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THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TODAY

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Edwin Newman’s popular book Strictly Speaking has the subtitle “Will America be the death of English”? What do Newman and others mean when they talk about the death of English or use related metaphors—decay, deterioration, decline, degeneration, corruption?

The metaphor of language death is established in a very different sense from the one that Newman obviously intended. We say that a language is dead when people no longer use it; we say that it is dying or in decline when there is a persistent fall in the number of speakers. A dying language is not itself sick or at fault; death, dying, decline are transferred metaphors. In this metaphorical sense, English is far from death. Recent estimates give English as the first language of nearly 300 million people and as an additional language of perhaps another 300 million. We can be confident that English will remain very much alive for the foreseeable future.

Language death is the ultimate stage. A language is in decline not only when the number of its users is dwindling but also when the number of its uses is dwindling. For example, if it is employed only in writing and not in speech, or if it is not the medium for instruction in education, or if it is not considered appropriate in very formal contexts. One obvious effect of disuse in a particular function is that the language will lack the special vocabulary for that function. English is employed in the full range of language functions: from prayer to communication between airplane pilot and control tower, from poetry to technical manuals. English is in no danger of creeping atrophy.

Living languages constantly change. Only dead languages remain unchanged. Changes do not occur instantly throughout the speech community, and even an individual may vacillate when there are competing variants. If changes in our environment disturb us, we may well be hostile to language that we are not used to. The extreme conservative will perhaps stigmatize any language change as deterioration. But there is no rational basis for determining that some earlier period of the language is perfect or pure and that therefore all subsequent changes can be considered corruption or degeneration.

But what if we are tolerant of the principle of language change? Is it reasonable to discriminate, and if so on what basis? The major function of language is communication: any change that facilitates communication is desirable, any change that hampers communication is undesirable. If someone invents a new word or phrase and others find it useful, they will repeat it and it will enter the language, though it may be restricted to some specialised group. It will be retained as long as people feel a need for it, and it will become obsolete when it is no longer needed. New vocabulary may be received by the language: a reference to objects, experiences, or ideas that are new or that we have begun to notice more frequently. We should welcome the availability of words like videotape, childproof, workaholic, and sexism, or phrases like letter bomb, greenhouse effect, or open classroom, even if we dislike some or all of the phenomena they refer to.

Grammatical changes often meet resistance at first. If they add to the expressive resources of the language, we should be happy to accept them. One major development over several centuries has been the steady spread of the progressive throughout the verb paradigm. Forms like is writing became common only in the 17th century. The progressive was extended to the passive (is being written) in the 18th century and to the main verbs be and have (is having a party, is being ungrateful) in the 19th century, and these forms have been accepted despite extensive resistance. In this century it has spread to have to (is having to sell his store). Recent evidence suggests that another gap is being filled: just as we now have a progressive participle being written, we may have a progressive participle being doing. Here are a couple of examples that have been recorded from casual conversations:

1. Is the deadline a rigid one? Can you ever get an extension?
2. You can get an extension, on the grounds of being teaching.

(1) I've missed endless buses through not being standing at the bus stop when they arrived.

The novel combination will sound strange at first, but if we are exposed to it frequently enough we will find it natural.

Some language changes reflect changing attitudes. Words acquire associations that are considered unpleasant or they make distinctions that come to be felt offensive. New coinages like Ms., singles, and chairperson will be resented by those who are comfortable with the older terms and either don't feel a pressing need to replace them or object to the attitudes of persons advocating the replacements. Some will rationalize their reactions as condemnations of unpleasant combinations of sounds. But is Ms. Taylor uglier than Liz Taylor? The same attitudinal change will probably lead to increasing use and acceptance even within formal contexts of the neutral singular forms of these pronouns, as in Every student should consult with their advisor before they register for courses. Again, such changes are to be welcomed; they allow us to avoid unintended offense, and they therefore facilitate communication.

Meaning changes occasionally arise through misinterpretation, as when infer is used for imply, disinterested for uninterested, and verbal for oral. Most teachers will want to correct such misinterpretations, at least in written language. At the same time we should be aware that when these misinterpretations become widespread we are fighting a losing battle; at some stage a misinterpretation becomes a new interpretation. There may be a confusing transitional period when conflicting interpretations co-exist, though generally the meaning will be unambiguous in context. But we need not fear that such changes will corrupt the language. We can compensate for a lost meaning through a synonym: we can replace infer with deduce or conclude. Or we resurrect flammable if we fear that inflammable will be misinterpreted dangerously.

Words sometimes become intensifiers or general terms of approval or disapproval: a real hero, terribly difficult, a marvelous party, an awful day. Most of them are stylistically marked as informal. Some escape the condemnation of writers of textbooks and usage guides more easily than others: sheer luck, a true friend, a great time, highly intelligent, deeply worried. As with misinterpretations, if we can no longer use a word in an earlier sense we can find an alternative, for example terrifying for terrible, or awe-inspiring for awful. Worthwhile distinctions are never lost permanently. If we need a distinction we will be able to make it. We can get some rise from a relatively few individual changes that we may regret to a complaint that the language as a whole is decaying.
If it is unprofitable to complain about the decay of the language itself, can we at least complain about the decay in the use of the language? One complaint has been that language is frequently used to deceive the public. Political, military, and industrial leaders are charged with using euphemistic or obscure language to conceal unethical behavior and attitudes or illegal acts, or to soften the impact of subsequent revelations. Advertisers are accused of wording that is intended to mislead. Sometimes the effect is ludicrous, as when embarrassed gas industry officials recently attempted to avoid the word glut, preferring to call the unpredicted glut of natural gas "a bubble" or "an overdeliverability situation." Often the effect is sinister, as in the Vietnam War talk of surgical strikes and the Watergate obfuscations. We should certainly teach our students to recognize these abuses. However, we should not confuse language abuse with language change. We can still use bubble, surgical, and plumbum in their more familiar senses. The long-standing British parliamentary euphemism terminological inexactitude and the contemporary American misstatement have not driven lie out of the language.

