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USING A "WRITE-SPEAK-WRITE" APPROACH FOR BASIC WRITERS

ABSTRACT: *The authors begin by developing some reasons why basic writing is not at all "basic," but a serious challenge to theory and practice of the most advanced stages in linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education. The authors go on to advocate an approach focused on the communicative participants, rather than on the language or the text, for assessing potential language competence as it develops both in speech and writing, and for redefining the notion of "error." Finally, the authors present a pilot project in which the use of speech is found to assist basic writers in producing writing that is improved not merely in its length, fluency, and involvement, but also in its concrete detail and organization.*

Dilemmas for Theory and Practice

It is not surprising that basic writing should be a long-standing practice for which academic research has been hard-put to supply a theory. Most theoretical work on language has been aimed toward a

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high level of abstraction, where deviations from general norms and standards are discounted or treated as marginal. Also, the samples of language and discourse addressed in such work have usually been in standard written prose, even when the researchers expressly declared the primacy of speech over writing.[1] When language varieties were studied, moreover, they were usually those current among some regional group and could thereby be understood as localized norms in their own right.

After a long delay, language research began to address the varieties belonging to social groups as well as to purely regional ones. The evaluative or judgmental implications at once became more acute. Labeling a dialect as "Low German" does not carry negative implications (the "lowness" belongs to the low-lying plains of northern Germany), but labeling one as "lower class" does.

The so-called "deficit hypothesis" about social language varieties, formulated in the 1960s and 1970s by a group around Basil Bernstein in London, offers an instructive retrospect. Its proponents had been comparing samples of the speech of "middle class" and "lower class" British children and finding that the first group manifested a more "elaborated code" and the second group a more "restricted code." In his early work (he later found it unwise), Bernstein cataloged the traits of the two varieties, which he at first called "formal speech" and "public speech"—two labels referring to situations rather than to traits of the "code" itself. But his labels for the traits were mostly code-based and resembled commonplace descriptions of basic writing, even though he was purportedly referring to speech. In contrast to the "accurate grammatical order and syntax" of the elaborated variety, the restricted variety manifested "short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences with a poor syntactic form," along with "simple and repetitive use of conjunctions," "little use of subordinate clauses," and so on (Bernstein 169f).

These traits were construed as indicators of psychological deficits as well as linguistic ones. Bernstein postulated an "inability to hold a formal subject through a speech sequence," a "dislocation of informational content," a "confounding of reason and conclusion," and so on (169f). This diagnosis may disturb writing teachers, who have good reason to consider such drastic extrapolations unduly pessimistic and premature, the more so as we lack a reliable consensus about how to draw direct connections between "form" and "content."

Predictably, the same trend toward psychological extrapolation surfaced in American studies of the speech of Black children, where social differentiation was correlated with racial. When Bereiter and

Engelmann (36) had trouble recognizing distinctly articulated work boundaries in "the child's pronunciation," the diagnosis was an "inability to deal with sentences as sequences of meaningful parts." Thus, "the speech of severely deprived children" was believed to signal "a total lack of ability to use language as a device for acquiring and processing intonation" (34, 39).

This kind of extrapolation is ominous in view of the already confused educational policies in the Anglo-American world. The project to make education as general as possible and to base its success criteria on "merit" rather than wealth and privilege led to an uncritical faith in standardized testing. At the top of the hierarchy was "intelligence testing," which claimed to measure a unitary, innate intellectual competence unrelated to social and cultural situations—despite the uncanny correlations, already shown by Cyril Burt in the 1940s, between IQ and parental income. A College Board Report presented the same finding for the SAT scores of 647,000 students tested in 1973–74.[2] Evidently, measurements of "intelligence" and "aptitude" address not so much the innate competence or fixed scholastic potential as the complex and variegated social situations in which some students develop their competence and realize their potential while others do not. This problem cannot be resolved merely by eliminating socially marked content (if that were possible) or introducing the content of a presumed "subculture." High pressure test-taking, especially in abstract problem solving, is itself such a heavily acculturated middle-class activity that it cannot measure the competence of lower-class children. The "myth of the deprived child," which, as Herbert Ginsburg has shown as a close corollary of the "deficit hypothesis," is a product of narrow middle-class preconceptions about the relevant modes of being "intelligent."

In the past, most standard intelligence and aptitude tests have not included a freewriting sample, not so much because the hybris of testmakers like ETS is limited (it isn't) but because the time and expense of scoring it would cut into profits. When language items have appeared on a test, they typically assumed the more tractable and ominous form of multiple-choice questions about tricky points of grammar that would not even come up except in rigidly standardized prose (like "Vote for whoever/whomever is best qualified"). Under recent pressure, the inclusion of writing samples is growing as a token gesture, but I doubt that the testmakers will provide scoring techniques which genuinely measure anyone's intelligence or aptitude from a writing sample and certainly not those of basic writers, who may be even more effectively discriminated by the newer tests.

Thus, academic conceptions in linguistics, psychology, and standardized testing have united to reinforce, with more technical and protected rationales, the old folk-wisdom that nonstandard speech and basic writing are signs of inherent low ability. If even theoretical specialists are unable to transcend this folk-wisdom, the prospects are much bleaker for practicing teachers and administrators, and bleakest of all for the learners themselves. The danger persists that we may all take it for granted, at least secretly, that nothing decisive can be done. The eminent linguist Sir Randolph Quirk once told me I simply shouldn't expect everybody to learn how to write well: "You can't teach a dog to grow persimmons," he added.

When research findings and the diagnoses drawn from them tally with discriminatory social and racial attitudes, the researchers face three distinct choices. They can, as Arthur Jensen has done over the years, contumaciously insist that their findings represent "scientific facts" we must face, whether we like it or not: Blacks and poor children *are* inferior, period. Or, as Bereiter and Engelmann did, they can treat the findings as a factual condition we can resolve by remedial education: the children are inferior *now,* but can be "remediated." Or, as William Labov has done, they can scrutinize the underlying predispositions that led to such an interpretation of the "facts" and can provide other facts and alternative interpretations, showing for example how the same "deprived" Black children manifest impressive communicative skills in other types of situation: the children are *not* inferior, but are made to appear so by the skewed relationship between their own culture and the educational contexts we have created for them.

Most of us, including composition teachers, do suspect that writing plays a major role in psychological development and social advancement, but the relevant contexts, conditions, and causalities are hard to establish. The widespread nineteenth-century notion that merely transcribing texts word for word would do the trick is no longer seriously maintained; but an empirical study of grades 1, 3, and 5 in the mid-1980s showed that two-thirds of the total class time spent writing—the total itself being only 15% of the school day—still consisted of word-for-word copying in workbooks (Anderson et al.). Around the same time, a study of secondary schools found that less than 10% of the students' time in English instruction itself was spent writing connected prose (Hansen et al.). Under conditions like these, the potential of writing for psychological and social progress cannot be properly assessed, and the discouraging results obtained so far tell us very little about what might be achieved under more favorable conditions, provided we had the means to identify and create them.

