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A persistent circumstance on the reading diagnosis scene is the isolated word list. It frequently functions as a screening test and a source of diagnostic information. Its use is widespread and continuous, perhaps because it is fast, convenient, available, and appears to require little skill to administer. Late findings from the descriptive science of linguistics have been translated into criteria for assessing the tactics, tools and materials of reading pedagogy (Goodman, Olsen, Colvin & Vanderlinde, 1966). Application of linguistic criteria to the practice of assessing reading performance via word recognition tests using a list of isolated words is in order. The resulting conclusions bear close examination by reading teachers, clinicians, and consultants involved in devising, using, and interpreting testing strategies.

A word about testing strategies is appropriate. Word lists, quite properly, are included in most eclectic attempts to comprehensively assess reading. As one item in an array of test tactics, a word recognition test using a list of isolated words can function as a valuable source of information. The immediate clues from the child's responses can help solve problems of structural word analysis, phoneme-grapheme associations, configuration, dictionary skills, letter discrimination, sequence, attention, vision, and a host of other areas. The list of isolated words is not to be denied as a valuable component in a test battery. The concern of this paper is not with the application of linguistic criteria to a total test battery including oral and silent paragraph reading, and perceptual tests; rather it is with the practice of assessment based solely upon a word recognition test using an isolated word list.

Few persons in elementary school settings have experiences which do not bear out the following hypothetical sequence of events. A comprehensive test strategy exists. A word list is a component. A situation arises wherein a large number of students must be assessed in a short time. Limited time, limited personnel, and limited diagnostic skill of some of the personnel become foremost considerations. Choices appear to be necessary. An attempt to economize leads to devising a skeletal test battery made up of the less time consuming components of the comprehensive test strategy. High on the list of quick, easy to administer, conveniently available inclusions in the skeletal test strategy is the word list to be used as a word recognition test. Among the early exclusions is the paragraph reading test because of the time and skill required to administer it. Under the press of time, further exclusions appear appropriate but still, the word recognition test in the form of an isolated word list persists. As a hurried round of administrative meetings draws to a close, the skeletal test strategy frequently turns out to be an isolated word list functioning as a word recognition test. Obviously, considerations of expediency overshadow linguistic features of assessment of a strategy in the situation described.

Given the circumstances by which the use of a list of isolated words occurs, the procedures of administration of the test tactic invite examination. Usually, a word is flashed to the child using either a tachistoscope, cover cards, or flash cards. During a flash, the child may view the word for a fraction of a second. He is then expected to respond by saying the word. His response is recorded. If he responds in a way that does not meet the expectation of the tester, it is general practice to let the child view the word in an untimed manner. In the flash situation, the tester is seeking what has been called sight word recognition. In the untimed situation, it has been said that word analysis skills are being assessed. In both situations, the tester records the responses and computes a percentage of words responded to according to expectation. Interpretation of the percentages varies. Often percentages used with paragraph oral reading tests are applied.

The assumption is made that a strong relationship exists between running words and words in a list (Botel, M., 1969). Usually, about ninety-five percent or above accurate word recognition is considered mastery while something below ninety percent suggests extreme difficulties.

Authorities have dignified the use of lists of unrelated words by suggesting that it is one way of avoiding the contamination of contextual information. This position holds that the use of context can be an oral reading error (A. Harris, 1970, p. 173), and that an accurate appraisal of word recognition requires the use of words in isolation. Application of linguistic criteria to the position suggests the possibility of controversy.

Summarizing to this point for the purpose of focusing linguistic criteria upon the practice of using isolated word lists as word recognition tests to assess reading ability, the following is pertinent. The practice is widespread. Authorities foster it. Although it is proposed as a component of comprehensive tests strategies, it can become the sole testing device in the interest of administrative expediency. These facts invite interpretation in the light of linguistic criteria. Linguistic principles bearing upon the reading process are summarized in *Choosing Materials to Teach Reading* (Goodman, K. et al., 1966). These principles serve as the basis for generating questions which function as linguistic criteria. The isolated word recognition test is the object of each criterion question thus producing an attempt to apply linguistic criteria for validating reading materials to a testing procedure.

Criterion Question	*Response to Criterion Question*
1. Is the test accompanied by a stated viewpoint on language?	No. Frequently, the word lists, instructions for exposing words, and percentages in relation to instructional reading level are all that is provided for the teacher or clinician who is to administer the test. Essentially *no* language information is offered other than that which is implicit in the construction of the word list and can be gained by examining the word list.
2. Is the viewpoint on language consistent with the purposes of the test?	No. Operationally, an instructional level involves running words. The use of isolated words to assess such a level is inconsistent. Further, the word list used for testing is often not the same as the word list upon which the student's basal reader is structured.

