Editor's overview

CORRECTION

I am indebted to Professor Elaine Chaika for pointing out that the page numbers for her 1974 article that was referenced by Herbert and Waltensperger (*AP*, 1980, *1*, 81–93) were incorrect. The correct page numbers are 257–76.

THE DOCUMENT DESIGN PROJECT

In my *Overview* for the previous issue, I made mention, briefly, of the Document Design Project of the American Institutes for Research. Subsequently, I invited the project director, Dr. Janice C. Redish, to prepare a description of this program for inclusion in a forthcoming *Editor's overview*. The following is a slightly edited version of the information she sent me.

In September 1978, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) began the Document Design Project to foster clear and simple writing and design of public documents. The purpose of the Document Design Project is to help make forms, regulations, brochures, and other written materials easier for people to read, to understand, and to use. Carnegie-Mellon University and Siegel & Gale, Inc., a private firm that specializes in language simplification and forms design, are working with AIR on this project. Funding for the project comes from the Teaching & Learning/Reading & Language group at the National Institute of Education.

The project's goal is to increase the knowledge and skills of people who produce public documents. To accomplish this goal, staff of the Document Design Project are:

- conducting theoretical and applied research on language comprehension, on the ways in which skilled and unskilled writers work, and on problems associated with different features of documents;
- working directly with government and private agencies, helping them to produce materials for public use; and
- developing courses in writing and design for graduate students and undergraduates.

The Document Design Project is conducting research studies in Washington, D.C., and at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh. At Carnegie-Mellon, researchers are developing an understanding of the writing process and are exploring the use of computers in document design. In Washington, AIR and Siegel & Gale staff are analyzing documents to determine the nature and extent of specific problems, working in the local Hispanic community to find out more about how non-English speakers cope with

documents, conducting experimental studies on comprehension of complex conditionals found on many forms, and creating and testing simplified materials.

The Document Design Project works with government agencies to simplify regulations, forms, and brochures and to evaluate revised documents. The Document Design Project also developed a three-day workshop on "Simplifying Documents," and this year the project is creating a workshop for high-level managers in charge of document simplification in their agencies.

As part of the Document Design Project, AIR surveyed innovative approaches to training undergraduates in how to write. Another survey will look at the training needs of writers in government and industry. Project staff at AIR and Siegel & Gale are developing a curriculum for an undergraduate course in clear writing, and Carnegie-Mellon University has established a new interdisciplinary graduate program in document design research, which admitted students in the fall of 1980.

The staff of the Document Design Project is a team of scholars and practitioners from several fields. The group includes psychologists, linguists, communication specialists, graphic designers, writers, editors, lawyers, and experts in instructional technology. The project officer is Dr. Ramsay W. Selden at the National Institute of Education.

For further information, write or call Dr. Janice C. (Ginny) Redish, Project Director, The Document Design Project, American Institutes for Research, 1055 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007, (202) 342-5071.

GUEST REFEREES

It would not have been possible to produce Volume 1 of *AP* without the kind assistance of many individuals who agreed to serve as guest referees for particular manuscripts. I would like to gratefully acknowledge their service to the journal at this time; their names are listed below:

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Harry S. Upshaw

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M. C. Wittrock
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BOOK REVIEWS

It has been decided that a comprehensive journal like *AP* can enhance its contribution to the field by publishing reviews of book–length literature. Thus, *AP* will begin to include reviews of published books in all of the subareas of applied psycholinguistics in the pages of Volume 2 (1981). The editorial office of *AP will* consider unsolicited book reviews, but we expect that, in the main, *AP* will publish reviews that have been prepared by invitation.

THE CONTENTS OF THE PRESENT ISSUE

We are pleased to publish another in our series of invited articles in the present issue of *AP,* the review by Quigley and King of the extensive program of research by Quigley and his associates concerning (1) syntactic competence and its development in deaf children and youths and (2) the assessment of syntactic competence in the deaf. Quigley and his associates studied syntactic performance in this population through the medium of writing (and, to some extent, reading as well) and noted, first of all, that when compared with hearing subjects, the deaf subjects shared both similarities and differences as regards the various syntactic structures under investigation. Second, the deaf subjects' facility with the various syntactic structures investigated fell far short of an estimate of their occurrence in "commonly used reading materials." This led Quigley and King "to conclude that most deaf students cannot read the books from which they are supposed to be learning." Third, over the age range investigated (CA 10–18), progress in mastery among the deaf subjects was limited by and large to simple syntactic structures; they were clearly at a disadvantage regarding most sentence-combining operations. Thus, when compared with hearing controls, a significant developmental lag was evident in the performance of the deaf subjects. Fourth, on the basis of an examination of the literature on language development in young hearing children, Quigley and King suggest that "it is perhaps reasonable to assume that developmental stages in the acquisition of particular syntactic structures are similar for deaf and hearing children but that the rate of development is greatly retarded in the case of deaf children."