To meet that provision, we must address a whole gallery of troublesome questions, such as:

(1) What deserves to constitute the core or norm of a language?
(2) What brands of language should be distinguished, and by what criteria?
(3) What evidence can a given brand of language provide about the psychological or social status of the people who speak or write it?
(4) How are a person's speech and writing related to each other, and how does each contribute to development of one's potential?
(5) How can we gauge current writing skills?
(6) How can we differentiate these current skills from potential skills?
(7) How can we create conditions for encouraging the realization of this potential?
(8) Where do writing skills fit in the overall picture of human abilities?
(9) Where do writing skills fit in the overall picture of intellectual or academic progress?

For a long time, these questions were seldom raised, presumably because institutions believed that conventional education would deal with them in practice, at least for learners who were sufficiently meritorious, dedicated, gifted, and so on, whether or not we had any theory to explain how. Recently, such questions have been much more frequently raised but will keep getting confused with each other as long academic standard prose continues to be the pervasive dominant standard both for describing language and for judging academic abilities. This prose tends to form a closed circle which not only keeps the outsider from entering, but also hinders those of us who have mastered it from communicating reliably with those who have not.

Basic Writing as a Linguistic, Psychological, and Social Phenomenon

A material improvement in the situation of basic writing presupposes a comprehensive statement of what it *is* rather than what it *is not*. At least three crucial standpoints can be distinguished.

From a *linguistic standpoint*, basic writing is essentially a written language variety reflecting the writer's speech patterns,

filtered only through some autochthonous strategies of transcription and deprived of all the expressive means not amenable to these strategies. From this standpoint, the central problem is that the resources of speech for expression and elaboration are not *inferior* to (more "restricted" or "dislocated" than) the resources of writing, but *different*. Caution is needed lest we assess this difference mechanically because we are distracted by the flagrant disparities in English between speech contours versus written orthography and punctuation. If we can genuinely free ourselves from our preoccupation with errors—a goal which has been frequently advocated and rarely achieved[3]—we may, by dint of conscious exertion, overcome the destructive bias of equating basic writing with "misspelled" and "mispunctuated" writing. As word processors become widely available, the instruction in spelling should be shifted away from episodic memorization of a sole *correct* spelling toward thematic heuristics for approximating a *plausible* spelling well enough to use spell-checking programs efficiently.

So far, linguistics has examined the more important organizational differences between speech and writing only occasionally, as in the work of the Czechoslovakian scholar Josef Vachek.[4] Even linguistics has been unduly influenced by the "folk belief, typical of a written culture, according to which spoken language is disorganized and featureless," as " 'demonstrated' by transcriptions in which speech is reduced to writing and made to look like a dog's dinner," due to "the disorder and fragmentation" in "the way it is transcribed" without "intonation or rhythm or variation in tempo and loudness" (Halliday xxiv). As far as I know, Michael Halliday was the first major linguist who completely abrogated this folk-wisdom:

> The potential of the system is more richly developed and more fully revealed in speech. . . . Spoken language responds continually to the small but subtle changes in its environment, both verbal and nonverbal; and in so doing exhibits a rich pattern of semantic [and] grammatical variation that does not get explored in writing. . . . Spoken language can "choreograph" very long and intricate patterns of semantic movement while maintaining a continuous flow of discourse that is coherent without being constructional. (xxiiif, 201)

Halliday's vision suggests that part of learning to write is learning to *restrict* the richness of elaboration, rather than to enhance it.

Halliday's argument bears directly on the research that led to the "deficit hypothesis," with which he and his wife Ruqaiya Hasan were initially involved. Researchers like Bernstein and Hawkins in

the U.K. and Bereiter and Engelmann in the U.S. were evidently proceeding on the assumption that the *only* relevant resources for "elaborating the code" are those typical of standard written prose, the same variety linguistics had often treated as the most basic and general instantiation of language. This outlook can see only a "deficit" in varieties that use alternative resources. The transformation of spontaneous speech written down without regard for intonation, tone of voice, emotional nuances, and so on is compounded for the speech of a specific social or racial group whose pronunciation and grammar are further removed from standard orthography, e.g., in terms of marking the boundaries of words or the number and tense of verb forms.

Any genuine solution presupposes a description of the language based directly on speech rather than on writing. Like his teacher J. R. Firth (23), Halliday (xxiii) has called for a "grammar of spoken language" but has not yet provided more than an outline of it. His most important strategy, in my view,[5] is to shift the focus from the exhaustive segmentation of sentences, typical in both traditional grammar and linguistics, over to the functional expression of experiential and communicative categories, such as "mental process" or "circumstance."

From a *psychological standpoint,* basic writing might be described as a rudimentary stage in which the learner's expressive strategies were retarded or indeed arrested before they could be developed and refined to tap the special resources of written prose, such as the opportunity to reconsider and revise one's choices. However, this description entails a possibly fictional assumption that a "normal" rudimentary stage of writing in fact occurs during language development. In some cases, writing may not have appeared on the agenda at all. Such was the situation of a group of college-age Sudanese refugees in a camp in Haifa, Israel, who were supposed to be prepared for education. They spoke only Amharic and had never written any language. To make literacy more accessible, I recommended a strong orientation toward their spoken culture, such as writing their most familiar songs and stories down first in Amharic with the Hebrew alphabet, then in Hebrew, before attempting to teach them the standard grammar of Hebrew—a language whose dependence on writing included the remarkable reanimation of the language from scriptural sources during the nineteenth century.

Moreover, Halliday's argument indicates the perils of associating "spoken" with "rudimentary." If one's speech skills were fairly well developed during the stage when basic writing was leveling out, the written texts should consistently reflect at least some speech-like

elaboration. But if one's speech skills were not developed, the written texts should show little consistency except what might arise from the basic writer's guesses about the organization of writing, whose creative and ingenious quality, as Mina Shaughnessy first pointed out, is routinely overlooked by teachers who judge the results purely as academic prose.

It is therefore essential to uncouple the issues of psychological development from those of linguistic development. For example, we could examine the ability of basic writers at various ages to give and follow instructions for performing tasks of varying complexity, using speech and writing alternately. Or we could have them read a story written down by another basic writer and retell it in both speech and writing. However, such probes would have to be carried out under conditions where the learners would not be self-conscious about their language, and, in the bounds of conventional schooling, this might be difficult.

From a *social standpoint,* basic writing is a highly specific variety of language whose users create it more through individual efforts than through communal consensus. Its audience is solely the writing teacher or a similar institutional representative. It therefore carries a chiefly "metacommunicative" significance, indicating how the writer proceeds rather than conveying a pertinent message.

Although users of basic writing constitute a recognizable minority, the latter is not defined in terms of writing skills per se, and the prospect that they might be organized to assert their human rights is virtually nil. The discrimination to which they are subjected is nowhere regulated by statute. And since the current trend in court decisions is to legitimize discriminations against nonstandard speakers of English (on the fiction that the problem is individual and personal rather than social or racial), nonstandard writers have little to hope for in the future.

