This collection of abstracts is part of a continuing series providing information on recent doctoral dissertations. The 14 titles deal with the following topics: children's ability to read their own dictated oral language; adjunct structure and reading comprehension; learning and comprehension of simultaneously presented stimuli in children of superior intelligence; literal comprehension as an aspect of total comprehension; the effects of advance and nonorganizers in the learning of verbal materials; the effect of silent and oral reading on comprehension and oral reading miscues; effects of learning instructions and age on information acquired from prose; adult age differences in sentence memory; the effects of restructuring grammatical patterns on comprehension; the effects of expectation modification on reading comprehension; the effects of spatial organization of text on content recall; relationships between semantic and stylistic aspects of language and comprehension of discourse written for children; influences upon learning rate in first grade children exposed to several stressors; and the effects of lexically ambiguous nouns embedded in a reading task for children.
Reading, Comprehension, and Memory Processes:

Abstracts of Doctoral Dissertations Published in Dissertation Abstracts International, July through September 1977 (Vol. 38 Nos. 1 through 3)

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A STUDY OF SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF ORIGINAL TAPED STORIES WITH SELECTED ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

BEIGLEY, Ruth Virginia, Ed.D.
Arizona State University, 1977

Educators have recognized the historical importance of oral language and its interrelationship with and significance to the reading process and the teaching of reading. Little research has been done, however, pertaining to this interrelationship. The purpose of this investigation was to study (1) the oral reading ability of first and fourth graders reading samples of their own dictated oral language (which had been transcribed from cassette tape) as compared with samples from basal readers that were currently being used and (2) the readability levels of the same first and fourth graders' dictated stories as compared with the readability levels of the basal readers currently being used.

Five hypotheses were formulated: (1) there would be no significant difference between the percentage of accuracy in a child's reading his own story and that of commercially published materials; (2) there would be no significant difference between the percentage of accuracy in a child's reading a peer story and his reading from a basal reader; (3) there would be no direct relationship between the readability level of children's transcribed materials and the readability level of commercially published materials for each grade level; (4) there would be no direct relationship between the readability levels of the Spaceh Readability Test and the Fry Formulas for the first grade level materials; and (5) there would be no direct relationship between the readability levels of the Spaceh Readability Test and the Fry Formulas for the fourth grade level materials.

Each pupil was recorded reading a portion of his or her story and a selection from the basal reader or cassette tape. Children from a control group were recorded reading the same portion from a peer's original story and a portion from a basal reader. Using the Spaceh Diagnostic Scale as a guide, the investigator listened to and graded each story as to percentage of accuracy. The Fisher's t test was applied to the scores to determine their significance.

Using the Fry and the Spaceh Readability Formulas in the first grade and the Fry and Dale-Chall Readability Formulas in the fourth grade, the investigator determined the readability level of the dictated stories and of the basal reader selections. The Pearson Product Moment Coefficient Correlation was then applied to the data. The following findings and conclusions were drawn from the hypotheses tested in this study. Because there was no significant difference in the first grade experimental group between the oral reading of the student's dictated story and the basal reader, null hypothesis one was not rejected on the first grade level. There was a significant difference in the fourth grade experimental group in favor of the oral reading of the student's dictated story and the basal reader, null hypothesis two was rejected on the first grade level. There was a significant difference in the fourth grade experimental group in favor of the oral reading of the student's dictated story and the basal reader, null hypothesis three was rejected on the fourth grade level. There was a significant but definite relationship between the readability level of the first grade student dictated stories and the selections from the basal readers using the Fry and Spaceh formulas. There was little relationship in the fourth grade between the readability level of the student dictated stories and the basal reader selections using the Fry and Dale-Chall formulas. There was a small but definite relationship in the fourth grade between the readability level of the student dictated stories and the basal reader selections using the Fry and Dale-Chall formulas. There was a moderate relationship between the Fry and the Spaceh Readability Formulas. There was virtually no relationship in the fourth grade between the Fry and Dale-Chall Readability Formulas.