One demonstrable difference between earlier periods and ours is that the growth of the mass media has increased the size of the audience exposed to language abuse and television has increased its impact. But is language abuse more common than 20, 50, or a hundred years ago? And is it increasing? Are public figures more dishonest nowadays? Is the public more gullible? Do the mass media spread language abuse more than they expose it? I am not sure how we can go about computing answers to those questions.

Finally, we might complain about the use of the language in a stylistic sense. Do we use English less efficiently or less aesthetically than in previous periods? Writers like Newman have no doubt about the answer. We can be sure that many people nowadays make poor use of the rich resources of the language, and that we can be and ought to do better. We can be more careful, more precise, when we lack a feeling for appropriateness of style, when they fail to command a range of grammatical and vocabulary options. We should do our best to help students improve their skill in the use of the language. We do not need to be motivated by comparisons.

But suppose we took the question seriously and tried to compare language use in two periods. The difficulties will at once become apparent. In the first place, we can only compare like with like, one functional variety with another. For example, we have to make separate comparisons for scientific writing as opposed to cookbooks or newspapers. We would have to be more precise even than that; since they presuppose different audiences and writing purposes, we cannot compare a scientific paper in a learned journal with a science textbook or with a science feature article in a newspaper. Secondly, for technical reasons we cannot investigate natural conversation, by far the most common variety of language use; we do not have recordings from earlier periods. Furthermore, we would have to ensure that samples are random and sufficiently numerous, so that we can be confident that we are making reliable comparisons. We would also need to match for the two periods the educational backgrounds of the users and their audiences. We would need to be aware that language change can affect the stylistic values of words, collocations or constructions. Furthermore, what is considered appropriate style for a particular functional variety can vary from period to period. "Impassioned prose" was highly regarded in the literary writing of the nineteenth century. We now find it embarrassing. Here is De Quincey in a passage published in 1849:

Lo, it is summer, almighty summer! The everlasting gates of life and summer are thrown wide open; and on the ocean, tranquil and verdant as a savanna, the unknown lady from the dreadful vision and I myself are floating: she upon a fairy pinnace, and I upon an English three-decker.

One final problem: we would have to establish criteria for evaluating the language of the very different functional varieties.

I tried out a pilot experiment to compare judgments of language use today with that of an earlier period. Without reading their contents, I selected two newspaper items reporting on spy trials, both from the Milwaukee Journal, one published in July 1969 and the other in October 1978. The items are attributed to the news agencies, so that there was little interference from the local editors. I circulated dittoed copies to teachers of writing courses in the English Department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and asked them to judge the quality of writing in the two items, whether the language of News Item A was better than the language of News Item B, or vice versa, or whether the language of the two items was about the same in quality.

Eighteen teachers responded. None of them indicated that they were aware of the time difference of nearly 40 years between the two items. Eleven preferred the 1978 item, 3 preferred the 1949 item, and 4 thought that they were about the same in quality. The features of the 1978 item that most often elicited favorable comments were that it was better organized and that its sentences were more complex. On the other hand, a couple of the teachers preferred the simpler syntax and simpler diction of the 1949 item. You may rightly object that the 11-3 preference for the contemporary style does not prove that the use of the language has become better since 1949. After all, the comparison is restricted to newspaper use and to only one pair of items; and perhaps the judges were insufficiently discriminating. But at least I have presented you with comparative evidence, even though its scope is severely limited. A systematic comparison of language use in any two periods requires an enormous project. The result will be of general interest, though I do not see that they will have any practical value. But until somebody has made systematic comparisons, we should remain skeptical about claims that the use of English has deteriorated.

FOOTNOTES

1 An earlier version of this paper was given at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English held at Kansas City in November 1978.

2 The estimates are reported in Fishman et al. 1977, 6. The same source (page 7) states that as of January 1, 1975, English was the sole official language in 21 countries and had official status in another 16. An analysis (page 14) of the educational statistics for 112 countries where English is not the mother tongue estimates that a total of 76.7% of secondary level students were in English classes at the beginning of this decade. Secondary level students have had at least four years of previous instruction at the primary level.

3 The examples are taken from Halliday 1980. The history of the progressive is discussed in Jespersen 1909-49, IV 164-70, 210-14, 224-27, V 57.

4 "He is likely to become a permanent addition to the English language. A term like Ms has long been needed when a woman's marital status was not known; its convenience is reinforced by objections to a pair of terms that make a distinction not made for men. The effect of Ms on Miss is still uncertain; perhaps Miss will become archaic or perhaps it will remain with a restricted reference and different associations; its future will depend on whether a need is felt for a modified use of the word."

5
The passage is cited in Gordon 1966, 159.

I took the earlier item from a book of photographic reproductions of the front pages of American newspapers (Emery et al. 1970, 188). I selected a page from the Milwaukee Journal because I could easily obtain current copies of that newspaper. The earlier item was dated July 1, 1949. I silently corrected a misprint (the omission of an apostrophe in 't'he') because it might have irrevocably prejudiced the judges. The second item was selected because it dealt with a similar topic. It appeared on page 8 of the main section in the Milwaukee Journal of October 31, 1978. The earlier item is attributed to Associated Press, while the later item is attributed to Associated Press, the New York Times, and the Washington Post. Although the later item is a composite from three sources, it is better constructed and reads more smoothly.

REFERENCES

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SPEECH AND WRITING. LISTENING AND READING: SOME DIFFERENCES

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If I asked you to meet me for coffee in the restaurant across the street, you would be able to comprehend most of what I said, and by noticing where I pointed or by asking me a question you could pin down the elusive piece of information. If, on the other hand, to borrow an example from Fillmore (1971), you found a bottle afloat on a body of water with a paper containing the message, "Meet me here at noon tomorrow with a stick about this big," you would be most hard pressed to fill the request. My contention is that skilled reading is much more than the sum of oral comprehension plus decoding, despite Edmund Burke Huey's (1908) oft-cited observation that "The child comes to his first reader with his habits of spoken language fairly well formed and these habits grow more deeply set with every year. His meanings were in this spoken language and belong secondarily to the printed symbols" (p. 123).

