) over-use of pronouns as subject.

If we now look at a sample of a child's writing, it is possible to use this framework to locate the main areas of probable difficulty for an individual child — the classificatory stage (c) referred to on page 1. The following essay was produced by a nine-year-old.

Kim B 26th November The Birthday present 1976

This is a story about a girl called Sue. It was her birthday today and she was looking forward to it because she was getting a brand new pair of roller skates from her uncle. She sat down looking at her cards. Then a knock at the door made Sue jump. She was hoping that it was her uncle but it was her friend already for the party but she said "It is to early". "Im very sorry Ill come later on okay bye." Then a glance caught her eye her uncle was across the road he had a parcel in his arms. Sue ran to him "Happy Birthday" Sam he said and she gave him a big kiss. A present was given to her. She quickly ran indoors and opened the box and there she saw a brand new pair of skates. They were red with white laces, She asked her uncle to do up her laces and he said "yes" So after Sue went roller skating. She even tried to do tricks but she was only a learner. She skated down a hill and her laces were not tight enough and she fell and her skates went into a dump yard. She began to cry on the way home. and thinking what her (~~grandad~~) uncle would say. She didn't go in until her uncle was gone and after that he was gone she crept in and ran upstairs and pretended to put the roller skates away. Her mum said "did your skates go okay"? "Yes." "Did you know it is Christmas tomorrow"? "No." "Mum if I tell you something will promise not to tell uncle"? "Yes." "I lost my skates". Well ill lett you what I shall get you a pair for christmas exsactly the same. and so she did, And uncle came over and he said "how are your roller skates"? "Very lovely thankyou!" anyway Im inviting you all to dinner today "horay". Can I bring my roller skates"? "Of course", and Sue was very happy.

The two main characteristics of connectivity in this essay are obvious: the use of *and* to the apparent exclusion of other forms of connectivity, and the highly frequent pronominal role. The obviousness of these remarks hides some complexities, however, to which I referred earlier. Why *should* the child resort to these strategies? In both cases, investigating the most noticeable features leads us into other areas, and suggests explanations for the difficulties that could tie in with the child's linguistic behaviour as a whole. Perhaps this is a child who is having difficulty in mastering the more complex subordinating conjunctions of the language, or in building sentences using non-finite clauses (evidenced by *She began to cry on the way home. and thinking what her uncle would say.*). Both of these structures are relatively late language acquisitional features. Perhaps the child views *and* as particularly appropriate for certain

kinds of expression, suggesting an attempt at stylistic contrast — the way in which the construction to some degree reflects the speed of events in *She skated down a hill and her laces were not tight enough and she fell and her skates went into a dump yard*. Perhaps it is the system of logical connectivity itself that gives the child difficulty (as shown by the second *but* in *but it was her friend already for the party but she said 'It is to early . . .'*). It is plain that the child has begun to control aspects of these areas of grammar (as indicated by the use of *because . . .*, *looking at . . .*, *even . . .*, *until . . .*, etc.), but the systems of contrasts involved have clearly not been completely acquired.

Similarly, one can look at the pronoun usage, and draw inferences about acquisition. Here the issue is not this child's learning of the actual pronominal items, but the relationship of the pronouns to other parts of the sentence. In the sentence *Then a knock at the door made Sue jump*, given that *Sue* is the only subject engaged in actions at this point, a pronoun would be expected. The learning of constructions involving double pronouns, identity of reference of pronouns, and related matters, however, comes relatively late in language acquisition (cf. contrasts such as *John gave a book to Jim, and he gave one to Mary* and *John gave a book to Jim, and HE gave one to Mary*, which are still being acquired in speech by many children at age 9; cf. Chomsky, 1969).