As a result of these data, it was concluded that the use of children's dictated stories will produce a lower percentage of errors in oral reading in the fourth grade level. A number of other interesting aspects surfaced, such as progression in the growth of creatively-baRed ered interest of the part of the students, opportunities for the use of these stories in teaching reading and reinforcing reading skills, and contrast of reading themes.

ADJUNCT STRUCTURE AND READING COMPREHENSION

CATERINO, Linda Claire, Ph.D.
Arizona State University, 1977

One-hundred and thirty-two seventh-grade students participated in an experiment designed to explore the effects of exer- cise-magnetic activities on reading comprehension ability. Learners were directed to read a 990-word prose passage and to answer 80 multiple-choice questions based on the text. Subjects were blocked according to their reading comprehension scores on two standardized reading tests. Both high and low comprehenders were given one of three odd devices: a word list of key terms, a glossary of key terms, and an outline to use while reading the experimental text. The criterion test consisted of questions focusing on critical material covered by the odd device as well as the test and incidental information referred to only in the experimental passage. Half of the test questions employed a stem taken verbatim from the text and half were lexical paraphrases.

Essentially, the results indicated that high comprehenders remembered more items correctly than low comprehenders, and that high comprehenders were more stable in both right and wrong response accuracy. Verbatim items were answered correctly more often than paraphrase questions. As an odd device significantly interacted with comprehensiveness level and item type, indicating that the glossary device may have been more efficient in improving recall for critical material than either the word list or outline devices. Low comprehenders given the word list performed much better on incidental than on critical test items. The significant adjunct device by item-type by item-form interaction for posttest scores supported the previous finding emphasizing the role of the glossary device in high-lighting critical information. A reading times analysis was significant for comprehension level only, with low comprehenders requiring more time to read the experimental material.

These results suggest that the glossary device may be more facilitative for the correct recognition of critical information, and that high comprehenders may be more adept at employing this device. Low comprehenders seem to be more attentive to incidental information than high comprehenders, especially when supplied with only a list of key terms. Suggestions for future research include employing an extensive training program to aid subjects in making efficient use of experiment-supplied learning devices as well as investigating subject-generated learning methods.

Order No. 77-17,388, 101 pages.
LEARNING AND COMPREHENSION OF SIMULTANEOUSLY PRESENTED STIMULI IN CHILDREN OF NORMAL AND SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE

COLEMAN, Natalie Christine, Ph D
University of Oregon, 1977

Adviser: Richard J Rankin

The study was conducted in an attempt to discover whether individuals of superior intelligence are more capable of attending to and comprehending simultaneous visual stimuli than individuals of normal intelligence. More specifically, the relationships of sex, intelligence, and the ability to comprehend simultaneous visual stimuli were investigated. Sex was included as an independent variable in order to control for any possible sex differences.

The subjects were 54 fifth and sixth grade students. The subjects were divided into two ability groups: Those individuals designated as intellectually superior (n=32) had obtained an IQ score of 130 or higher on the Stanford-Binet, or its equivalent, and had been admitted into the educationally advanced program at their own school. Individuals designated as having normal intelligence (n=32) were established as such by virtue of their assignment test scores.

After selecting the ability groups, all students were randomly assigned to the comparison and control groups. All subjects in the control group received Condition One: Condition One consisted of a slide presentation of two stories of differing content. The subjects read the stories at their own pace. After presentation of each story, the subjects wrote down the two main points of the story and took a comprehension test designed to reflect general understanding of the story.

All subjects in the comparison group received Condition Two: Condition Two consisted of a slide presentation of the same stories used in Condition One: Condition Two: The stories were presented simultaneously. The subject was presented with a four to five word section from each of the stories on each slide. Total time of exposure and density of material was controlled across the experimental and control conditions. After presentation of the simultaneous stories, the subjects wrote down the two main points of each story and took a comprehension test containing items on both stories.

The subjects' scores on the comprehension test served as the measure of the dependent variable. The subjects' responses as to the main points of each story were also evaluated for general comprehension of the stimulus material.