There are undoubtedly many similarities between oral and written comprehension. Intuitively, I believe that the human mind is built as economically as possible — I believe that God in his infinite wisdom operates on a principle of economy of effort. Hence, I might be convinced that the mind has special "perceivers" or processes for recognizing and differentiating print or sound, but I am highly skeptical that there are any "comprehenders" in the mind specifically suited to information gathered by reading the printed page. It just does not make good sense.

Nonetheless, I think it highly important and I intend to emphasize the differences among various forms of oral and written language, rather than their similarities. In fact, I believe it can be misleading to compare the broad class "oral language" with the broad class "written language" since the differences within these classes are often greater than the general distinction between them. While visual decoding is an obvious difference between listening and reading tasks, my contention is that it is but one of a number of distinctions (and too obvious to treat here) which present obstacles in learning to read.

There are but five distinctions between spoken and written language, which I would like us to consider and they are distinctions which may explain some reading comprehension problems. Before commenting about comprehension in general seem appropriate. In a book I recently wrote with David Pearson (Pearson and Johnson, 1978) we argue that the essence of comprehension is captured in one simple principle: Comprehension is building bridges from the new to the known.

Beneath this simple metaphor lies a rich and complex set of implications about the process itself and about the process of teaching comprehension. Among them are: (1) Comprehension is active, not passive; that is, the reader or listener cannot help but interpret and alter what he reads or hears in accordance with prior knowledge about the topic under discussion. Comprehension is not simply a matter of recording and reporting verbatim what has been read or heard. (2) Comprehension involves a great deal of inference making. In fact, the number of inferences required to comprehend even the simplest prose passage is staggering, and inferences are an inevitable part of the comprehension process. (3) Comprehension is a dialogue between writer and reader, hence, we interpret statements according to our perception of what the writer or speaker is trying to do — inform us, persuade us, or direct us.

To note the reality of viewing comprehension as bridge building between what is new and what we already know, I invite you to comprehend the following short paragraph and to answer the questions which follow.

The Center, resplendent in bright red and white, made the hook shot.
As the buzzer sounded the home fans screamed and cheered wildly with joy and relief. Most stayed nearly another half hour singing chorus after chorus of the "Budweiser" song.

1. Who made the hook shot?
2. What song did they sing several times?
3. What was bright red?
4. Whose team was the Center on?
5. Who won the game?
6. What game was being played?
7. How many points for the Center's shot?
8. Who (what school) did the Center play for?

Questions 1 and 2 could be answered literally from information explicitly stated in the text. Your answers to 7 and 8 could in no way have been drawn from the text. "Two points" came from a knowledge of basketball and "Wisconsin" from a knowledge of school colors and fight songs. Questions 3 through 6 are trickier. Responses were implicit in the text, though with some (perhaps number 6) you needed to draw on prior knowledge or experience — inferences based on experience.

Experience is at the heart of comprehension, especially as comprehension is assessed in today's schools. Experience is what we refer to when we say that a person is good at reading "between the lines," or "beyond the lines."

While the details are not quite so well worked out, there are some useful frameworks that represent attempts to understand the structure readers bring to the printed page as they try to make sense out of all those little squiggles. Interestingly, the frameworks that make the most sense come out of a discipline totally alien to me — computer simulation of intelligent behavior. I have been most influenced by the work of Lehmer (1975), Minsky (1975), and Schank (1973) in constructing a framework for comprehension of longer discourse. Because I have found his treatment of the relationship between what is in the text and what the reader brings to the text so useful, I have adopted Schank's term, script, as a special label for experience (at least most experience).

A bit of history about attempts to get computers to act like human beings will help to clarify the usefulness of the script notion. People in a field called artificial intelligence (AI) have been trying for at least two decades to get computers to act like human beings. In the early programs for question answering, computers could answer questions like (1) and (2) but none of the others. That is because a computer will only give back to you what you put into it. In our little story only questions (1) and (2) have explicitly stated answers. The rest require inferences. Human beings have little trouble making such inferences. AI researchers literally had to feed the computer all that extra information that humans carry around in their heads. So for a short paragraph like our example, they had to feed in about five to six times that much information so that the computer could answer questions like the ones you answered.
It became obvious that a more efficient procedure had to be devised. Several computer scientists came up with standardized, stereotyped frameworks called frames or scripts. (I will use the term script.) A script was used to represent all the mundane, take-for-granted knowledge that an information processor (be it a computer or a human) brings to a real-life situation (like going to a ball game) or to a comprehension situation (reading or listening about going to a ball game). Schank and his colleagues, for example, developed a restaurant script, a bus ride script, a subway script, and so on. Then whenever the computer encountered a story dealing with a particular instance of going to a restaurant or riding a bus, it called up the appropriate script. This procedure made it possible for such more efficient computer programs, especially those that try to answer questions.

But more important for our purposes as educators, computer scientists have provided us with a useful metaphor for conceptualizing the way in which living information processors (students) answer questions about what they read (and what they already know about what they read).

For a second, consider the wealth of knowledge that you brought to bear on this paragraph about the basketball game. What did you already know about going to games? What was your athletic event script? Most script knowledge is very mundane, almost taken for granted. In fact, if a writer or a speaker, in relating an instance of going to a restaurant, included all those mundane details, you would probably become bored, impatient, irritated, or concerned about his intelligence. You already knew that! What gets into a text or a speech is special or unusual.

Using the script metaphor, we believe that comprehension involves (1) processing the text information, (2) matching it against the prototypic script for such events, and (3) integrating textual and scriptal (our coined word) information, thus producing a complete knowledge structure for the event described in the text.

Suppose that Henry, a sheltered teen-ager from a well-to-do family in suburbia, has only been in elegant French restaurants and chic bistros. His restaurant script contains all the elements and events most of us associate with "good" restaurants. Then, at age fourteen, his parents allow him to go to McDonald's with some friends. His restaurant script is upset! You pay for the food before you get it! No maitre d'? Standing in line! Food served in paper containers!