3. **Does the linguistic viewpoint of the test reflect late, comprehensive conclusions derived via scientific method?**

No. The answers to questions 1 and 2 preclude this as even a remote possibility. Late linguistic findings appear to emphasize semantic and syntactic considerations (Wardhaugh, R., 1969).

4. **Are phonemes presented in the test treated as categories of sounds which vary, but not enough to interfere with understanding the language?**

No. Great inconsistency exists here. Testers' expectations vary since each tester speaks a subdialect. This is one reason why "informal" precedes the title of many word recognition tests. Further, testers vary in experience. Someone enamored with phonics may have significantly different expectations than a word configuration buff.

5. **Are phonemes contextually couched in the test?**

Yes, to the extent that the expectation is that a child will pronounce the entire word, the context that the word itself provides is in play.

No, to the extent that the context that is usually available in a phrase or statement, the conventional context of spoken or written language, is not available.

6. **Are both regularities and irregularities involving phonemic generalizations treated in the test?**

Yes. Most word list tests are random samples of the words in basal readers which contain some words of regular and irregular spelling pattern. However, the inconsistencies of expectations of the tester come into play.

7. **Are graphemes in the test treated as categories of written symbols which vary? (i.e. A, a, $\underline{A}$, $\underline{a}$)**

Yes. Most word lists contain some proper names requiring capitalization, but a consistent approach is not available.

8. **Are single graphemes treated as representing several different phonemes in the test? (i.e. "s" as in sure, since, etc., K. Goodman et al., 1966, p. 95)**

Yes. Most word lists by virtue of the randomizing techniques, include this factor in an uncontrolled fashion.

9. **Are single phonemes treated as corresponding to several graphemes in the test? (i.e. "oo" as in too, do, you, and flue etc., K. Goodman, et al., 1966, p. 98)**

Yes. (same as 8)

10. **Are words predominantly treated in context?**

No. The technique of isolation precludes this as even a remote possibility.

11. Are lexical meanings treated as conventional ranges of possible meanings, and full meanings treated as a function of context in the test?

No. (same as 10)

12. Does the test include contractions presented according to generalized conventions of spoken language?

No. Word lists generally reflect basal reader word lists, and contractions are conspicuously absent from most beginning levels of basal reader word lists. Contractions are usually integral parts of conventional spoken language. The lists do not reflect generalized conventions of spoken language in relation to contractions.

13. Does the test treat inflections in early reading levels?

No. (similar to 12)

14. Are derivational suffixes treated in early reading levels in the test?

No. (similar to 12)

15. Is the syntax of the test similar to the child's spoken language?

No. (similar to 12)

16. Is the syntax that is unusual avoided in the test materials for early reading levels?

No. The isolated word list presents a most unusual syntactical form.

17. Does the treatment of fillers in the test proceed from simple to complex according to oral language patterns?

No. Fillers are not treated.

18. Does the treatment of syntactical structure in the test proceed from the usual to the unusual as reading levels increase?

No. Syntactical structure is uniformly unusual.

19. Does the frequency of syntactical structures parallel oral language development in the test?

No. No attempt to relate syntactical structures to the assessment of reading is made.

20. Are confusing syntactic relationships excluded from the test?

No. Ambiguities are persistently and conspicuously present due to the lack of context.

21. Are function words in the test contextually couched?

No. Context is not available.

22. Are syntactic cues treated as a major system of word recognition in the test?

No. Syntactic cues are not available.

23. Is the relationship established between punctuation marks and intonation in the test?

No. Intonation is a function of context and context is absent.

24. Is the intonation in the test treated as it functions in oral language?

No. Saying a word in isolation is not typical.

25. Is the intonation in the test treated as a system of cues for word recognition?

No. The intonation cues would be a function of language. A word list is not conventional language.

26. Are the problems of dialect treated in the test?

No. Deviance from the expectation of the tester is treated as error whether the difference is due to dialect or not.

27. Does the test treat transformations as signals that aural encoding has occurred?

No. A transformation is treated as just another error.

28. Are transformations not treated as errors in the test?

No. (similar to 27)

29. Does the test treat the child's language as a signal that a complex and most difficult step has been taken toward intellectual development?

No. Language is not the same as a list of unrelated words.