The overall test of significance was a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance. Results of the data analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between intelligence and condition (F[1, 63] = 5.50, p < .05). There was a significant difference between the two ability groups on both conditions, with a greater difference between the groups favoring the superior subjects on the simultaneous presentation of the stimulus material. There was no significant difference between sex on either condition.

Analysis of the subjects' responses as to the main points of each story revealed a significant difference between the conditions. There was no significant difference in the mean number of correct main ideas between the superior subjects and the normal subjects who read the stories one at a time. However, among the subjects who read the stories simultaneously, the superior subjects were able to supply a significantly larger number of correct main ideas than the normal subjects.

Intelligently superior subjects performed more successfully than normal subjects under both successive and simultaneous presentation of the stories. The hypotheses received support in the direction expected. There appears to be an interaction between intelligence and the ability to attend to and comprehend simultaneous visual stimuli.
THE EFFECTS OF ADVANCE AND NONORGANIZERS WITH
RESTRICTED AND UNRESTRICTED MODES FOR EIGHTH-
GRADE STUDENTS AT THREE COGNITIVE LEVELS OF
LEARNING AND RETENTION USING SELECTED MATERIALS IN THE ARTS

EWING, Brian Patrick, Ed.D.
State University of New York at Albany, 1977

This study was an experimental investigation comparing the effects of advance and nonorganizers in the learning and retention of meaningful verbal materials in the Arts for separate knowledge, comprehension, and application scores, and for these scores combined. The effects of restricted and unrestricted modes were also examined. The theoretical base for the study is David P. Ausubel's theory of advance organizers, and their application to meaningful verbal learning and retention. Ausubel hypothesizes that such organizers facilitate learning and retention of meaningful verbal materials because they permit students to subsume new materials into their pre-existing cognitive structures rather than to rely on rote memory of materials in an unrelabeled fashion.

The sample was eighty-eight-grade students selected at random from the population of a small-town middle school. Subjects were placed randomly into four treatment groups: one group was given limited access (restricted mode) to the advance organizer, while another group was given limited access (restricted mode) to the nonorganizer. These groups were then given the actual learning passage. This procedure enabled differences to be determined between effects of advance and nonorganizers in the restricted mode for learning and retention. As were permitted to read the appropriate passage (advance organizer) forty-eight hours before, and immediately before reading a learning passage of approximately 3000 words dealing with "The Art of Movie Making." These two groups did not have access to their respective preliminary passages during the study of the longer learning passage.

A third group was given extended access (unrestricted mode) to the advance organizer passage, while a final group was given extended access (unrestricted mode) to the nonorganizer passage. These groups were then given the actual learning passage. This procedure enabled differences to be determined between effects of advance and nonorganizers in the unrestricted mode for learning and retention. As in these latter groups, access to the appropriate passage (advance organizer) forty-eight hours before, and immediately before reading the learning passage of approximately 3000 words dealing with "The Art of Movie Making." These three groups in addition, were permitted to refer to their respective preliminary passages as often as they wished while studying the 3000-word learning passage.

All groups were given a twenty-four item multiple choice criterion test weighted evenly for knowledge, comprehension, and application-level questions. A retention test was administered two weeks later. Data were analyzed for both learning and retention.

From the results of the study, it was concluded that an advance organizer (as defined in the study) did significantly facilitate learning and retention for the combined knowledge, comprehension, and application scores in the restricted mode. This finding was supported for learning in the unrestricted mode as well, but not for retention. Regarding separate cognitive levels, advance organizers did not facilitate learning significantly, but at the application level for retention, advance organizers in the restricted mode were significantly effective. Thus, support was found for Ausubel's theory of meaningful verbal learning and retention.

Related results included the finding that advance organizers were significantly more effective for learning and retention at some cognitive levels among girl subjects, whereas, no significant differences were noted by treatments for boys. Finally, age of subjects was not a significant variable in the study.

Order No. 77-10,748, 218 pages.