When Henry encounters this deviant information, he has three choices: (1) He can ignore the information about McDonald's altogether, perhaps claiming that McDonald's isn't a restaurant at all; in this case his restaurant script remains intact. (2) He can modify his restaurant script to accommodate the new information; in this case, he must change some of his restaurant script rules; for example, you can pay for the food either before or after you get it. Or, (3) He can create a new script for fast-food restaurants, which he keeps separate from his "good" restaurant script.

But only the second and third choices are of any real use to Henry. Assuming that he will encounter other "McDonald's" in his life (an inevitability) only the modification of his old script or the creation of a new one will allow him to deal with that new information.

Comprehension, then, is best understood by invoking the new to known principle. We understand what is new in the context of what is known to us. We sometimes assimilate new information into existing scripts; we sometimes accommodate the new information by revising a script; we sometimes ignore it, as when we preserve stereotypes.

With this base, let's return to look briefly at the five differences between reading and listening referred to earlier.

1. Prosodic information exists within speech but not writing. (Bill Martin refers to this as the "melody of the language"; Marvin Klein, as the suprasegmental features of intonation, pitch, juncture stress and rhythm.) Consider these sentences spoken with the capitalized word stressed.

Lisa slammed the door.  
Lisa SLammed the door.  
Lisa slammed the DOOR.

Prosody, in this case stress, provides help in separating new or focal information from old or given information. New (focal) information refers to what the speaker thinks the listener doesn't know. These questions exemplify that focal information:

Who slammed the door? (Since Julie and Kirk left with Lisa)  
What did Lisa do to the door? (She often opens and closes it and sometimes kicks it.)  
What did Lisa slam? (The phone? the refrigerator? her books?)

Consider the different meanings of these two sentences:

Tom kicked Ken and then KATHY kicked him.  
Tom kicked Ken and then Kathy kicked him.

Since readers don't have the benefit of prosodic features which listeners have, they must compensate by relying on:

(a) our limited set of punctuation marks (which do indicate elocutionary force, pauses, lists and related statements)  
(b) syntactic cues,  
(c) information from previous parts of the passage, and  
(d) information from their own scriptal knowledge,

to determine the focal words of sentences and passages. The lack of prosodic information causes readers to use more complex processes than listeners. Clark and Clark (1977) point out that intonation cues as designators of constituent boundaries, are much easier to process than written word types such as determiners, quantifiers and definite pronouns which also indicate constituent beginnings. While most teachers help children analyze context and do some scriptal searching (Previewing, DRTA's, Mathemogenic activities) few teachers or published programs teach children to read, (not write) punctuation or to look for meaning cues in (not write or diagram) syntactic structures.

2. Situations differ when speech rather than writing is used. Speech situations, unlike the writing situations, provide interaction, shared contexts and such paralinguistic information as facial expressions, gestures, pointing, nodding, body language.

Rubin (1978) has identified four aspects of language situation which afford the listener a greater advantage to comprehend:

Interaction, in which the language experiences are made highly individualized, participatory and clarifying;

Involvement, through greater utilization of first person pronouns and through a speaker's monitoring the listener's reactions.
Spatial commonality, which enables extra-linguistic cues like gestures, facial expressions, bodily positions and pointing to enhance comprehension and enables the participants to use the same spatial deictic terms (here, there, come) with common referents, and,

Temporal commonality, which provide a more clear understanding of such deictic terms as today, now, 'last May', verb tense markers, and the like.

If you recall the message in the bottle mentioned earlier, "Meet me here at noon tomorrow with a stick about his big," you see the advantage to the listener which spatial and temporal commonality provides. Our language abounds with deictic terms, words whose interpretation depends upon the context to facilitate comprehension while listeners are often provided much.

I wonder how much instructional time in reading is given to processing deictic terms and anaphoric relationships such as those exemplified by sentences like:

(a) I rode my bike to work and left it there.
(b) The students scheduled a meeting but only a few attended. Several had gone to the beach. Others were at a dance. Only the most serious attended.
(c) They came last Sunday, but I want Wayne and Dick to leave tomorrow.

If young children, often found to be egocentric, find it hard to use the perspectives or frameworks set by the text, comprehension is, as a result, impaired. Again, the advantage is to the listener.

3. Written and spoken communication differ in function.

Olson (1977) argues that oral language is the language of common sense; it is informal, social and more motivational than written language, whose primary purpose is the formal communication of information. As such, written language is more scientific, abstract, general and logical. Thus, reading tasks children face may often assume knowledge which would not be needed in order to comprehend the spoken language they usually encounter. In other words, an individual's network of scripts closely mirrors that individual's world of oral language, so that successful reading demands the acquisition of many new scripts and the modification and extension of existing scripts. Teaching interaction strategies of previewing, slicing, concept stretching, semantic mapping and feature analysis, and providing lots of feedback seem worthwhile components of reading instruction.

4. Language used in writing differs from language used in speaking.

 Speakers are often redundant, either verbatim or in paraphrase, and use familiar words and imprecise syntax. Written language employs more formal, complex syntax, and more infrequent or unfamiliar words, as shown by the research by Driemann (1962), DeVito (1965), and Walker (1975). Thus, it is likely that the beginning and developing reader will need to process more complex vocabulary syntax, and discourse structures than processed previously in listening. Much greater detail and precision is usually found in writing as you can verify this by listening to tape recordings of informal or impromptu speech. Comprehension tasks that focus upon vocabulary expansion, paraphrasing, comparing, and processing figurative language, ambiguous statements, causal relations, time relations and anaphoric relations seem justified.

5. Written language is permanent; spoken, temporary.

The permanence of written language affords advantages to readers that listeners don't have. Readers can set their own pace and read quickly or slowly or flexibly. They can scan ahead to see what is coming and give some thought to it. They can re-read, reflect, summarize and savor. Listeners, on the other hand, must follow the materials at the direction of the speaker, except when interaction can take place. Both readers and listeners can determine the level of detail they wish to obtain.