The social diversification, to which "equal opportunity education" was intended to be a response, is reconverging today upon a steadily constricting bottleneck of economic opportunities whose scarcity counsels more urgently than ever against any deviations from the standards recommended for "upward mobility." Moreover, minorities are increasingly suspicious that they can be integrated only if they consent to being estranged from their own language and culture. And even if they should consent, they have no guarantee that a distinct improvement in individual status will ensue; or that such an improvement might not be used as an alibi for leaving the social disparities themselves unaltered.

From an *educational standpoint,* basic writing is the product of the disequilibrium between two contrary tendencies: to make

education more general, but to continue centering it on a special variety of language and culture whose users form an ever-smaller minority as the educational process expands. This minority not merely enjoys an enormous advantage throughout their personal schooling, but also continues to serve as evidence and pretext for a wishful model of the hypothetical student at whom the average textbook or instructional method is usually aimed. Their exceptional success furnished a justification for retaining these materials or altering them only in cosmetic or gradual ways.

Thus, higher education has admitted a nontraditional population of students, yet has continued to discriminate them indirectly by making standard prose a central yardstick all across the curriculum yet not providing genuinely workable means to describe it in their own terms, let alone to produce it. This impasse is unlikely to be relieved until we can make a much more encompassing assessment of how basic writers come to be "basic," and what their current skills and future potential might be. We must above all understand the conditions of basic writing as a linguistic, psychological, and social phenomenon in its own right, and not as a mere negation of some other phenomenon or as an anarchy of deviations and disruptions. This understanding should help us to appreciate not only why basic writing has the traits it does, but why it presents such a challenge to both theory and practice.

The Language versus the Participants

We can encourage such understanding by orienting our theories and practices toward communicative criteria. The focus of attention would then be the *participants* rather than the *language* or the *text,* which has occupied center stage in nearly all areas of theory and practice in traditional grammar, linguistics, and composition. Such an orientation has recently been advocated both in writing research and in the evaluation of students' products, but because the means for implementation are not well accounted for, we continue to focus on language and its formal properties, whose "correctness" appears to offer us a convenient and straightforward frame of reference.

Dispassionate examination of communication in a wide variety of settings, including other languages than English, leads to a significant conclusion: formal correctness is not crucial for communicative success. The process of "pidginization," which improvises an intermediary language for everyday use, proves that formal correctness can be extensively relaxed without adverse effects on one's ability to communicate. By building a bridge between the languages of the participation groups, the pidgin is the

only practicable medium in such settings. The pidgin English spoken in Ghana, for example, is the only medium of nationwide communication among the speakers of more than forty indigenous languages.[6] Its elementary but flexible structure—which might well be counted a "deficit" by the research cited in this paper's first section—enables it to accommodate the diverse formative principles of these languages without jeopardizing comprehensibility. On the other hand, British English, the language of the former colonizers, is ridiculed by pidgin speakers as "booklong," a term which points up the Ghanaians' awareness of the close link between standardization and extended written texts.

At first, the Ghanaian values seem paradoxical: the very features that count as markers of correctness in British schools count in Ghana as errors—more social errors than formal ones. But this paradox disappears if we adopt a communication-oriented definition of "errors": a class of language events not intended but perceived as negative metacommunicative signals about the speaker or writer rather than about the message. Errors are disputatious because different people or groups vary dramatically in their "error-consciousness," that is, in their ability and disposition to perceive and interpret such signals. Composition textbooks, such as the recent one falsely claiming that "a sentence fragment doesn't really say anything" (Glazier, 67), often imply the dubious theses that errors entirely blot out the message, and that a high level of error-consciousness is therefore both widespread and desirable and should be internalized while learning to write. Since basic writers know better from their own experience in conversation, they understandably resent being asked to internalize an attitude that inaccurately disqualifies their own language as a means of communication. Most of the error-consciousness in the English-speaking world is either the property of English teachers or the product of their ministrations to propagate it.

This communicative redefinition of "errors" illustrates the proposed focus on the participants. The traditional focus on the language or text, in contrast, has helped to entrench the pernicious notion, dear to self-appointed guardians of language like Wilson Follett and Edwin Newman, of an error as a tangible absolute for all participants and contexts. This notion reinforces the folk-belief, cited above, that everyday speech is crammed with errors. Only by shifting our focus to communicative participants can we hope to bring about more tolerant and enlightened public attitudes about language, as advocated by Anne Gere and Eugene Smith in *Attitudes, Language, and Change.*

This newer focus reopens the question of which participant groups have the right to decide what is or is not an error. In the past,

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this right was simply seized by persons whose claim to authority was based chiefly on their own exaggerated error-consciousness, and who felt free to inflate the catalogue of supposed errors with their personal whims and dislikes, as Dwight Bolinger has shown. And as long as errors are held to be tangible absolutes, none can ever be removed from the list, and whoever disputes the wrongness of any censured usage gets rebuked for "destroying standards" and "corrupting the language."

The participant orientation has been largely neglected in linguistics, which remained language-oriented to the point where, in generative grammar, the "speaker-hearer" faded away into an idealization devoid of nearly all human qualities, like the "abstract automaton" invoked by Chomsky.[7] Recently, however, linguists working in "pragmatics" and "discourse analysis" have shown how many important regularities of language must be described in terms of participants.[8] The problem at present is that attempts to draw the full consequences of this insight are still hampered by the language-oriented theories and terminologies inherited from the past.

A participant orientation would offer a means to reappraise the difference between speech and writing. An intriguing finding in research so far has been that only a few people, among them trained public speakers and radio broadcasters, produce spoken texts that closely resemble their written texts in linguistic terms. The large majority, including most academics, exhibit two quite divergent brands of language in one mode versus the other. Speech transcripts from videotapings made here at the University of Florida, for example, displayed English professors speaking in ways fairly similar to ordinary freshman writers.

If the same participant demonstrates such consistent patterns of diversity irrespective of skill level, speaking and writing must involve at least partially different types of competence, which can and often do develop in quite divergent ways. Many problems regarding usage, particularly in America, have arisen from the tendency to overlook this potential difference by extrapolating naively from one modality to the other. One of these problems is the misconception that if writing is to be standardized, we must first standardize speech to resemble it as closely as possible. This idea entrains writing teachers in an endless crusade far beyond either our authority or our capacity. We extend our already overdeveloped error-consciousness to cover the students' speech as well as their writing, and end up asking them to adopt a brand of speech which, within their peer group, might count as a conspicuous (and possibly ludicrous) deviation, like the "booklong" British English in Ghana.

Another problem in confusing speech with writing is the belief that because the speech competence of our students has been essentially stabilized by the time they enter our classes, we will not be able to influence their writing competence very materially. The fact of the matter, I suspect, is that our methods and textbooks are largely designed on the—increasingly wishful—assumption that the learners' writing competence has also been at least partially stabilized by that time. Our methods and textbooks work best when this is so, e.g., among children of middle-class or upper-class families maintaining a literate environment, but are otherwise ineffectual; and the lack of stabilization among basic writers is readily misunderstood as a disability to develop competence at all, irrespective of age.