A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF SILENT AND ORAL READING ON THE COMPREHENSION AND ORAL READING MISCUES OF AVERAGE FOURTH-GRADE READERS

GLENN, June Carol, Ed.D
University of Southern California, 1976

Chairman: Professor Charles Brown

Purpose. The purposes of this study were (1) to compare what differences occurred in the quality, number, and types of oral reading miscues when categorized according to selected criteria of the Reading Miscue Inventory among three groups of fourth-grade readers; and (2) to compare the differences among these groups in comprehension as measured by a post reading cloze test.

T, read the research selection orally at sight and completed the post reading cloze test, T2, read the research selection silently before reading it orally, and then completed the post reading cloze test. T3, read the research selection silently, completed the post reading cloze test, and then read the research selection orally.

Procedure. Six schools were randomly selected from elementary schools in the Anaheim City School District, Anaheim, California. Thirty-nine average fourth-grade readers were randomly selected and assigned to three treatment groups. All readers spoke English as their first language. Each group contained approximately the same number of boys and girls.

The research selection and the post reading cloze test were administered to each subject of the three groups. All oral readings were audiorecorded. Miscues were analyzed according to selected criteria of the Reading Miscue Inventory. The independent variable (treatment groups) was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance. Significant F ratios were analyzed by the application of Duncan's multiple comparison test.

Selected Findings. T3 scored significantly higher than T2 in the categories semantic acceptability yes and strength in grammatical relationships. T3, and T2 scored significantly higher than T3 in the loss of comprehension pattern category. T3 scored significantly higher than T1 and T3 on the post reading cloze test. No significant difference was found among the groups in the type of miscues observed or in the number of miscues committed.

Conclusions. (1) A reader's accuracy in using graphophonic information is not directly related to comprehension as measured by a post reading cloze test. (2) Fourth-grade readers make extensive use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues. (3) The thesis held by reading authorities that children tend to comprehend better when reading silently than when reading orally was not supported. (4) Oral reading accuracy is not improved when silent reading precedes oral reading. (5) The number of miscues per hundred words is not improved when silent reading precedes oral reading. (6) No significant difference was found in the number of miscues committed among the three treatment groups. (7) The types of oral reading miscues observed were not significantly different when silent reading preceded oral reading than when the research selection was read orally at sight. (8) Individual readers vary widely in the quality, number, and types of miscues committed and in the post reading cloze test scores recorded.
EFFECTS OF LEARNING INSTRUCTIONS AND AGE ON INFORMATION ACQUIRED FROM PROSE

HARRIS, Wendy Joan, Ph.D.  
University of California, Berkeley, 1976

The extent and character of information acquired from prose was assessed as a function of learning instructions and age. Four, eighth, and twelfth grade students listened to two 200-word mystery stories under instructions to either simply remember the story information, remember it in a relational manner, or remember it in a verbatim or discrete manner. Information acquired was tested by a primary measure of free recall for each story, and by a secondary measure of true false questions for the second story presented. Primary dependent variables in each response mode were constructed for information either directly reproduced from the story or otherwise derived (e.g., inferred, concluded) from story content. It was predicted that while both types of information would increase with age, a larger increase was anticipated for the derived than for the reproduced variety. Also, instructions were expected to affect derived information, but not reproduced, tasks to vary with age. While relational instructions were to facilitate performance more for younger than for older students, verbatim instructions were to facilitate performance only for older than for younger subjects. These instructions were tested for verbal performance only for the middle school students. Further, it was expected that there would be no age differences in the recall of information under verbatim instructions.

Order No. 77-15,711, 56 pages.