Reading educators have long advocated pre-reading activities like skimming, scanning, noting headings, bold face type, underlining, and the procedures of SQ3R, DRTA, and the notion of varying one's rate according to one's purpose. Instruction in activities such as these will help develop the reader's ability to sample the text efficiently. Sampling the text efficiently is a most important reading skill and one which differs from any comprehension advantage available to the listener.

In summary, it seems that comprehending written language is more difficult than comprehending spoken. Readers must comprehend what is written; they cannot interact with the writer to seek clarification. Speakers can tailor their messages for a particular listener or audience while writers do so less specifically. Reading often requires adapting to a perspective other than one's own and a reader must interpret information within the overall context of the text and with continuing assimilation and modification of one's scriptural knowledge. The benefits of prosodic features and spatial and temporal commonality accrue to the listener rather than the reader. Nonetheless, the permanence of writing provides some options which can compensate for some of the ways in which its processing is more difficult. Proper use of the text sampling options of previewing, rereading, establishing and varying pace, as well as monitoring and evaluating what is being read, hold the potential of enhancing reading comprehension.

Earlier I took issue with one of the observations of Huyy in his celebrated, 1908, The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading. I would like to close with what I believe is his most profound observation found in the same sources:

And so to completely analyze what we do when we read would almost be the acme of a psychologist's achievement, for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind, as well as to unravel the tangled story of the most remarkable specific performance that civilization has learned in all its history.

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LYNNE M. KULAWA, OSHKOSH WEST HIGH SCHOOL

A winner of other English awards, Lynne’s extra curricular activities reflect her interest in writing and books: copy editor for the yearbook and a circulation page, Oshkosh Public Library. President of the American Field Service, she also participates in the Honor Society. Her future career plans: journalism, English, or library science.

MARIA E. LEDGES, CUZHAY HIGH SCHOOL

Active on her school’s newspaper staff for several years, Maria is serving as editor-in-chief this year. She has also participated in American Field Service and Ushers Club. She plans a career in journalism.

KAREN McDaniel, OSHKOSH NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

Karen, an alternate to Badger Girls’ State, works on the yearbook and school paper, and is on the Oshkosh North Enrichment Committee. Her extracurricular activities include candy stripping and membership in a church guitar group. Karen plans to be a physician.

HERZING  BURCH  JOHNSON  KULAWA  LEDGES

McDaniel  Raleigh  Shah  Short  Yatzek

EDITH M. RALEIGH, PRENTICE HIGH SCHOOL

Edith, a National Merit Scholarship Commended Student, was recognized in Who’s Who Among American High School Students. Edith is active in the library and science clubs, newspaper and band; additionally she tutors and is a church organist. She plans to enter a writing connected field.

PRAVIN KUMAR SHAH JR., GREEN BAY WEST HIGH SCHOOL

Kumar has won several first place awards in journalism contests; he also has won awards for music, weight lifting and vandalism prevention. Kumar is editor of the school’s newspaper and also participates in swing choir, jazz band, drums, Running Club. He plans to enter a career in broadcast journalism.

TIMOTHY W. SHORT, PLATTEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

Timothy, a participant in AFS American Abroad to Argentina, has won many awards in debate and forensics and is a World Peace Study Scholarship Winner. A PSAT Commended Student, he is recognized in Who’s Who Among American High School Students. President of the Student Senate, he also has participated in madrigal singers, newspaper and yearbook staffs and chess, Spanish and bicycling clubs. He is considering work in international relations or physics teaching or research.

ELENA M. YATZEK, APPLETON EAST HIGH SCHOOL

Elena won the National Forensics League Degree of Special Distinction and the Rotary Outstanding Student Award. She has also won awards for feature writing. Editor of the school newspaper, Elena also participates in debate and a media group and is a member of the National Honor Society. Elena plans a career as an economist.
COLLEGIATE RESEARCH SKILLS: A PROFICIENCY-BASED PROGRAM

CAROL LEE SAFFIOTTI
CARLA STOFFLE
University of Wisconsin — Parkside, Kenosha

Sharing the general problems and pressures facing English faculties across the country, the English faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside in consort with the instructional support staff of the library has adopted into the curriculum a one credit research skills module. The ramifications of such a proficiency requirement for all students are far-reaching, particularly in terms of the need to introduce research skills early into the high school curriculum as well. Along with college-level proficiency in mathematics, reading comprehension, and general writing skills, the students are also expected to demonstrate proficiency in college-level research preparation and writing. The program at UW-Parkside, an open-admission school with a commuter student population, while not unique in the country is noteworthy for the following reasons: 1) clear definition of objectives; 2) provisional support through instructional activity outside the traditional classroom; 3) the inclusion of research skills as a requirement for promotion to the junior year.

Though similar in content and purposes to a mini-course at CCNY, Parkside's model differs in three ways:

1) As an 8 or 16 week module it gives the students time to develop skills, to write, and to have much needed time for consultation.

2) The module is aimed at developing competency in research skills, one of three requirements of freshmen in order that they continue their college careers.

3) The course is closely linked to work with librarians both in the classroom and in the library itself, with a workbook developed by faculty and staff as well as class exercises, and lectures from the faculty member.

Parallel to the general workbook for library skills, the authors are preparing a writing workbook specifically to guide students both in the strategy and the writing of research papers.

Basic Research Module

The following are two broadly defined research goals expected of students:

1) The ability to use appropriate resources and services of a library to identify, select, and locate materials, both print and non-print, on a variety of subjects.

2) The ability to write a simple research paper at the level of quality and sophistication appropriate to entering college students.

Specifically, in the research paper module, competency consists of attaining the following skills:

1) The ability to select and abstract information from library books, periodicals, and general reference works.

2) The ability to plan a research paper on a specific topic.

3) Resourceful use of library research sources to find appropriate written material.

4) The ability to effectively select and evaluate material to prove or demonstrate the thesis of the paper.

5) The ability to write up the findings of library research in a paper that (a) indicates logical and consistent order; (b) distinguishes the writer's ideas from ideas taken from library sources.

6) The ability to use quotations and other references so that they fit smoothly into the context.