Yet another problem arises when basic writers also confuse speech with writing. By projecting their difficulties with writing over onto their speech, they acquire a mistaken feeling of incompetence to use the language in general. Their major language resource to invest in writing, namely their speech competence, thus gets disqualified as a liability, leaving them with the sinking sensation of trying to start from absolute zero, which really *is* impossible. We should thus not be too surprised when basic writers pass through years of schooling without attaining functional literacy and become steadily more alienated from the whole enterprise.

To recover their motivation, basic writers need to accept two beliefs: that their speech competence is a key resource, not a liability, and that it does not have to be transformed before their writing competence can develop. These beliefs can be fostered through an approach which actively encourages them to invest their speech capabilities and helps them to appreciate how writing differs according to its own particular conditions and purposes. The main focus would be placed on recognizing and controlling potential problems involved in those differences and on exploiting the resources specific to writing.

In such an ambience, the task of writing can be decomposed into subtasks whose number and scope are tailored to fit the group of learners at hand. This principle obliges the basic writing teacher to adapt the design of instruction to each group. The added demands on the already overburdened teacher can be offset, however, as the students become steadily more capable of evaluating and revising their own products. The traditional task of "correcting papers," which improves the teacher's competence while leaving the learners crucially dependent on outside reactions, is thereby transferred to the learners. The teacher's function is then to identify

problems and suggest strategies, whereas the learners must find and alleviate the specific instances on their own.

Tasks and criteria must be carefully designed lest the learners' error-consciousness be raised in an inhibiting way. Teacher-performed correction raises this consciousness only vaguely and disconcertingly by suggesting that errors are frequent if not unavoidable but also that the teacher alone is competent to find and remedy them. Instead, we must try to convey the message that most issues of usage depend on what suits the context and purpose and do not demarcate a borderline between "right" and "wrong." Learners should become attuned to potential problems at the same time as they acquire strategies for identifying and alleviating them. The resulting consciousness will then be more focused and more practicable than that fostered by teacher-performed correction.[9]

One reason for the meager and undependable results of traditional "remediation" is that it fails to take the writer seriously as a communicative participant with a concrete social history. Such remediation is often one more rehearsal of the same methods that led to the basic writer's predicament in the first place. The metalanguage imposed by the materials is not helpful because it is either too technical (e.g., "finite verb," "gerundive") or too vague (e.g., "a sentence" is "a complete thought") to apply to real communication. Noncommunicative drills merely become steadily more meaningless through recapitulation. Error-consciousness is intensified but no effective or practicable strategies for applying it are inferred. Creativity is not rewarded but discouraged as a further source of errors. Finally, the remedial situation—even the term "remedial" invokes the spirit of the deficit hypothesis—and its disappointing outcome reinforce the learners' belief in their own incompetence in the language.

Paradoxically, basic writers most need the help we are least prepared to give. We are still not adequately informed about their language abilities and about the nature and origin of their problems. Our curriculum represents to them a ladder with the lower rungs missing, rungs which are supplied by learners from more literate backgrounds. Our preoccupation with upholding and protecting unrealistic "standards" keeps our offerings out of reach. And emphasizing mechanics as the basis for good writing is tantamount to recommending rigorous training in pronunciation as the proper basis for effective speaking; the term "mechanical" itself invokes the alienating quality of the repetitive drills often applied to these issues.

Materially improving the state of affairs requires much comprehensive work in both theory and practice. We should observe and

record spontaneous speech under real-life conditions, and pay close attention to those resources of expression and elaboration which do not carry over into written samples in standard orthography, such as indicators of personal interest and involvement. We should then compare these speech resources to the corresponding resources of standard writing. Finally, we should develop workable training programs for mediating these resources to basic writers on whatever level they may be encountered.

A Pilot Project

A pilot project with basic writers might help to make some of the arguments advanced above more concrete. Mar Jean Olson, a graduate student in English here at UF, was delegated to conduct a special writing class within the Office of Instructional Resources Special Program for Athletes. Like many basic writers, these students had invested their talents in sports, where their success stood in a far more tangible and reliable ratio to their efforts than in English. The cliché that athletes are "not intelligent" no doubt reflects their frustration from trying to correlate their intellectual development with stringent and uncreative school assignments and attaining unpredictable and uncontrollable results.

Preliminary contacts and interviews indicated that—again like many basic writers—these students were articulate and animated speakers. We hoped that these abilities could be deployed to improve *fluency,* i.e., how easily and extensively the students produce texts, and *involvement,* i.e., how strongly they can identify the writing activity with their personal priorities. These two factors should help to counter-balance some of the more debilitating effects of the intense but vague error-consciousness instilled by traditional instruction.

In that semester, the contingent assigned to Olson consisted of fifteen University of Florida scholarship athletes. Instead of writing a formal paper on an assigned topic, they were to "choose a game they played and explain it to someone who wouldn't know how to play it," first in writing, then in speech, and then again in writing. For the first session, students had half an hour. The second session took place one week later, when each student attended an individual conference. During their monologues, which were recorded on tape, Olson listened attentively, but tried not to display conspicuous encouragement or disapproval. At the final session during class one week after the taping, the students were given both their first drafts and the typed transcripts that Olson had made from their recorded speech, plus written instructions saying: "Here is

what you wrote when you explained a game that you play, and here is what you said. Read through both, and then explain the game to me in a final draft." The time allotment was again half an hour, as in the first writing session.

We conjectured that this approach might encourage the students to view writing as an open, multistage process of drafting, comparing, and revising. This view could work against the problem commonly reported (e.g., by Lillian Bridwell) among inexperienced writers who, when asked to "revise" a paper, follow the first draft much too closely and incorporate a few cosmetic minor changes (of presumed "errors"), focusing on grammar, spelling, and penmanship. Our design interposed a spoken version produced long enough after the first draft that the students could not repeat themselves. The contrast between the first draft and the spoken transcript could draw attention to the open relationship between content and expression. This contrast was highlighted by the graphic appearance of the transcript. Instead of standard punctuation, we used one slash mark for a short pause and two slash marks for a long pause; stressed words or word-parts were written in upper case. This means of transcription retains at least some of the intonation and avoids the interpretations we would have to make by inserting our own punctuation. The compendious Survey of English Usage at University College, London, directed by Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, has adopted similar conventions for its spoken corpus.

We expected that the first written draft would be relatively low in fluency and involvement, whereas the spoken second version might be substantially higher, since participant orientation is naturally more direct and conspicuous for spoken communication than for written. Ideally, some of this increase might carry over to the written third version. For the purposes of the project we disregarded the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, or grammar, which could be introduced later on, after fluency and involvement have improved.

In the first session, the students indeed showed scant involvement and visibly fretted about making errors. They manifested no significant motivation to be informative or personal. On the contrary, they appeared to feel restrained by the very activity of writing from conveying what they thought and felt. In the speaking session, the students proceeded with noticeably greater freedom and confidence, displaying more animation, direction, and conviction.