One might also note here the related problem of ambiguity, where *but she said* could refer to either Sue or the friend. And perhaps one might reflect on the pervasive stylistic monotony of the pronoun constructions. What happens when a pronoun is used as a subject of a sentence in English? All the 'weight' of the sentence comes after the verb. This is in fact the natural order of things in English speech (cf. Quirk *et al.*, 1972, Chapter 14). This feature can readily be recognized when one compares the greater naturalness of *It's nice to see you digging the garden*, to *To see you digging the garden is nice*. In a developed style, one introduces variations in focus and theme to avoid monotonous concentration on the object and subject of the sentence. In speech, too, one uses intonational emphasis to avoid monotony. In Kim's essay, however, apart from a certain mobility in the use of *he said*, there is no thematic variation; the subjects are short and repetitive. The one clear attempt to break out of this pattern is worth singling out: the use of the passive in *A present was given to her*. This would generally be a rather artificial construction at this point — though whether the child intended the formality,

impersonality, or pomposity that attends the use of the passive is unknowable. It would have been far easier to have written *She got a present, He gave her a present*, or the like, but because of the thematic variation it is a quite exciting move in the right direction. Once again, there are signs of acquisition in progress.

In trying to establish the typical errors in this child's work, it should be noted that we have had to make use of assumptions relating to stages (d) and (e) in the teaching process referred to on the first page of this chapter. In particular, we have noted that both the problem areas discussed — complex sentence construction and thematic variation — are aspects of language that tend to be acquired relatively late, between 5 and 10 years of age. Of course, the most important implication of this is that the problem this child faces may not solely be one with the written language. It is crucial for the teacher to check on this possibility, as there is little point in introducing remedial written work if the child has had no experience of the constructions in question in his reading, or, more fundamentally, in his speaking or listening comprehension. For specific areas of construction, the point should be easy enough to check.

Let us take, as an example, the use of sentence-connecting adverbials, such as *actually, fortunately, happily, later, in fact*. These might be absent in a child's written output (as in the essay above). A look through the main reading materials used by the child would show fairly quickly whether such patterns were being regularly used. (One could note, in this respect, the sentence-by-sentence progression of several traditional reading schemes which jump, suddenly and without a control in complexity, to paragraphs of story-text involving quite complex connectives. In *Skylarks*, on the other hand, building in gradual increases in the complexity of sentence linkage is a main feature; cf. Bevington and Crystal, 1975). It would be more difficult to check on the child's use of such connectives in spontaneous speech and listening comprehension, but a relatively easy matter to check on this in controlled situations. The teacher might write a list of adverbials on the board, then begin to read a sentence, requiring the children to continue it using one of the adverbials. For example, with *happily, quickly, fortunately* on the board:

Teacher: *Yesterday, we went to town. Fortunately, . . .*

Child: *Fortunately, it wasn't raining.*

Remedial attention to this problem might continue using variants of the *Find a Story* or *Roll a Story* materials (Vidler, 1974), where one can 'ring the changes' on a sentence by systematically varying the connecting link, with varying results ranging from the incongruous to the absurd. One may even find story material in print that focusses on the remedial feature (as in Charlip, 1964, for the entertaining contrast between *fortunately* and *unfortunately*), but rather more often one would have to work up some simple materials of one's own. In this way, the diagnosis of writing → reading → speaking → comprehension can be reversed; comprehension and speech exercises lead to reading patterns compatible with speaking ability and thence to promoting their use in the written language. The sentence-maker techniques in *Breakthrough to Language* are examples of this process.

Selecting immediate teaching goals and devising remedial techniques, described as stages (f) and (g) at the beginning of the chapter, go closely together in practice. There is little point in setting oneself a goal if there are no practicable techniques available for reaching it. But with ingenuity it is usually possible to devise a strategy for attacking any structural linguistic problem and, moreover, for doing so in an entertaining way. The children who laugh at Charlip's *Fortunately . . .*, or who construct more and more fantastic story-boards, little realize that they are being drilled in 'sentence-connecting adverbials'. It is also a far cry from the traditional approaches of formal grammar, where one learned the structures (and the terminology) first, and thought what to do about them afterwards. The kind of background knowledge that is required of the teacher before he can lead his children in this direction is, however, quite considerable, as I hope this paper has shown. It is no greater than that which has to be mastered in order to implement several other areas of expertise within the profession; but because it has been so neglected, the problem, perhaps, seems larger than it is. Group discussion of the problems, especially in schools, can be of great value in bringing the issues into perspective. Supported by a small amount of judicious reading and a willingness to experiment, it is remarkable how quickly the bridge between theory and practice in educational linguistic work can be constructed.

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