ADULT AGE DIFFERENCES IN SENTENCE MEMORY: AN INVESTIGATION OF CONSTRUCTIVE MEMORY

HURLBUT, Nancy Lillian, Ph.D.  
The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977

Supervisor: Associate Professor Erich W. Labovitz

After listening to 24 sentences, elderly subjects (mean age 71.9 years) and young subjects (mean age 21.5 years) were asked to recognize, from a set of 60 sentences, which sentences they had heard before. The set of recognition sentences contained (a) acquisition sentences (Old sentences), (b) semantic fragments integrated from ideas in more than one acquisition sentence (New sentences), (c) semantically incorrect sentences (Novel case sentences) for both ages, there was a high false recognition of New sentences, and a low false recognition of Novel case sentences. Such data indicate that young and elderly adults learn/remember sentences by constructing holistic ideas from separate semantic units (constructive remembering). There were no age differences on measures of constructive remembering; however, the young adults better recognized the verb information (Old sentences), Instructions (Comprehension and memorization) also influenced the ages differently. There were no age differences under the comprehension instructions but the young subjects showed better verbal remembering under the memorization instructions. The results indicate that there are no universal, inevitable decrements in the sentence memory of healthy elderly adults. There are, deficits in the elderly's learning/memory performance but such deficits are task-specific (verbatim remembering) or experimentally induced (memorization instructions).

Order No. 77-14,337, 125 pages.

THE EFFECTS UPON COMPREHENSION OF RESTRUCTURING GRAMMATICAL PATTERNS

LONDON, Charlotte J., Ph.D.  
The Pennsylvania State University, 1977

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there was a significant difference in comprehension when comparative reduction structures were used in written material. 2. When relative clauses were placed near the beginning of a sentence, at the middle of a sentence, and at the end of a sentence; 3) when verb particles were placed after the verbs with which they were associated or after the clauses that followed them when they were placed near the end of a sentence, and 4) whether there was a significant difference in selectional rules consistently functioning to cue subjects to the choice of appropriate nouns or verbs which had the same semantic features of either the noun with which the verb had to agree or the verb in which the noun had to agree.

Procedure

There were four independent variables tested in the study. Three of the variables: comparative reduction, verb particle placement, and selectional rules, had two values each, while the fourth variable, relative clause, had three values. There was therefore a total of nine values.

Nine sets of instruments were developed with each instrument testing one of the nine values. The nine sets of instruments were divided into three test booklets labeled Comprehension Survey Form A, Comprehension Survey Form B, and Comprehension Survey Form C.

The data from the study were collected from ninety subjects enrolled as freshmen at Stockton State College in New Jersey in September, 1975. The subjects were pretested with the Cooperative English Tests, Form IC, and were assigned by test scores to one of three equivalent groups with thirty subjects in each group. The three subjects with the highest test scores were assigned to each of the three groups and this procedure was followed down to the subjects with the three lowest scores being assigned to each of the three groups. The test instruments were then administered to the groups. The highest achieving subject in each group was tested with a separate form of the test instruments, and the three sets of tests were treated as equivalent and given the label subject 1. This procedure was followed down to the three lowest subjects.

The student test for the difference between means was used to test the comparative reduction, verb particle, and selectional rules variables, while the Analysis of Variance was used to test the relative clause variable.

Findings

The findings appeared to indicate that: 1. There was a significant difference (p < 05) in reading comprehension when comparative reduction vs no comparative reduction structures were used in written material. Reading comprehension was better when comparative reduction was used in written material as opposed to when no comparative reduction was used. 2. There was no significant difference in reading comprehension when relative clauses were placed in one of three positions. 3. There was a significant difference in reading comprehension when verb particles were placed after the verbs with which they were associated as opposed to when they were placed after noun phrases. 4. There was no significant difference in selectional rules cueing subjects to the choice of appropriate nouns as opposed to appropriate verbs in written contexts.

Order No. 77-17,708, 118 pages.
THE EFFECT OF EXPECTATION MODIFICATION ON ACTUAL PERFORMANCE OF A READING COMPREHENSION TASK BY ELEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS

MANDATO, Vincent, Ed.D.
Fordham University, 1977

Mentor: John Poster

This study was concerned with the effect of three conditions of feedback administered to high, middle, and low academic self concept (ASC) 11th grade students on expected and actual performance of reading comprehension tasks.