These tendencies did carry over to the writing of the third version. The students appeared to be encouraged by having usable

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sources in front of them. This time, the familiar questions posed in the first session did not appear, such as, "How long does this have to be?" or, "Do you want a whole page?"

In nearly all cases, the final draft was not only longer than the first, but also superior in several ways I shall try to describe. Although these final drafts still did not conform to conventional composition standards, the remaining defects were largely mechanical. For example, words the student had misspelled in the first version and Olson had spelled correctly in the transcript often turned up with the original misspelling in the final version, such as "furst" for "first," "elven" for "eleven," and "cassel" for "castle." The missing "-s" from plural nouns and third-person singular verbs also tended to stay missing. Evidently, the writers were not focusing enough attention on spellings to notice the discrepancies between the first version and the transcript, especially when a dialect form was involved.

The openings of the three versions produced by one student clearly signal an increase in involvement and enthusiasm:

(1) Miss olson, I play the game called chess. Chess is a game on a checkerboard. The board is for checkers.

(2) chess is a GREAT game / if you DON'T play chess / you're REALLy missing something / there's NOTHing like sitting down to play a game // you GOT TO CONCENTRATE // WATCH your men when you play chess

(3) You really should play chess. It's a great game. Chess is a game that is played on a checkerboard. It needs two people to play it. What you need to play is concentration. You sit at the board with your men.

Whereas the original (1) opens with a dry statement that the writer "plays a game" "on a checkerboard" and spends a sentence on explaining the name of the board, the spoken version (2) opens with a declaration of enthusiasm and goes on to project the feeling of actually being in a game. The written version (3) follows up, again expressing enthusiasm (albeit more restrained) and taking the viewpoint of "sitting at the board with your men." The "checkerboard," omitted from (2), is retained in (3) but without the banal explanation of its name.

A more complex and interesting relationship obtains among these three openings:

(4) Football is a game where guys play on a field. The field can be out of grass or artafischal turf.

(5) Football has TWO teams // there's ONE ball // EVERY-

body wants to get that ball one way or the other // the GATor field has 120 yards to it

(6) The University of Florida Football team is called the Gators. I play on this team and am proud of it. We play on Florida Field. The football field has 120 yards to it. Our field is made of artafischal turf but you can play on grass.

We see a similar rise in personal involvement along with the dramatic change from version to version. The original (4) opens impersonally, and the focused end position of the sentence goes to "field" rather than "game," suggesting that "field" is the main topic. Version (5) focuses first on the "teams," tells what every team member "wants," and then turns to one particular "field" the speaker knows from experience. Version (6) further raises personal involvement by citing the writer's own "team" and declaring his "pride" in "playing on" it. Taking "play" as a main topic makes the transition to a particular "field" much less abrupt than it was in version (5). The overall topic flow is smoother and more concrete, and the writer's role as participant in the activity has replaced the abstract content orientation of version (4). This shift of focus toward participants, which calls to mind the trends outlined for language research in this paper's section, "The Language versus the Participants," may well have been encouraged by having interpolated a spoken session into the writing procedure. Additional evidence of greater involvement came from the ending of the spoken version, which had no equivalent in the written ones:

(7) football has lots of action and you'd just LOVE it // I could talk forEVer about football

A discourse analysis of a complete set of three versions from the same student may bring out some organizational trends that register the student's positive achievement and underlying skills beyond the concerns of mechanics, as proposed in the previous sections. For convenient reference, these versions and their constituents are numbered, which of course was not the case in the versions the students saw. The written first version (8), the spoken version (9), and the written third version (10), ran as follows:

(8.1) I play basketball for fun. (8.2) It only takes a ball and hoop. (8.3) That's it. (8.4) You lucky if you got a hoop. (8.5) There ain't no net were I live. in Gainesville. (8.6) You try to cruize the ball down the hoop. (8.7) Its easy. (8.8) The court you are on about two time as long across length. (8.9) Its good if you see lines. (8.10) Lines are were to stand. (8.11) You can't go pass them. (8.12) You start from the jump. (8.13) G   o

to your court. (8.14) Play your half till you go down. (8.15) when you sink a baskit. (8.16) Win

(9.1) You play basketball all by yourself it you want to / (9.2) it's SO good / (9.3) sometimes when you don't want ANYbody / I mean NObody to tell YOU WHAT to do // (9.4) basketball has a hoop // (9.5) you and the hoop / (9.6) MAN / that's CLASsic // (9.7) BUT / when you play your BROTHers / you stick to rules // (9.8) only when there's rules do SOMEbody win // (9.9) I don't care a whole lot about winning because it's a COOL game whether you win or lose // (9.10) SO / you got the BALL // (9.11) I play Wilson / (9.12) then the court // (9.13) let's see // I might play CEment or gravel or dirt // (9.14) it REALly doesn't matter // as long as YOU know where your lines are // (9.15) that's SIDElines / (9.16) you CAN'T go out them sidelines // (9.17) at the ends of the lines at the ends of the court hang the hoops / TEN feet up // (9.18) SO // after you got the ball and the hoop and the court / you need the PEOPLE // (9.19) basketball games have two team // (9.20) you got your FORwards / two of them // (9.21) you got two guard and a center / (9.22) the center / he's the TALLest and he stand around the basket // (9.23) you know / he REbounds // (9.24) the guard is the MASter of the dribble // (9.25) he moves you downcourt / (9.26) OR / you can pass // (9.27) when you SHOOT / you SCORE // (9.28) a game has a halftime // (9.29) and in the LOCKer-room / you can talk strategy // (9.30 YOU know / you talk about man-to-man or about zone DEfense

(10.1) I play basketball here in Gainesville. (10.2) I like to play all alone because than nobody bothers me. (10.3) but I like to play with people too. (10.4) When you play with people you got to have rules. (10.5) The rules are to stay in the lines. (10.6) The lines go around the court. (10.7) The court is about two time as long as its wide. (10.8) The next rule is that you cant foul the other guy. (10.9) You cant touch or hurt him. (10.10) Than the next rule is that you gotta shoot to get points. (10.11) you shoot the round ball thro the baskit. (10.12) I like to shoot the Wilson ball. (10.13) When you play ball you can play gaurd if you dribble. (10.14) You play center if you are a tall player and than you rebound. (10.15) You play forward if you shoot good. (10.16) A team has two guard, one center and two forward. (10.17) It don't matter if you play man to man or zone defense. (10.18) You get points when you shoot. (10.19) And you win when you score the most point before time.

The word count shows a typical curve, 91 words for (8), 228 for (9), and 174 for (10). By comparison, the averages for the whole group were: first version 102 words, second version 150 words, and third version 139 words. This curve shows the length of the written third version consistently moving up toward the length of the spoken version—an encouraging trend. Moreover, the longer versions showed an appreciably wider range of vocabulary.