7) The ability to use standard documentation in footnotes and bibliography.

The module is introduced to the students by the librarian and the instructor, both of whom require students to have conferences on a regular basis outside the class. The final evaluation of the work is based on completion of all assignments made by the librarian and the faculty member. At each step in the process, from formulation of topic to final draft, the students are directed by the instructor to seek advice from librarians; a librarian is also given time in class as well to answer questions, present information and ferret out problems with the faculty member.

The first assignment in the research module is designed to familiarize the students with library resources. At UW-Parkside, this is accomplished through a twelve chapter, self-paced Basic Library Skills Workbook. The purpose of the workbook is to familiarize the students with the university library and general library tools such as encyclopedias, periodical indexes, newspaper indexes, and biographical sources. A librarian assigned to work with the instructor administers this section of the course and students have two weeks in which to complete all assignments correctly. When corrections are necessary, the librarian acts as a tutor, explaining the mistake to the student and staying with the student until the correction is made. At the beginning of the third week, students turn in a preliminary research topic. The instructor and the librarian then discuss each topic in light of the course requirements and available library resources. When the topics are approved, each student completes chapter 12 of the workbook which serves as a research guide helping students further refine their topics and develop a preliminary bibliography. A librarian examines each student's research so that students who have trouble locating sources can be led to alternative indexes or reference tools. The students have individual conferences with the librarian to be sure they understand where they are and what they still need to do.

Once the preliminary research is completed, students hand in to the English instructor a thesis statement, an outline for the paper and a bibliography. The requirements for the bibliography are discussed jointly by the instructor and librarian during an entire class period. Variety in types of sources and quality of sources are heavily emphasized as well as correct format (see Appendix A for description of the writing guide and sample exercise). Whenever seeking help from librarians the students must bring their work in order to make effective use of staff time in advising. At this stage, students complete the information gathering process and write a draft of the first five pages of their research paper. The instructor checks this draft primarily for footnote format and for the appropriate use of footnotes,
Although misspellings and other problems are generally noted to help
the student. Students who are having difficulties are referred to the librarian,
if necessary.

Course Outline—8 Week Module

Week I and II

Completion of exercises to familiarize the students with library resources and how
to use them.

Week III

a. Preliminary topics due to English instructor for approval.
b. Review, approval, suggestions for revision made in consultation with the librar-
ian; topics to be returned to students.
c. Preliminary topics used as basis for completion of Basic Library Skills Workbook
chapter 12 (see Appendix A); librarian and staff to advise students with pre-
liminary source checks.
d. Student consultation with instructor and librarian based on work completed in
(c) should result in final term paper topic and thesis statement to be handed
in to instructor for approval.
e. Return of final versions of topic and thesis statement to students.
f. In-class presentation and exercises on the selection and use of sources (see
Appendix B).

Week IV

a. Development of outline for the paper.
b. Final outline due.

Week V

a. Student conferences with instructor. Referrals to librarian if necessary. The
students should be aware before the week begins that their grade is equally de-
pendent on performance in the library as well as classroom setting.
b. Students must present paper outline and proposed bibliography to the instructor
for approval.

Week VI

a. Rough draft of first chapter or section (approximately 5 pages) due to librarian.
b. Student-instructor conferences.

Week VII

a. Lecture notes: how to conclude a paper.
b. Other exercises: how to use direct and indirect quotation.

Week VIII

a. Continued work on papers, in and out of class, with several joint teaching
sessions, and problem solving sessions where students are able to ask questions
in front of peers, in order to point out common and similar problems.
b. Papers due

Personal styles and the need for each group may vary, but at critical
points such as bibliographic, footnote processes and research methodology,
exercises should be given which will alert students to their progress and
standing in terms of mastering skills. The final grade is determined by the
instructor, after the librarian indicates whether or not the student's work
is complete and satisfactory. Incomplete or unsatisfactory research is not
accepted by the faculty member as fulfillment of the competency requirement
in research skills, just as unsatisfactory writing would not be.

Although at most colleges and universities the freshman composition
course includes some instruction on writing research papers and several such
courses include library instruction which is research related, the research
module offers a more flexible schedule:

1) As self-contained course taught for 1 or 2 credits.
2) As a unit taught within the context of the traditional freshman
composition course.

Some of the advantages of the first format include the removal of the
teaching of basic research techniques from the already overcrowded English
composition syllabus; and the provision that students will earn the credit
they deserve for the extended work required to master the skills needed to
do basic research at the college level.

The latter format is possible for those curricula which cannot allow
for externally scheduled modular teaching, while it still provides extended
and monitored coverage of the material. In either case, the English faculty
member is assured that the expertise and cooperation of a professional
librarian is available to students and faculty alike. Thus, the faculty
member is relieved of the need to suddenly become an expert on references in
everything from fluid dynamics to solar energy, and freed to attend very
closely the structural, organizational, and stylistic problems that students
will have with their papers. The proposed module is a way of meeting the
challenge of the information explosion we all face in most areas of learning.

Other distinct advantages to teaching research skills in the above
fashion are the clarity with which goals and expectations are set out for the
student, the direct path to completion of a project, and acquisition of
library research skills that the module provides. The students are impressed
from the outset that the academic department takes seriously the commitment
to train students in good research habits, and that commitment is supported
by the joint efforts and presentations in both library and classroom instruc-
tion.

For those departments which are overburdened within the confines of
present course structure, the separate module provides a way to place in the
classroom those faculty members who are most interested in the task. Although
the Research Skills Module does not reduce the number of term papers sub-
mitted each year, it does reduce the chances that first year students go on
to further college work ill prepared for research writing. We should be
providing ways to utilize teaching resources efficiently, and we should
acknowledge the library as a natural setting for teaching.