This study sought to determine whether certain feedback conditions would interact with ASC level in order to significantly change expectancy and subsequent performance.

Findings from previous studies which employed the technique of discrepant feedback as a method for expectation change have been contradictory. This study postulated that the inconsistency of findings may have been due to the failure of previous researchers to incorporate ASC variable control or to consider the length of time over which such feedback was employed.

Discrepant feedback, in the form of gradually inflated, predicted scores (expectation) over a period of 30 trials, was examined as a specific treatment technique for reading comprehension expected and actual changes at three ASC levels. No feedback and correct feedback conditions were similarly examined for comparison purposes.

The sample consisted of 180 males and 180 females enrolled in 11th grade English classes in a large school system compatible to middle class areas within diverse socioeconomic urban school districts.

All subjects were first trichotomized on a word rating list to measure for level of ASC. They were then pretested on form A of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT - III), matched and assigned to one of three feedback groups within each ASC level. Individualized prediction and scoring (treatment) charts were kept and change scores were analyzed at the end of treatment and after a four week post-post-treatment period.

Hypotheses were stated in the null form independently for males and females at each treatment juncture for expected and actual changes. Eight 3 x 3 analyses of variance, mixed design were performed to determine acceptance or rejection, and significant mean changes were examined by the Tukey procedure.

A major finding of the study was the identification of one group in each mid-range ASC male and female category where significant positive directional changes occurred for both expected and actual performance. Although weakened, such changes lasted to the post-post-treatment period. These subjects were identified as being most susceptible to the positive discrepant feedback. Subjects at the extremes exhibited no change at all at the high ASC level and inconsistent change at the low ASC level.

Other significant findings were as follows: 1. Negative expected and actual changes occurred for low ASC males given correct feedback. 2. Low ASC girls did not change expectation but did increase performance when administered correct or inflated-predicted feedback suggesting a beneficial effect from prediction. 3. All subjects overpredicted expectations. This was more notable at the low ASC level and especially true of males. 4. It could not be generalized that expected or actual change in reading comprehension occurred as a result of any feedback condition. Inferences for such change must be limited to mid-range ASC students administered gradually discrepant feedback in a positive direction for 30 trials.

Major conclusions from the findings were: 1. Inconsistency in discrepant feedback research is most likely due to a lack of consideration of the ASC variable. 2. Reading comprehension test feedback as presented in a classroom can have a masked but varied effect on individuals, depending on ASC level. 3. School personnel should consider the ASC variable as part of unit evaluations. Order No. 77-14,873, 108 pages.

DESIGN OF TYPOGRAPHICAL FORMAT AND PROSE RECALL

MURRAY, Norman Boyd, Ph.D.
Brigham Young University, 1976

Chairman: Adrian P. VanMondfrens

This study considers the effects of multidimensional spatial organization of text on prose recall. Subjects (Ss) were 158 missionaries in an intensive language learning program. In a posttest-only-control group design with three replications 26 experimental Ss, in three groups, memorized a 1,000-word passage presented in spatially organized experimental materials. Thirty control Ss, in three corresponding groups, memorized the same passage using regular training materials. Results indicate facilitative effects of multidimensional spatial organization of text on prose recall.

Order No. 77-13,806, 43 pages.

SOME RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SEMANTIC AND STYLISTIC ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE AND COMPREHENSION OF DISCOURSE WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN

RICHMOND, James Emery, Ph.D.
University of California, Berkeley, 1976

For many years professional educators and researchers in related fields have been seeking better ways to control the difficulty of reading material designed for children and adults. Most of the research efforts to date have focused primarily on the frequency of occurrence of specific vocabulary, sentence length as a measure of complexity, and the number of syllables per hundred words. However, a limited number of recent investigations have begun to explore additional language variables that may ultimately aid in the development of better means to predict and control reading difficulty.

Two exploratory studies, completed prior to the current investigation, identified a number of discourse variables that appeared to have an influence on the reading comprehension of elementary school children. This investigation was designed to assess the effect of two of these variables on the reading comprehension of second and third grade children.