The first version (8) is highly typical for basic writing: short, choppy sentences and a miscellaneous flow of topics without an evident plan or logic. Compared to the opening version (11) of a series on football we shall look at in a moment, the tone is positive, putting "fun" in the key end position of the opening sentence (8.1) and devoting a later sentence to the "easy" quality of "cruizing the ball" (8.7).

The active agent of (8) alternates between "I" and "you," closely but fuzzily identified with each other. In view of the way the later versions emphasize the student's fondness for playing basketball alone, the absence of the rest of the team in this first version seems significant. The writer's tactic for discovering and organizing content in (8) appears to have consisted in mentally taking up a position on the court and reviewing what would be visible: "ball" and "hoop" (8.2–4), "court (8.8), and the "lines" whose capacity to be "seen" is expressly commended (8.9–11). This approach through mental imagery reminded the writer of some amenities he has not always been "lucky" enough to have, such as "hoop," "net," and easily visible "lines."

Again typical for basic writing is the rough and episodic topic flow, whose key words are: "basketball - ball - hoop - court - lines - play - win." The opener announces the game and its goal, i.e., "fun" (8.1), the prerequisites are named (8.2–5), and the action of play commences abruptly (8.6). Instead of carrying the imaginary player through to the score, as did the original football text (11) shown below, the topic shifts over to "the court you are on" and thence to the "lines" circumscribing it. Then, we are just as abruptly returned to the play, now (finally) at the proper "start," which oddly is mentioned before the player has even "gone to your court" (8.12–13). The perspective next jumps from the single play to the whole "half," belatedly invokes the scoring move of "sinking a baskit," and ends with a monosyllabic adjuration to "win" (8.14–16).

The spoken version (9) is quite superior in involvement, concreteness, and organization. The student's enthusiasm is featured at greater length than in (8)—e.g., "SO good" (9.2), "CLASsic" (9.3), "COOL" (9.9)—and justified as an existential

compensation for situations in which you have somebody "telling YOU WHAT to do" (9.1–3). This justification is followed up with a somewhat philosophical observation, reminiscent of Rousseau or Thoreau, that "rules" are created only "when you play your BROTHers" and "SOMEbody" has to "win" (9.7–8). The writer's previously asserted enjoyment of playing alone is now logically linked to his "not caring a whole lot about winning because it's a COOL game whether you win or lose" (9.9). Personal involvement is also increased by stating his predilections regarding types of "ball" and "court" (9.11, 13).

The topic flow is another major change over version (8). The perspective of the opening statement suggests that the topic might be not just "basketball," but in the speaker's solitary enjoyment of it. This statement naturally calls for explanation since the game is supposed to be played by whole teams. The explanation indicates, as we saw, a personal ratiocination about the organization of society versus sports.

Then comes an unmediated topic shift, using the conversational transition marker "SO," over to the ordinary requirements like "ball," "court," and "hoops" (9.10–18) with greater experiential detail than in version (8), e.g., the stipulation of the "hoop" being "at the ends of the court" and "TEN feet up" (9.17). Having gathered up these requirements, the speaker now moves on to the "teams" and the players' positions, all of which rated no mention in version (8). The enumeration moves from the front players ("FORwards") toward the "center," who stands out by height and location (9.20–23). Rather like the basketball itself, the perspective is rapidly passed from player to player, so that it is not clear who the "you" might be (9.25–27), unless it covers the team as a whole. The portrayal concludes not at the end of the game, but at "halftime," thus getting the "you" into "the LOCKer-room" to "talk strategy," such as "man-to-man" or "zone DEfense" (9.28–30).

The third version was noticeably influenced by the interposed spoken version, but developed a somewhat different organization. Concrete details are added again, e.g., "the court is about two time as long as its wide" (10.7) and "you cant foul the other guy" by "touching or hurting him" (10.8–9).

The topic flow is better controlled as well. "Playing basketball" is announced as the topic proper in a sentence of its own, and the "playing all alone" is reserved for the second sentence and thus made to seem less topical than it did in (9). The justification for this solitary preference is rendered again, but in a sufficiently different style from the spoken version as to suggest that the student has some sense of overall conventions of writing; compare: "you don't

want ANYbody / I mean NObody to tell YOU WHAT to do" (9.3) versus "nobody bothers me" (10.2); or "when you play your BROTHers / you stick to rules" (9.7) versus "When you play with people you got to have rules" (10.4). The philosophical rumination is more terse here, however.

The "rules" are used now as a strategic topic for grouping together the "lines," the "fouling," and the "shooting," each being presented as one instance of a "rule" (10.5–10). Since the content of these instances is not parallel, the grouping is a trifle bumpy, but nonetheless reveals a feeling for the need to make the statement sequence more coherent than it was in the spoken version. By placing the "shooting" at the end of the list, the writer leads up to the high point and can dilate upon it to bring in the significance of the "basket" and his preference for one brand of "ball" (10.11–12), which had previously been situated among general conditions before play started (9.4–5, 10–11).

The next topic grouping is the team and its members, where consolidation and parallelism have once more been improved over version (9). Now, the "you" is the common agent who may, if meeting the respective stated qualifications, "play" either "guard," "center," or "forward" (10.13–15). Only after this parallel listing is the team totaled up and its positions counted (10.16). The writer brings in the issue of "man to man or zone defense" as an aspect of "play" (10.17) instead of as a subject for "talk" in "the locker room" (9.29–30), and thus ends up still on the field, citing the accumulation of "points" and the "winning" at the final "time." Thus, the end of the text coincides with the end and goal of the game, yielding the kind of convergence that (to expropriate a phrase from Frank Kermode) promotes "the sense of an ending."

The evolution was still more significant in this set of three versions:

> (11.1) Football is a real easy game to watch but a hard to play because you get beat up but its more harder because the rules are hard. (11.2) Furst off you needd a place to play and a ball. (11.3) And some people. (11.4) Then you line up. (11.5) Then the quarterback snap to his man. (11.6) If You read your man thats hard. (11.7) If your man catch the ball you can score. (11.8) You can run the ball to. (11.9) But the quarter back he has lots of plays. (11.10) You score and the other guys get the ball. (11.11) You need elven guys. (11.12) And the same thing again. (11.13) You gotta get points to win football.
>
> (12.1) football's NOT hard to play // (12.2) you get a BALL

