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LOCATING THE LANGUAGE ERRORS OF CHILDREN

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We were shown a number of years ago that children who have studied formal grammar do not write any better or interpret literature any better than children who have not studied formal, technical grammar.¹ We have also been taught that formal English grammar is ineffectual as a discipline.² However, the time schedule for language and grammar in the public schools has remained about the same. In fact there has been a tendency in recent years to extend the time schedule, particularly in the lower grades. This has been accompanied by the effort to find a better type of work than the old formal grammar. The better type of work, for the most part, has consisted of oral and written composition on a motivated basis, and more recently of specific work designed to correct the language errors of children. So far as the author knows, the first effort to list the language errors of grade pupils was that of the teachers in the schools at Connersville, Indiana, who noted the errors of grade- and high-school pupils through a period of two weeks, a total of seventy-nine different errors being reported.³ Since that time a number of such studies have been made. The Boise study, reported in the special report of the public schools of Boise, June, 1915, followed in detail the Connersville plan and shows strikingly similar findings. The Kansas City study under the direction of Dr. Charters included written as well as oral language errors of children. The oral mistakes noted in Kansas City showed a situation almost identical

¹ Franklin S. Hoyt, "Studies in the Teaching of English Grammar," *Teachers College Record*, November, 1906.

² Thomas H. Briggs, "Formal English Grammar as a Discipline," *Teachers College Record*, September, 1913.

³ G. M. Wilson, "Errors in Language of Grade Pupils," *Educator-Journal*, December, 1909.

with that discovered in Connersville and Boise. The Cincinnati study of the common mistakes in pupils' oral and written English as reported in the *Elementary School Journal*¹ was in some respects a more thorough study than any of the preceding ones and resulted in considerably extending the list of pupils' mistakes.

The particular purpose of the present article is to note the most common errors of the pupils as shown by all of these studies and to show that a survey in a small city conducted for but a short period of time will furnish most valuable data on which to base an important phase of the language work, namely, the correction of language mistakes made by the children. The table here presented shows the language errors noted in the Connersville study, followed by a list of any additional errors reported for each of the succeeding studies for which data are available. It will be observed that in addition to those of Connersville, Kansas City, Boise, and Cincinnati, a list of errors noted in the Iowa consolidated schools is included. This was the result of the scoring of 1 854 compositions of pupils in a number of consolidated schools.

LANGUAGE ERRORS NOTED IN THE CONNERSVILLE STUDY²

1. <i>Aint.</i>	K B (C)	12. You <i>can</i> go (for may).	C K B (C)
2. <i>All</i> of us took an apple.		13. <i>Ceiches.</i>	C B (C)
3. All of us took <i>an</i> apple.		14. He <i>clum</i> the tree.	C K (C)
4. <i>And</i> , and, etc. (redundant).	C	15. He <i>come</i> (for came).	C K B (C)
5. He <i>are</i> here.	C	16. I'm <i>comin'</i> .	C B (C)
6. Where is he <i>at</i> ?	B (C)	17. I have <i>did</i> my best.	C K B (C)
7. It is <i>awful</i> hot.	C (C)	18. They <i>does</i> well.	
8. He did it that <i>away</i> .		19. He <i>done</i> it.	C K B (C)
9. He <i>begin</i> it (for began).	C B	20. <i>Don't hardly</i> (double negative).	K B
10. He begun it.	(C)	21. <i>Don't haveno</i> (double negative).	
11. The wind <i>blowed</i> fiercely.	(C)	<i>Haven't no.</i>	C K B (C)
		22. He <i>don't</i> know it.	K (C)
		23. He nearly <i>drowneded</i> .	

¹ Isabel Sears and Amelia Diebel, "A Study of the Common Mistakes in Pupils' Oral English," *Elementary School Journal*, September, 1916.

² The letters to the right mean: C = Consolidated Schools; K = Kansas City; B = Boise; (C) = Cincinnati.