One discourse variable tested in this study was identified as the pronoun referent variable. This variable referred to the use of a pronoun as a substitute for a noun, series of words, or an event. The other variable tested was labeled the dialogue variable and referred to the manner in which dialogue appears in discourse.

To test the influence on reading comprehension of the pronoun referent variable, a set of two selections was developed at the second grade reading level. Another set of two selections was developed at the third grade reading level. One selection in each set was designed such that the antecedent of all pronouns used in the selection was in the same or immediately preceding sentence. This selection was labeled the close pronoun referent condition and was predicted to facilitate reading comprehension. The other selection in that set was designed such that the antecedent of all pronouns used in the selection was not in the same or immediately preceding sentence. This selection was labeled the more remote pronoun referent condition and was predicted to impede reading comprehension.

The same basic design was used to test the dialogue variable as was used with the pronoun referent variable. However, for the dialogue variable one selection in each set contained uninterrupted dialogue. Under this condition, predicted to facilitate reading comprehension, the identification of the speaker occurred prior to the dialogue. The other selection in each set contained interrupted dialogue. Under this condition the dialogue was interrupted by the identification of the speaker.
STATE ANXIETY, REINFORCEMENT AND COPING PATTERNS AS INFLUENCES UPON LEARNING RATE IN FIRST GRADE CHILDREN EXPOSED TO SEVERAL STRESSORS WHILE LEARNING WORDS

SCHWARTZ, Barbara Marion, Ph.D.
The University of Wisconsin--Madison, 1976

Supervisor: Associate Professor Roger A. Severson

This study explored learning effectiveness under several different conditions of intrinsic task stress and extrinsic reinforcement. 100 first-grade children were seen in three different sessions and each time taught words under three different conditions. The first session varied reinforcement, giving feedback only in task one, social praise for correct responses in task two and social praise plus tangible reinforcement (candy) in task three. Session II employed a first task with feedback only, a second task involving words much harder to discriminate (to vary intrinsic stress) and a third task similar to task one but including social praise. Session III involved a first task with social praise, a second task, again administering social social praise but involving twice as many words ("overload"), and a third task similar to the first but without social praise. A fourth session involved only 40 children in a free, choice word-learning task with hard, medium, and easy choices given twice with feedback only, twice with social praise, and twice with social praise and tangibles. Self-reported anxiety (an abbreviated STAIC) was obtained on three occasions and the observed behavior was rated for level of anxiety during all learning tasks.

Whereas two earlier studies had found no difference in average learning when social praise and tangibles were given for word learning in first graders, this study found social praise significantly enhancing learning, and tangibles significantly impaired learning. Although the tokens distracted from immediate learning effectiveness, they increased involvement and reduced observed anxiety. The two sessions employing a middle stressor task effectively detected children who handled stress adequately (maintained or improved learning under stress), as well as children who deteriorated under the stressful task and subsequently showed poor learning on the third task. Social praise was not sufficient to eliminate the total stressor effects during Session III, but analysis of subgroups indicated that social praise did reduce rated anxiety.

Self-report state anxiety, although moderately correlated over three assessments, did not relate to learning scores significantly and did not correlate with rated anxiety. Rated anxiety, although subjective, seemed a more valid measure in children of this age, correlating negatively with learning on every task.

The study explored the relationship of the tendency to respond positively to social praise with several other variables. Improving under social praise conditions was not related to the reaction to the stress tasks, nor to choosing more difficult tasks when social praise was added in a free-choice situation. It is possible, however, that due to the novelty of this task exploratory behaviors governed the choice selection and differing reinforcers were unable to overcome this effect.

The relationship of anxiety with the application of either feedback or social praise was investigated. Contrary to prediction, high anxious learners did not perform significantly better on tasks using social praise as compared to tasks providing feedback only. The administration or removal of social praise in the learning task following the "stressor" task did not significantly affect performance in either high or low anxious children. These findings were confirmed when both self-report and rated state anxiety measures were used.