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/ (12.3) the ball is brown (12.4) // THEN / you gotta get enough PEOple to PLAY // (12.5) SO / you gotta get eleven strong MEN / (12.6) they make ONE team / (12.7) you have TWO team // (12.8) THEN / you throw a QUARter to see who play the ball / (12.9) heads or tails / YOU pick // (12.10) you start at the FIFty-yard line // (12.11) THERE / you line up you face your man // (12.12) SO AFter you line up / you GOTta get a PLAY // (12.13) you pass OR you run // (12.14) BUT / you GOTta be GOOD cause you're going to the OTHer end of the GREEN // (12.15) WHEN you CROSS it / you get the GLOry // (12.16) that what my HIGH school coach CALL points / GLOry // (12.17) they're the GOLD / or whatEVer YOU want // (12.18) BUT / FIRST / you GOTta get to the END zone // (12.19) make SURE you got a good KICKer / a real dependable foot // (12.20) ANYway / AFter you line up / the FUN parts start // (12.21) on DEfense / you got TACKlers / CORnerbacks / end / free-safety / and backers // (12.22) they're ALL big TROUble // (12.23) on OFfense / THEY got the ball / (12.24) THEY got the quarterback // (12.25) he call the play // (12.26) sometimes // he be a BOMBer or a SHORT-yard passer // (12.27) you got HIM / you got ENDS / guards (12.28) // THEN / you got the quarterback // (12.29) he called the CENter / (12.30) he the BIG man // (12.31) you got backs on DEfense // and you got TACKles (12.32) / EVERYbody's got a job to do // (12.33) AND / if YOU do YOUR job / YOU / win the game // (12.34) STILL you don't ALways win // (12.35) BUT / it's ALways fun to play football

(13.1) Glory is what you want in football. (13.2) Thats what you get when you cross the endzone and score. (13.3) You furst need elven guys. (13.4) And you line them up on the line. (13.5) You need two team. (13.6) Furst you need one team that got tacklers, cornerbacks, ends, freesafety and backs. (13.7) There defense. (13.8) Next you got the other team. (13.9) On the other team you need ends, gaurds, and one big center. (13.10) That team play offense. (13.11) But most important on offense you got the quarterback. (13.12) He be the one who throw the ball. (13.13) He hand off the ball to. (13.14) You see the offense is the ones that got the ball. (13.15) Only the team who got the ball can score. (13.16) You score when you cross the endzone like for a touchdown. (13.17) You score to when you kick a feild goal. (13.18) Thats the glory, the score.

The differences in length were again typical for our whole group:

a short written first version (108 words), a long spoken second version (244 words), and a written third version falling in between (140 words).

The greater length of version (12) over version (11) is accounted for partly by a wealth of added details: a "brown" ball (12.3), "strong MEN" (12.5), "the FIFty-yard line" (12.10), "TACKlers / CORnerbacks / end / free-safety / and backers" (12.21), "a BOMBer or a SHORT-yard passer" (12.26), "ENDS / guards" (12.27), and so forth. This enrichment of concrete detail is all the more marked in view of some rather empty stretches in version (11), such as "And some people" (11.3) or "And the same thing again" (11.13) (presumably meaning eleven more players), plus the wordy pessimistic opening about how "hard" the game is (11.1). Version (12) opens with an optimistic reversal by proclaiming that "football's NOT hard to play" (12.1).

The rise in length also reflects increased involvement, witness the expressions conveying immediate experience and personal viewpoint: "THEN / you throw a QUARter to see who play the ball, heads OR tails" (12.8–9); "THERE / you line up you face your man" (12.11); "You GOTta be GOOD cause you're going to the OTHer end of the GREEN" (12.14); "WHEN you CROSS it / you get the GLORy" (12.15), "my HIGH school coach" (12.16), "make SURE you got a good KICKer / a real dependable foot" (12.19), "the FUN parts start" (12.20), "they're ALL big TROUble" (12.22), and "it's ALways fun to play" (12.35). This increase, which we observed in the texts of several other students as well, suggests that the students were somewhat uncomfortable about reporting or displaying their feelings in the first writing situation, but more at ease when speaking about the same topic. We need to investigate in more detail how far personal expression is systematically discouraged by the standard school writing instruction with its unrelenting emphasis on "formal styles" and its straitlaced avoidance of "opinion and emotion" as well as the first and second person.

The flow of topics was fairly jerky and miscellaneous in the first version (11). The flow opened with the "hardness" of the "game" and its "rules," cited "place," "ball," and "people" in vague terms, and "then" went to the "line up" (11.1–4). In the play itself, the perspective of the active agent vacillated confusingly among "quarterback," "his man," "you," "your man," and "the other guys" (11.5–10). The number of players and teams followed as an obvious afterthought (11.11–12), and the ending capped a series of statements (11.1, 2, 3, 13) that would apply to many games, not just to football.

The topic flow of (12) is far smoother and more coherent. The

flow opens with the claim that the "game" is "not hard" after all (12.1), cites the ball and the people in more concrete terms "brown," "strong" (12.2–5), and puts the number of players and teams in a logical place (12.5–7) before starting the action moving. The speaker evokes the toss of the coin, the exact location of the "line-up," and the "play" (12.8–12). This time, the agent focus is consistently placed on "you," zeroing in from your whole team (12.10–12) to the individual player (12.13–15), who successfully completes a touchdown. "Your man" is reserved this time for one of the opposite team (12.11), and the confusion of agents is gone. Version (12) then sticks to the point by naming a "dependable foot" as a requirement (12.19)—the only passage suggesting how the game got its name. We then flash back to the "line up" and the "fun parts" just about to "start," thereby getting the teams back into the handiest array for naming the types of players, of whom only the "quarterback" had been mentioned at all in version (11). Some of them are introduced along with helpful comments about what they are or do. The repetition of "quarterback" in (12.28) was apparently needed to define him further as "the CENter" and "the BIG man" (12.29–30). The "DEfense" gets less focus and development than does the "OFfense" (12.21–31), probably because the latter viewpoint applied to the "you" who dominated the "play" (12.12–18). The flow then goes fairly logically from the players to their respective "jobs," whose well "done" performance leads to "winning the game" (12.32–33). The final point of having "fun" even without "winning" (12.34–35) has no correlate in the written versions, and, as did samples (2), (7), and (9), again suggests the higher enthusiasm we might expect from spontaneous speaking over writing.

The third version (13) follows (12) more than (11) in its presentation of details, such as: "tacklers, cornerbacks, ends, freesafety and backs" on "defense" (13.6–7), "ends, gaurds, and one big center" on "offense" (13.9–10), and "You score when you cross the endzone" (13.2, 16). The "score" for "kicking a feild goal" (13.17) is mentioned for the first time. One important statement indicating involvement has not only been preserved from the spoken version (12.15–16), but given new prominence by occupying the strategic initial and final positions: "Glory is what you want" (13.1), and "Thats the glory" (13.18). The trend among the three versions thus runs from the pessimistic tone of (11) that opened with players "getting beat up" and with "rules" making the game so "hard" (11.1), to the more optimistic tone of (12) with the game being "not hard" and "fun" even without "winning" (12.1, 34–35), to this peak of optimism with "glory" first and last.

The topic flow of (13) also differs from that of (11) and (12). Placed in lead position, "glory" attains topic status and leads naturally into the action of "scoring." The flow shifts back to the prerequisites "you furst need" (13.3). This time, the topic proceeds from the occasion of "lining up" and embarks directly on the players and positions of the two teams. Now, an attempt is made to even out the coverages of "defense" and "offense" by making them partly parallel (13.6–11). This sequencing, without skipping from "DEfense" to "OFfense" and back (12.21–31), prepares the way for zeroing in on "the most important" person in running the play and getting the "score" (13.11–15). The strategic nature of this arrangement is especially clear: unlike (11) and (12), version (13) ends on the highest note and ties the end back to the beginning—both hallmarks of well-written prose on more advanced levels.