24. I *dunno*.
 25. 'em for them.
 26. *Et* for ate. (C)
 27. He *give* me one. C K B (C)
 28. *Git*. C B (C)
 29. Yes, I'm *goin'*. C (C)
 30. I haven't *got* any. C K B (C)
 31. We *got* home (for arrived, etc.). C K (C)
 32. *Hain't*. C
 33. John *he* did it. C K B (C)
 34. *Her* did it.
 35. It was *her*. C K
 36. It was *him*. C K
 37. *Him* and I will go. (C)
 38. He did it *hissself*. K (C)
 39. I don't mind *him* going. C K (C)
 40. She told Doris and *I*. C K (C)
 41. They *is*, or *was*. C (C)
 42. *Kin* for can. (C)
 43. I *knowed* it. C (C)
 44. He *learned* me to do it. C K B (C)
 45. She *loves* peaches (for like).
 46. *Me* and *him* did it. C K B
 47. *Me* and you did it. C
 48. You are taller than *me*.
 49. It was *me*. K (C)
 50. *Misses* Fair (for Miss).
 51. He picked it up *on* the walk.
 52. *Onct* for once. C (C)
 53. Neither this *or* that is correct.
54. *Oxens*.
 55. This is *pretty near* (nearly) right. C
 56. The bell has *rang*. C K B
 57. It is *real good* (for very). C
 58. Have *rode*. C
 59. It *run*. C K B (C)
 60. He *rung* the bell. C K B (C)
 61. He kept *runnin'*. C B
 62. I have *saw*. C K B (C)
 63. I *seen*. C K B (C)
 64. It *seems like* I should know you. K B
 65. *Shall* you do it? (for will). C K B
 66. He *sit* there until dark (for sat). C K B (C)
 67. I *sung* at the club yesterday. K
 68. Each one studied *their* lesson. C K (C)
 69. *Them* apples are fine. C K B (C)
 70. It was *them* (for they).
 71. I like *those kind* of apples.
 72. He *throwed* it. (C)
 73. If there *was* (for were). C K (C)
 74. You *was*. K
 75. She has *went*. C B (C)
 76. To *who* did you sent it.
 77. *Who* did you meet?
 78. They *wuz*.
 79. Is this *yourn*?

LANGUAGE ERRORS ADDED BY THE KANSAS CITY STUDY (ORAL)

1. He *ask* me (for asked). C B
 2. *Attacked*.
 3. *Baddest*. C
 4. *Beautifuler*.
 5. *Done got*. C
 6. Drink (confusion past tense and past participle).

- | | | | |
|---|---------|--|---------|
| 7. <i>Had</i> ought. | B | 14. She is the <i>tallest</i> (of two). | C |
| 8. <i>Joyfulest</i> . | | 15. That <i>there</i> book. | |
| 9. Lie and lay (confusion). | C B (C) | 16. <i>Us</i> girls went. | C |
| 10. <i>More</i> better. | (C) | 17. The problem <i>what</i> is assigned. | |
| 11. He only went two miles (misplaced). | C | 18. <i>Went and did</i> it. | C B (C) |
| 12. He looked up <i>quick</i> . | (C) | 19. <i>Worser</i> . | C (C) |
| 13. I <i>taken</i> some. | C (C) | | |

LANGUAGE ERRORS ADDED BY THE KANSAS CITY STUDY (WRITTEN)

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--|---------|
| 1. An, and. | C | 12. Road, rode (confusion). | |
| 2. You all (one person). | C (C) | 13. The, they, there (confusion). | C (C) |
| 3. Are, our, or. | | 14. There, their (confusion). | C |
| 4. They <i>drug</i> the road. | | 15. Then, than (confusion). | |
| 5. Fore, four, for (confusion). | C | 16. To, too, two (confusion, possibly spelling). | C B |
| 6. Have, half (confusion). | C | 17. Threw, through (confusion). | C |
| 7. Hear, here (confusion). | | 18. Where, were (confusion). | |
| 8. Lose, loss, loose (confusion). | | 19. Introductory <i>why</i> . | C B (C) |
| 9. New, knew (confusion). | C | 20. Your, you're (confusion). | |
| 10. No, know (confusion). | C | | |
| 11. Of, off (confusion). | C (C) | | |