In general this study found that differing patterns of response were produced as a result of varying intrinsic task stress and extrinsic reinforcement. Although some children maintained or improved their initial learning effectiveness during stressor and subsequent learning tasks, others did not cope adequately. The administration of social praise was unable to offset the effects of the stressor task. Rated anxiety correlated negatively with learning effectiveness in every task. It remains for future studies to explore the stability and relationship of these patterns to subsequent learning and achievement.

Order No. 77-8812, 108 pages.

THE EFFECTS OF LEXICALLY AMBIGUOUS NOUNS EMBEDDED IN A READING TASK FOR CHILDREN

STUPAY, Diane Surle, Ph.D.
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One way to look more closely at how semantic screens (Goodman, 1979) or the accumulation of meaning from prior context, operate in the reading process is through the study of lexical ambiguities. Words such as bat, as in baseball, and bat, the animal, require different contexts and lead the reader to different predictions about context which will follow the ambiguous word. Therefore, this study proposed to explore whether the presence of two meanings of a lexically ambiguous noun in contiguous sentences would reduce the size of the unit, the eye-voice span, children at the fourth and sixth grade levels are processing. (The eye-voice span is defined as the number of words the eye is ahead of the voice in oral reading, and was measured in this research by turning off a slide viewer, thus removing the printed display, and asking the subject to continue reading as far as he can after the light goes off.)

Since their lexicon is less fully developed, it was anticipated that fourth grade children would be less affected by the presence of ambiguity than sixth grade children. Also, it was hypothesized that the second of both meanings of the ambiguous noun would trigger a reprocessing operation in working memory which would be evidenced by miscues in the two sentences which include the ambiguous noun. Therefore three dependent variables were assessed: 1. An eye-voice span measure of the exact number of words correctly reported after each light-out position; 2. A corrected eye-voice span measure which included miscues which were completely semantically accept-
able and did not change meaning; 3, A count of the mis- 

Eighty subjects from a middle-class suburban school sys-
tem were chosen randomly from a sample of children with av-
erage standardized reading and IQ scores. There were forty 
children at each grade level with equal numbers of boys and 
girls. Subjects were tested on thirty three-line paragraphs 
presented one at a time on a 35 mm slide viewer. Half the sub-
jects at each grade level were tested on an experimental con-
dition in which the two meanings of the ambiguous noun was 
read in adjacent sentences. The other half were tested on a 
control condition in which the same stimulus materials were 
used, but the ambiguous noun in one of the sentences was re-
placed by a neutral noun. Materials were constructed at a 
third grade reading level, and were presented in random order. 

Analysis of variance results and post hoc tailed t tests 
revealed that the eye-voice spans were reduced in the experi-
mental condition for fourth grade subjects in both the eye-voice 
span measure and the corrected eye-voice span measure. Also, 
girls across grade levels produced significantly more mis-
cues in the experimental than in the control condition. The 

major implication of these results is that semantic informa-
tion is an integral part of the reading process and that even 
relatively young readers, ten year-olds, are sensitive to the 
disruptive effects of lexical ambiguity. It appears that the se-

matic lexicon of ten year-olds is fully sensitive to the se-

matic constraints of a third grade reading vocabulary and is 
more fully developed than was hypothesized. Furthermore, 
this study provides empirical evidence that the semantic 

screens hypothesized in Goodman's (1973) model of reading do 
in fact operate in the reading process, and that girls, by age 
ten, may be somewhat more sensitive than boys to semantic 
constraints in the reading process.

This study is one of the few attempts to use a semantic vari-
able, lexical ambiguity, to research the reading process in chil-
dren. It is a technique that can be applied with relatively young 
readers who are sensitive to the disrupting effects of lexical 
ambiguity. This study could be extended by evaluating average 
and learning disabled readers to determine the ways 
in which they differ from average readers in their use of se-

matic information. In addition, other semantic features could 
be embedded in a reading task to gain a fuller understanding 
of the ways in which semantic screens operate in a model of 
reading.

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