APPENDIX A—The Writing Guide

The Guide to Basic College Research Writing at UW-Parkside has been
designed as an aid in the teaching of report writing. The materials in the
guide, divided into twelve units, cover the mechanics and methodology of
writing strategy from narrowing a topic and formulation of argument to end
notes and reference citations. It is intended to be used in conjunction
with Parkside's Basic Library Skills Workbook, a general guide to library
use. The standard reference for student use with the materials is the M.L.A.
Handbook For Writers of Research Papers; however, examples, discussion and
exercises are all provided in the guide itself. Examples are drawn from
actual library holdings, and students choose their own answers for the
questions based on research in progress.
Some of the sequential writing tasks include use of outline, paraphrase, summary and precis writing as well. A statement of objectives is complemented by a series of five checklists for student proofreading and for grading. The students incorporate units of written work into the final version of their papers. Two areas stressed are critical evaluation of sources and structure of formal written argument.

The guide expresses the goals of the Collegiate Skills Program at Parkside clearly to the students. All of the materials were designed to allow flexibility: as handouts and class assignments; as packets for students working independently; as masters for transparencies, etc. Thus, instructors have the option of using the whole guide as a text, or parts of it. The librarians work closely with both faculty and students, not only answering reference questions but also offering presentations and reviewing the written work in consort with the instructor. The final draft of the guide was completed with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. A sample exercise follows.

FROM NOTE CARDS TO TEXT:

Become familiar with several alternatives for introduction and verification, to offer variety and indicate serious consideration of the evidence on the part of both writer and reader:

- Margaret Mead, who has done extensive work with sex roles, has considered...
- One researcher who has repeated the experiments of Laeitl in an advocates without success; claims...
- Harold Smith affirms...

QUESTIONS:

Which of the above examples require verification of source in the text before continuing further with a draft?

What information must you seek and consider before properly verifying your sources in text?

PRACTICE:

Once again, complete an example from your own sources which is both properly verified and introduced:

NOTES

2 Students may also work with the instructor of a literature course, but must satisfy the same requirements.
3 The authors' project has been funded through an NEH grant for library resource development. The workbook is currently under consideration for publication. Those interested in any of the workbooks should contact UW-Parkside, Library-Learning Center.
4 The course has been taught as both an 8 week 1 credit module or a 16 week 1 credit course. The outline can be adapted to provide several weeks when students do not meet in class at all under the longer schedule.
5 For example, the libraries at the University of Alabama, University of Texas, and University of Kentucky, in conjunction with the English faculties, have developed research handouts with library exercises designed to lead the student through the basic research steps to make the information gathering stages of the research paper assignment more productive and efficient. Graduate students provide the library tutoring and/or instruction. Other libraries at schools such as the University of Southern Colorado, the University of West Virginia, and the University of Michigan, are experimenting with a general workbook approach, similar to the one used in this module at UW-Parkside and first developed by Miriam Dudley at UCLA; however, these efforts do not extend beyond just teaching the use of reference sources.

A version of this report is available on microfiche from ERIC Clearing House.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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As a participant in the Wisconsin Writing Project, I have learned better ways of doing the kind of planning and individualization that effective 'basic skills' courses require to insure that every student has the opportunity to become a good writer and user of language. The Project has been an invaluable experience for me, not only because I have worked closely with twenty-six other teachers who willingly sought each other out to share experiences and strategies, but also because I now have the opportunity and support to help motivate even more teachers to try their hand at teaching basic composition as well.
A SOLUTION FOR THE LOW-SKILL STUDENT AVOIDANCE SYNDROME
IRENE M. DIAMOND
Malcolm Shabazz High School, Madison

An English teacher who prefers to work with low skill level students is rare. Or at least that has always seemed to be the case when the courses in our English department are planned and taught. No one ever offers to trade "Modern Women Writers" for "English Nuts & Bolts." It seems, too, that I am in no danger of losing my job as more and more students from the traditional high schools in our city are counseled into our "alternative" program and come to us with little or no mastery of the written language. And in the summer the district generously supplies me with fifty-eight students, most of whom flunked English at a traditional school during the regular year. I admit that my teaching preference is a result of being forced fed the kind of students who hate English and that I have continued to learn by trial and error how to help these students become successful writers.

My first audience of hostile sixteen-year-olds signed up for "English Nuts & Bolts" because they were hoping for an easy English credit. I discovered quickly that I need to know what I believed in, why I was in front of the classroom, and the purpose of every assignment I was going to ask students to do. My repertory of writing activities had to be varied and full of options for different students. Assigning a five paragraph theme and hoping it would be turned in by Monday did not work. The opportunity to spend time getting a philosophy together, planning new strategies, and talking to teachers willing to help struggle with the same problems became crucial when I was faced with this kind of teaching assignment and intended to turn it into a positive experience both for my students and for myself. I have never given up hope that I could find other teachers to help me explore ideas of help. Students improve their communication skills by discovering that they have something to write about and audiences who are anxious to read it, and I have finally found my vehicle for doing so—the Wisconsin Writing Project.

Composition teachers who are selected to participate in the Wisconsin Writing Project have the opportunity to air their frustrations and successes, philosophies and techniques in a supportive atmosphere, research new ideas, and then go out and share their understanding with even more teachers in inservice programs. Meeting over the summer to improve their skills, teachers in Wisconsin in K-12 groups, I have had the opportunity to read about and discuss the problems and challenges of teaching writing—from prescriptive to revision. Focusing on individualizing instruction, evaluation, and assignments that motivate students to write has renewed my enthusiasm for teaching and learning how to share my strategies with other teachers. Working together, Wisconsin Writing Project participants have written guides not only to teaching the writing process itself, but also for using models, dramatic, performance, popular culture and fieldwork to teach writing, and have conducted inservice programs to teach other teachers how to use the materials in their classrooms. I have hosted materials to use and share with my colleagues—a list of possible audiences for kids to write to, short stories that are good models for writing, language games for teaching syntax, sentence-combining activities, addresses of major advertisers, and ideas for creating writing labs—all applicable to any level and highly useful with low-skill students.

Books

FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS


Stunning vernicle and black scissors cuts by the author illustrate this retelling of an old tale. The unshaded, two-dimensional designs are placed on the page for maximum impact, enhanced by generous margins. The ample white space intensifies the impact of the illustrations, done in a simple, stylized manner. Even the binding is carefully planned to enhance the final effect: the cover is white and all edges are off by a vernicle Chinese design stamped in the middle of the cover.