LANGUAGE ERRORS ADDED BY THE BOISE STUDY

- | | | | |
|---|-------|--|-------|
| 1. The four boys divided it <i>between them</i> . | | 9. <i>Mad</i> for angry. | |
| 2. Break (past tense and past participle). | (C) | 10. Sequences of tenses. | |
| 3. <i>Fur</i> , for far. | | 11. <i>Take</i> (past tense and past participle). He has <i>took</i> . | C (C) |
| 4. I didn't <i>go to</i> do it (intend to). | | 12. <i>Theirselves</i> | |
| 5. I <i>guess</i> so (for think). | | 13. Introductory, well, now, so. C | |
| 6. He went <i>in</i> the house (for into). | C | 14. <i>What for</i> did you do it? | |
| 7. I <i>kind of</i> thought so. | | 15. <i>Without</i> I go, etc. (for unless). | |
| 8. <i>Lots</i> for many or much. | C (C) | 16. Write (past tense and past participle). He has <i>wrote</i> . | |

LANGUAGE ERRORS ADDED BY THE IOWA CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS STUDY

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>A</i> for an. | 4. Ate <i>up</i> . |
| 2. <i>Along with</i> for with. | 5. <i>Bild</i> for build (spelling). |
| 3. <i>Always</i> . | 6. <i>Best</i> for better. |

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 7. Blue, blew. | 23. <i>Pan full of.</i> |
| 8. <i>By</i> for buy (spelling). | 24. <i>Put</i> for but. |
| 9. <i>Came</i> for became. | 25. <i>Raining</i> for rainy (participle for adverb). |
| 10. <i>Eat</i> for ate. | 26. <i>Round</i> for around. |
| 11. <i>Every</i> for very. | 27. Scart for scared. (C) |
| 12. <i>Fetch.</i> | 28. Introductory <i>then.</i> |
| 13. <i>Got done.</i> | 29. <i>Then</i> for than. |
| 14. <i>Has never</i> yet. (C) | 30. There (superfluous). |
| 15. <i>Has</i> for had. | 31. <i>They sows.</i> |
| 16. <i>Has</i> for was. | 32. Tolled for told (spelling). |
| 17. <i>Have</i> drove. | 33. <i>Until</i> for when. |
| 18. <i>Like</i> for as. | 34. <i>Up to</i> instead of at or in. |
| 19. Nice. | 35. We <i>best</i> take. |
| 20. <i>On</i> for one. | 36. <i>Went</i> for when. |
| 21. <i>Only</i> for except. | 37. <i>Would</i> for could. |
| 22. <i>Out of</i> for from. | |

LANGUAGE ERRORS ADDED BY THE CINCINNATI STUDY

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Boughten, taken.</i> | 18. <i>Make</i> dinner (for prepare or get). |
| 2. <i>Brung.</i> | 19. <i>Never</i> gave. |
| 3. <i>Busted.</i> | 20. Find fault of. |
| 4. <i>By</i> my aunt's. | 21. Perty, wich, wen, etc. (mispronounced). |
| 5. <i>By</i> us for near us. | 22. <i>Sawn</i> , for saw. |
| 6. Doing dishes and help cook. | 23. <i>Suspicion</i> for suspect. |
| 7. <i>Done</i> my work (sequence). | 24. <i>Says</i> , present for past. |
| 8. <i>Durst.</i> | 25. <i>Snuck.</i> |
| 9. <i>Good</i> for well. | 26. That <i>there.</i> |
| 10. <i>Gooder.</i> | 27. That, which (for who, whose). |
| 11. <i>Haf</i> (for have). | 28. <i>These there.</i> |
| 12. He says, <i>says</i> he. | 29. Stays <i>to</i> home, different <i>to.</i> |
| 13. That doesn't <i>hurt</i> (make any difference). | 30. <i>Upon</i> Monday. |
| 14. In back of. | 31. Would <i>run</i> for ran. |
| 15. Largest (of two). | 32. <i>Youse.</i> |
| 16. <i>Leave</i> , for let. | 33. I <i>have</i> stayed at home and <i>had.</i> |
| 17. <i>Lend</i> for borrow. | |

