



Editorial

The need for a specialist journal of child language studies has been persistently voiced over recent years. Initial proposals were made at the Brno Conference on Paedolinguistics in 1970 and the 1971 Linguistics Institute at Buffalo, but nothing developed until the 2nd International Conference on Language Acquisition at Florence in September 1972, when a formal resolution to establish a journal was accepted by conference participants and acted upon, with the present result.

The demand presumably reflects the remarkable increase in the number of scholars engaged in child research during the past decade. Many disciplinary backgrounds have been involved – linguistics and psychology in particular, but also neurology, paediatrics, sociology, anthropology, education. An informal check on the amount of space devoted to child language studies in the main abstracting journals shows that the number of publications in this area has increased by a factor of ten. But so far there has been no focus for the publication and discussion of this research: papers are scattered over a wide range of interdisciplinary journals, or buried in conference proceedings on other fields. Journals of psycholinguistics or verbal behaviour tend to be adult-orientated, and journals of child development have a great deal else to occupy their attention than language. Indeed, without the ad hoc publication of some half a dozen collections of papers, which form the bulk of student's bibliographies in this field, it is doubtful whether there would be any structured scholarly identity for the subject of all.

This journal therefore appears to fill an evident gap in the academic coverage of child behaviour. It is the first journal to be wholly devoted to the theoretical, methodological and empirical study of language development in children, and to provide a forum for reporting on and discussing current trends and events within the subject. It has its primary motivation in the need to study child language in the light of the attitudes and findings of general linguistics and phonetics, but at the same time it recognizes the necessity to interrelate approaches in linguistics with those developing in other disciplines. While the bias in this Journal is avowedly towards linguistics, therefore, it is by no means exclusively devoted to the publication of research from proponents of that subject, as the content of this number makes clear. The Editorial Board is accordingly in no sense nominal: it is representative of a range of other specializations, and it is through the use of this Board that we hope to be able to develop a conception of child language studies that is appropriately broad, integrated and academically responsible.

A statement of the journal's scope is included on the inside front cover. It should be clear from this that we are anxious not to rule out in principle areas of child language study that some might consider marginal. We see in such areas as speech pathology considerable potential for providing general insights into the

EDITORIAL

nature of child language, and as long as contributions from these areas clearly relate to the central theoretical or descriptive issues of child language study, we accept that they fall within our purview. However, within this whole field, we hope we will be able to promote interests in those areas of the subject which have until now been underestimated or neglected. There are three emphases in particular which we would like to see develop.

Firstly, we hope that the journal will contain a regular proportion of papers on languages other than English. The regular complaint of those engaged in the hunt for linguistic universals of development is the lack of descriptive information about other (particularly non-European) languages. We feel that there has been plenty of general speculation about the form that universals might take, but few testable or tested hypotheses. Accordingly, we hope to be able to publish not only articles of a conventional size about these languages, but also 'notes and observations', which might contain a short account of some data, linked to a brief discussion of points of theoretical interest.

Secondly, we intend that a diversity of theoretical approaches to child language will be represented in these pages, and hope that by an explicitly eclectic orientation, alternative conceptions of language development will come to be explored. We note an increasing concern within the subject that accounts of available theoretical alternatives have tended to polarize, in particular with reference to the positions adopted in any defence of or attack on generative theory; and we look forward to presentations which will propose fresh theoretical strategies and models, as well as papers which continue to evaluate the strengths of those already in use.

Thirdly, we hope that close attention will be paid to methodological issues, which have tended to be neglected in recent work in linguistics, but which it is increasingly realized cannot be given too much attention in child language studies, where the role of adult intuition is so debatable. Analytic criteria need to be fully explicit, if one is to evaluate claims about when a rule can be said to be 'acquired', for example, or to ensure that comparative and typological work is carried out consistently. We feel that questions of experimental design, evaluation, terminology and notation have been insufficiently aired in relation to the idiosyncrasies of child language data, and we look forward to contributions concerning these matters.

January 1974

DAVID CRYSTAL