Undeniably, the written third version (13) is superior in organization and flow both to (11) and (12), and at a degree of subtlety and strategy one might well not expect from a basic writer. The intervening speaking session clearly had a positive effect on the evolution of the text in terms of fluency, involvement, and concrete detail, but the subsequent writing went considerably further in terms of far more sophisticated aspects than the "mechanics" so often drilled in basic writing classwork. We see some hallmarks of good prose already emerging on rudimentary guises, even though the student was probably not aware of them as such.

All the students we looked at followed a similar pattern with regard to their sources. In each case, the written third version utilized material left out of the written first version but covered in the spoken version. More importantly, the flow of topic and the organization of ideas steadily improved. A conspicuous case in point was the strategic deployment of beginnings and endings, which was not fully managed until the third version. Psychologists, who have long known that beginnings and endings are privileged in many mental processes, have recently pointed to the role of these stretches of text for indicating the topic or plan of the discourse. This factor is patently more crucial for written texts than for spoken ones, and our basic writers examined here seem to have shown at least an intuitive appreciation of the difference despite their overall lack of standard writing experience. At least, I see no other way to explain why these basic writers so consistently picked different and more effective beginnings and endings for their third version than for their previous two versions. Further investigation should probe whether switching modes between speech and writing reliably

yields occasions to reconsider one's selection and relative focus of topics and viewpoints.

Conclusions

Although a pilot study with fifteen basic writers who happened to be excellent athletes allows no general conclusions, some interesting tendencies emerged. The interposed speaking session evidently had positive effects on the process of reworking the written paper. The students were apparently freed from the typical revision tactic of basic writers who cling slavishly to their originals. The versions increased not merely in length, fluency, and involvement—which we had predicted—but also in concrete detail and strategic organization of topic—which we had *not* predicted.

In this approach, the divergencies between speech and writing are not construed as a mere hindrance to instruction or an indicator of low intelligence or ability, but actively enlisted to encourage detachment from the first draft and to invest the learner's prior language skills. In the process, we can also refine our knowledge about speech skills by gathering more and more on-site data. In addition, detailed discourse analysis of the kind I have illustrated here brings home Halliday's point about the complexity of speech that has gone unappreciated for so long.

A reasonable next step might be to use such a technique on a regular basis for an entire experimental course in basic writing. If, as seems likely, it is not feasible for the instructor to prepare transcripts on a steady basis, the students could work in the third session by replaying their own tapes, provided such a tactic does not interfere with the outcome. We should also explore how far apart the sessions should be spaced, since intervals of a whole week would be too long for most curriculum frameworks.

A particularly difficult issue is how such a write-speak-write approach might be coordinated with more conventional work emphasizing mechanics. Because basic writers have usually been alienated by an overdose of such work with poor results, the potential benefits of a write-speak-write approach might be reduced if mechanics were stressed too early. A better option might be to proceed with write-speak-write alone for a time sufficient to encourage a shift in attitude and an increase in confidence. As word processors become higher-powered and generally available, much of mechanics, especially spelling, might well be dealt with through student-paced sessions using appropriate software.

How much time and effort will be needed to make a real difference for basic writers is an empirical issue widely misunder-

stood as an administrative or curricular issue. Empirical evidence indicates that the usual period of "remediation," typically one or two semesters, does not suffice; but the design of the remediation is, for reasons I have attempted to expound, often inappropriate to begin with. A further factor is the prospect that a change of approach to the teaching of basic writing in the elementary and secondary schools could greatly ease the problems we are now facing at the college level.

If we expect basic writers to change themselves, we need to change ourselves at least as dramatically. Writing teachers have long harbored a justified mistrust of theories and their conversion into practices, because theorists typically devoted too little realistic concern to the basic problems of writing. The trend toward socially relevant and participant-oriented models of discourse offers a welcome occasion for basic writing teachers to voice their problems and requirements. In return, they should be willing to reconsider their own entrenched assumptions about what the priorities and standards in general should be, and about the role and significance of errors in particular. Recent trends in these directions are already very encouraging.

The highest goal of theory and research about discourse should be *to support the human freedom of access to knowledge through discourse.*[10] This goal may sound unfamiliar and disturbing in view of the narrower and more abstract goals of past research, and the mechanical or puristic loyalties of past instruction. The inability to use writing for oneself and for others in pursuit of this goal remains a hindrance to freedom in "the free world" and everywhere else. We must therefore untiringly confront the tasks of change, affirming their enormous difficulty, but also their supreme urgency.

Notes

(Written by Robert de Beaugrande)

[1] This theme is retraced in the original works of prominent linguists in my latest book, *Linguistic Theory* (1991).

[2] See Allan Nairn's comprehensive and alarming scrutiny of the ETS as "the corporation that makes up minds," available through Ralph Nader, P.O. Box 19312, Washington, DC 20036.

[3] For an assessment of this advocacy by authorities like Maxine Hairston and Joe Williams, see my book on *Text Production.*

[4] Extensive references are provided in Chapter V of my *Text Production.* Unlike my book, Vachek's valuable deliberations were inspired not so

much by the politics of literacy and composition in the U.K. and the U.S. as by the perspective of a special Czechoslovakian "functional" brand of "structural descriptive linguistics" for which I provided an overview in my 1990 report to the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences, to be published shortly, under the title "The heritage of functional sentence perspective from the standpoint of text linguistics," in the new journal *Linguistica Pragiensa*. Preprints may be requested from me at Dept. of English, The University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

[5] I offer a comprehensive reading of Halliday's work in Ch. 9 of my new book on *Linguistic Theory*.

[6] I follow here the findings of a thorough survey conducted in Ghana by Joe Amoako, later my student at the University of Florida.

[7] In a recent interchange with Chomsky in issues 11.1 and 11.2 of the *Journal of Advanced Composition* (1991), I have undertaken to demonstrate in some detail the scientific incoherence and the self-centered intellectual debility of his engagement with language. I would consider it unwise that we try to apply it to basic writing, as Rei Noguchi suggested, quite apart from the problems its extravagant terminologizing would create for our students.

[8] These trends are surveyed in two recent papers of mine, once in the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* for 1990 and the other in the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*.

[9] I undertook to implement this approach in a student textbook *(Writing Step by Step)*. But the textbook was not specifically designed for the type of basic writers described by Mina Shaughnessy, even though I hoped it might be easier for them than the usual textbooks. I could not be more specific because I lacked a consistent population to work with. My university does not have a special track for basic writers, though studies at our Writing Center by Willa Wolcott and Dianne Buhr have called attention to the special attitudes of such students.

[10] A *New Introduction to the Study of Text and Discourse,* in preparation by Wolfgang Dressler and myself for Longman, pursues this prospect in detail.

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