One surprising thing is that a short study of two weeks in a small city, Connersville, gave a very extensive and helpful list of pupil errors. The number of errors added by the large Kansas City study, while important, is not very great. Boise added only a few more. Quite a number were added by the Iowa consolidated school compositions but many of these are specific and would have

been included under the general heads of previous reports. It is apparent from an analysis of this composite list that the most common and doubtless the most fundamental errors were discovered in the first study and that practically all of these were likewise discovered in each of the later studies. A few items may be listed which, although not technically incorrect, are not good usage.

By summarizing these different studies, it is possible to determine with reasonable accuracy the few most common errors. The Connersville study showed that if the ten most common errors were corrected, 51 per cent of all oral language mistakes made by children would be eliminated. The list of errors which follows is made up by taking from each study referred to the ten most common errors reported in that study. The ten most common errors reported in Connersville are listed below as the first ten. Errors eleven to fourteen, inclusive, are the ones added in the first ten errors from the Boise study. Error fifteen is added by the oral errors from Kansas City. Errors sixteen to twenty are added by the written errors in Kansas City. Errors twenty-one to twenty-six are added by the consolidated school reports. Errors twenty-seven and twenty-eight are added by the Cincinnati study. These twenty-eight errors comprise all those included in the list of the ten most common errors reported in each of the studies noted, seventeen of them being supplied by the studies of oral errors and eleven by the lists of written errors reported from Kansas City and the Iowa consolidated schools. The numbers in parentheses at the right indicate the ten errors of most frequent occurrence when all these lists are combined.

TEN MOST COMMON MISTAKES FROM FIVE STUDIES

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Ain't, hain't. (1) | 9. Teach and learn (confusion). |
| 2. Saw and seen (confusion). (2) | 10. Can and may (confusion). (10) |
| 3. Plural subject with singular verb. (3) | 11. Do, did, and done. (4) |
| 4. Double negative. (5) | 12. "And" for "to" with infinitive. |
| 5. Have got. (8) | 13. Shall and will. (6) |
| 6. Come and came (confusion). (9) | 14. Go, went, gone. |
| 7. Git. | 15. Subject of verb not in nominative as: Her did it. |
| 8. Them and those (confusion). | 16. To, two, too (confusion). (7) |

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 17. There, their (confusion). | 23. Got for arrived, received, etc. |
| 18. Singular subject and plural verb. | 24. Introductory <i>then</i> . |
| 19. The, there, they (confusion). | 25. Is for are. |
| 20. An, and (confusion). | 26. A for an. |
| 21. And, and, and. | 27. I and my brother. |
| 22. Lots of. | 28. Frank and me in nominative case. |

The outstanding facts about all of these studies of language errors are:

1. The list is exceedingly small.
2. When the lower-grade list is made up carefully, few errors are added by upper-grade children.
3. Lower-grade errors persist in upper grades.
4. Verb errors constitute fully 50 per cent of all errors and among these a very few verbs make up most of the errors.
5. Errors are specific, which means that they are not made by rule and cannot be effectively corrected by rule.
6. Oral and written errors are largely the same except that in written work one new class of errors enters, namely, the confusion of words of similar sound.
7. There is a strong probability that if the effort is placed on the correction of mistakes actually made by children, improvement can be made very rapidly. The Boise authorities report "striking improvement in a short time," but no specific data are given.

Among the other studies of language errors that have been made, one catalogued a total of 10,000 errors and found that the thirteen most common ones constituted 48 per cent of all errors scored, while forty-three items made 82 per cent of the total scored. This report merely confirms the conclusion drawn from other studies to the effect that the total number of errors of common occurrence is relatively small. In consideration of this fact, is it not reasonable to ask a teacher or group of teachers to discover the common language errors made by pupils with the notion of correcting them through games, pride in correct speaking, and the necessary direct instruction?