The book is a welcome addition, for the comparison it offers with the earlier variant, Five Chinese Brothers by Claire Huchet Bishop (New York: Coward, 1938). Use the two, and help children discover the differences in number of brothers, who they live with, the problem which starts the action, and why abilities of both brothers. Call their attention to the use of the cover of the picture showing the brother who can stretch his legs: in the edition by Bishop with pictures by Kurt Wiese, the brother stretches to a full 15 inches high. In all other respects, however, Hou-tien creates pictures that can easily hold their own in comparison with those by Wiese.

John Warren Steig, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee


We all know that Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret is a favorite among upper-elementary-age girls. Librarians and teachers may that girls often ask them if there is another book like "Margaret." That question could now be answered with "Sure, read The Trouble With Thirteen."

Betty Miles has not merely imitated Blume. Twelve-year-old Annie Morrison is a spunkier character than Margaret. Unlike Margaret, Annie is not consumed with eagerness to mature. Instead, she is alternately reluctant to change, and pleased with the changes in her body. And her world is broader than Margaret's, her problems more taxing. Her best friend Rachel is moving to New York because her parents are getting a divorce. Miles treats the issue of divorce sensitively, showing, through Annie's relationship with Rachel and her parents, how divorce affects all family members. Annie must also face death, although this first confrontation is tempered somewhat, for it is her dog who dies. Again, Miles treats this issue with just the right touch. Annie is grief-stricken at the dog's death, but she slowly begins to accept her loss.

Despite the attention to Annie's acceptance of maturation, divorce, and death, the book does not seem issue-laden and "heavy." Miles' treatment of the issues is mixed with humor—Annie is quick with wisecracks, and there are light accounts of adolescence and play. Annie and Rachel have a wonderful time doing things that readers do or would like to do. They play with a dollhouse, but in a very "sophisticated" way. They buy make-up at Woolworth's and have their pictures taken in silly and sophisticated poses at the photo booth. They enjoy each other's friendship and even wonder if they have ESP because they share so many of the same thoughts and ideas.

Miles' book will age more quickly than Blume's because it refers to contemporary figures and events. But for at least five years the book will seem current. After that, copies probably will be worn out from use anyway.

Linda Western, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee


At sixteen, Leigh Thorpe longs to live in the real world of the American High School: Saturday night dates, football games, and real classes. When her mother remarries she makes the decision to leave her television acting life and live with her new family in a suburb of New York. Peter, her seventeen year old stepbrother, who is homebound with hemophilia, offers to help her make the transition from semi-star to the...
everyday life of high school. The bargain is that he will monitor her program for acceptance and experience high school vicariously through her. Leigh eventually wins acceptance and so does the ingénue image of high school, gained from her TV series. "The Campbell Kids," has nothing to do with reality. While other students in high school are planning what to do with their future, Leigh cannot reach a decision but rather chooses to live day to day. When her father asks her to play the lead with him in "The Diary of Anne Frank" in a summer road show, she is forced to weigh the pros and cons of acting against her current life. Her decision to accept the reality of who she is spurs Peter to do the same.

The book jacket is likely to entice the reader into the story. However, once there, the reader only finds a pleasant story that develops to the level of an episode in "The Partridge Family" or "The Brady Bunch," but will not have gained much insight into the feelings and motivations of the characters. For example, the exploration of Leigh's feelings and the counter-feelings of the high school students as she attends school those first few weeks could have been much more sharply drawn to emphasize the misconceptions of both points of view. The intensity of events is never felt. Events occur in the story that are sort of uncomfortable but they all work out fine without much difficulty. It is a story that had potential to penetrate the conflicts between fantasy and reality for teenagers but it only moves on the surface.

Mary Jett-Simpson, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee


Rosemary is a first-year university student who is unsure of herself. She does not think she is attractive or bright. She envies Cary, who is beautiful and seems self-possessed. Bran is a first-year medical student who fancies Rosemary. He is mature and very bright, but in a robust, irrepressible way. His plain good sense and stability distinguish him from Philip, who is weak and moody.

The reader meets these four as they drive together through a bleak, sodden stretch of English countryside. They are bound for Winter's End, Philip's vacant country house. They hope to spend a pleasant holiday together there, studying and relaxing. It is also clear that they hope the outing will clarify their romantic interests. Perhaps Rosemary will find she feels ready for a serious romance with Bran. Perhaps Cary will clinch her hold on Philip.

From the outset the old house seems a bit daunting, but the holiday visitors focus on its elegance. The village grocer has sent up plenty of good food. And the visitors feel a kind of excitement—who will sleep where?—as they sort about being grown-ups together. But at the same time something seems deeply wrong. The house is cold and can't be properly heated. A guest arrives with his younger sister, and she seems uninvited. The village snoops about, putting everybody ill-at-ease. Philip becomes increasingly withdrawn, then quarrelsome, and Cary reacts insensitively. Rosemary awakes mornings feeling unrested. She and Bran do study and talk together and do begin to feel close, but unlikely events—a scream in the night, the sudden onset of a deep chill—spoil happy moments that seem likely to turn intimate. Only when they go away from the house—to walk or to buy groceries—are Bran and Rosemary able to shake the mood of stress that has settled over everybody at Winter's End. Soon Philip goes demonstrably mad, and Bran and Rosemary move quickly to get him and themselves out. They leave to begin a romance which their flawed holiday helped them discover. For Philip it is less clear that the end will also be a beginning.

Authors of psychological drama want us to pay close attention to a few characters for a long time. To make their sustained explorations plausible they require our assent to certain conventions. One is the convention of enclosure. Characters are shown caught up in a situation from which they cannot easily remove themselves, and the situation helps account for the tension and disclosures that follow. Winter's End is a good example. It blends techniques of psychological realism with conventions from haunted house stories in a subdued, dignified manner. I recommend it for senior high readers who are beyond The Amityville Horror.

Richard Western, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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