Fifth, in spite of the similarities they found, Quigley and King did note in the deaf subjects, in observing both comprehension and production, "certain distinctive syntactic structures [i.e., departures from standard English syntax – *ed.*] that rarely or never appeared in the language of the hearing subjects" that persisted over the years. An intensive literature search (see Table 4), however, which included studies of first- and second-language learning,

language delay, and other studies, revealed that "just about every distinctive structure found with the deaf subjects occurred also in other populations." Thus, the difficulties deaf individuals have with standard English syntax, which are considerable, are mainly a matter of degree rather than of kind.

Finally, the findings I have just outlined, plus observations of the strategies deaf children appeared to employ in processing English sentences and the results from the work on the *Test of Syntactic Abilities* that Quigley and King summarize in the second part of their review article, led them to conclude that the process of language acquisition in deaf and hearing individuals is similar.

Thus even when slowed down by the presence of the type of deprivation that deaf children suffer, the language faculty retains an integrity that appears to constrain it to operate in rather limited ways.

Two of the remaining articles in the present issue of *AP* (Donahue, Pearl, & Bryan; Abbeduto & Rosenberg) were concerned with language disorders but the topic in both was conversational rather than syntactic competence. After examining referential communication performance in a laboratory setting, Donahue, Pearl, and Bryan concluded that their observations "confirmed the hypothesis that compared to normally achieving children, learning disabled children are less likely to request clarification of inadequate messages. However, this pragmatic deficit appeared to be related to deficits in linguistic processing only for the youngest learning disabled girls. Therefore, it appears that some learning disabled children differ from normal peers in their understanding of conversational rules for repairing communicative breakdowns. . . . These results suggest that, for some children, the development of pragmatic competence reflects their social knowledge at least as much as their knowledge of linguistic structure."

Abbeduto and Rosenberg assessed conversational competence in triads of mildly retarded adults in naturally occurring conversation, concentrating on turn-taking capabilities and the types and adequacy of communicative exchanges, and noted that in spite of individual differences, "most aspects of the conversational competence of mildly retarded adults, including their ability to maintain a topic, are sufficiently developed to allow for a genuinely social, cooperative exchange of information." Communication failures were infrequent in their data, and there was evidence that their subjects engaged in needed conversational repairs both as listeners (e.g., in requests for clarification) and as speakers.

Abbeduto and Rosenberg conclude that their findings "are not only of practical interest, but of theoretical interest as well, inasmuch as it appears that [the mentally retarded] do not reach the same level of competence as do CA-matched nonretarded individuals (and in certain areas, MA-matched nonretarded individuals also) in the domains of syntax, semantics, and phonology. . . ."

The "state of the art" regarding language intervention in language disordered children is to a large extent captured in chapters in two recent books edited by Schiefelbusch (1978a, b) and in an earlier work edited by Schiefelbusch and Lloyd (1974). In these volumes we find programmatic proposals

and reviews of research on language training that reflect the influence of the Skinnerian behavior modifiers, contemporary psycholinguistics, and, to a lesser extent, work on miniature artificial languages. The work on miniature artificial languages, however, is likely to be more influential in the future than it has been in the past (see, for example, Wetherby, 1978).

McLaughlin, in his article in the present issue, explores the contribution miniature artificial languages might make to our understanding of second-language learning. He argues "that research on miniature artificial languages . . . rather than being viewed as a method for understanding the nature of first-language . . . acquisition generally, can be regarded as a means of furthering our knowledge of the process of second-language . . . learning." An important advantage of miniature artificial languages, as McLaughlin points out, is that they permit one to manipulate variables that cannot be manipulated in naturalistic second-language learning.

The results of research applying miniature artificial languages to questions concerning second-language learning will, I predict, be scrutinized closely by applied psycholinguists interested in language intervention in language disordered children, in spite of any misgivings they may have about the applicability of such research to normal first-language acquisition.

At the frontier of applied psycholinguistics one finds an interest in the question of the impact of reading, writing, and second-language learning in children on subsequent first-language and cognitive development and performance (see my remarks on page 5 of the *Editor's overview* for Volume 1, Number 1 of *AP*). The traditional view has been that all of the relationships run in the opposite direction; that is, from first-language and cognitive development to reading, writing, and second-language learning. There is increasingly, however, an awareness of possibilities for reading, writing, and second-language learning to influence first-language capabilities and cognition. A case in point is the relationship between orthography and phonemic structure that Ehri and Wilce found that led them to "conclude that readers' conceptualization of the phonemic structure of words is influenced by their knowledge of word spellings." Thus it is likely that a complex set of relationships exists, including phonemic influences on reading and, subsequently, orthographic influences on phonemic representations, the implications of which are, as Ehri and Wilce indicate, both theoretical and practical.

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