30. Is the child's language treated as a tool to strengthen self concept in the test?

No. (similar to 29)

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31. Are arbitrary standards of English avoided in the test?

No. The expectations of the tester are specific and arbitrary.

32. Is effectiveness of communication used as a measure of usage in the test?

No. Communication only plays a part when directions are given and understood or not understood.

33. Are varied forms of dialect treated or accommodated by the test?

No. (see 26)

34. Are the redundant clues of oral language extensively available in the test?

No. The redundancies of language depend upon context which is absent in the isolated word list.

35. Are skills treated as both ends and means within the structure and function of the test?

Yes. Isolated word recognition lists are functioning as an end in that the objective is implicit that the child is expected to be able to say each word. As a means, the lists are used for assessment and as a curriculum schedule of rather limited content.

36. Are pictures included in the test as signs or cues at early levels?

No. Usually pictures do not accompany testing for word recognition using isolated word lists.

37. Does meaning function in the testing tactic?

No. The fact that the words are unrelated precludes meaning as a functional part of the test procedure.

38. Does the testing tactic function within the range of experience of the testee?

No, except to the extent that many children have experienced this type of tactic and have become sophisticated about the expectations of the tester.

Yes, to the extent that environmental context is operating.

39. Is the oral language of the child functioning within the test structure?

No. Children generally do not speak long lists of isolated words to anyone.

40. Are developmental language considerations reflected in the use of the test?

No. (similar to 12)

41. Does the testing tactic aid the tester in assessing the language development of the child?

No. The testing situation itself probably inhibits language as it functions as part of the environmental context of the words on the list.

42. Is the prior language knowledge of the learner brought to bear upon the assessment by using the test?

No, except to the extent that the directions for participating in the test are functioning.

43. Is a comprehensive, developmental model of the reading process reflected in the assessment by using the test?

No. The model implied is the grapheme-phoneme and sight word combination. This model is not comprehensive in that syntactic and semantic considerations are absent. It is developmental, but only according to the word lists of the basal readers which reflect a stilted language quite different from spoken language development. Further, the model is only implied. It is not generally available in presentations of test material. It remains for a tester to seek out the presuppositions about the reading process which underlie the test tactic.

Responses to the linquistically based criterion questions are predominantly negative. Most of the linguistic inadequacies of using isolated lists of unrelated words as word recognition tests stem from a lack of context. Pronounceable groups of phonemes are not language. Contextual meaning is absent. In addition, lexical meaning plays little or no part in the testing strategy. Hence, a limited view of language is operating as a presupposition. This conclusion is based upon the position that language and reading are inseparable.

It must be noted that linguistic criteria are not the only factors to be considered in selecting testing tactics. Of extreme importance is how the information gained from the test will be used. For instance, if a rigid structure of grouping students into separate classes is to result from the testing, the expedient word list tactic is highly inappropriate. Too many administrative difficulties arise in attempting to remain flexible about placing students in classes and rooms, particularly in upper grades. Alternatively, if a teacher in a self contained classroom is seeking a preliminary grouping, and the classroom organization is structured for flexibility, and beginning tactic is part of the larger, diagnostic teaching procedure. Hence, the procedure and the results of it are neither permanent nor in isolation. The total situation requires appraisal, and linguistic criteria has been omitted more often than not in practice to date. It is hoped that this attempt to apply linguistic criteria to an actual situation of frequent and widespread occurrence will stand at once as an invitation to criticism, and an encouragement to further use linguistic criteria for the improvement of practice in the routines of school.

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PROMISING USES
OF THE i.t.a. MEDIUM
IN BRITAIN AND MICHIGAN

better, developed more imaginative story lines and generally showed more original and flexible use of the words they selected. Taken away from our passive acceptance mode and placed in one demanding participation, children clearly demonstrated the superiority of one over the other." ("i.t.a.: A review and an assessment" *Occasional Paper* – available from Oakland Schools, Pontiac.)

Conclusion

British teachers and Michigan teachers have tried i.t.a. independently, and confirmed each other's experiences. They agree with the teacher interviewed by Vera Southgate, who quotes her as saying:

"I have accepted i.t.a. so happily that I just cannot imagine teaching infants without it now. I am absolutely in favour of it. I only wish all schools would use it."

Vera Southgate comments:

"This last opinion was expressed by many teachers who approved of i.t.a. They felt sorry for children in other schools who did not have the advantage of i.t.a. and could not think why other schools were taking so long to change over from T.O."

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