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A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ORAL READING MISCUES
OF
STUDENTS AT TEACHERS' COLLEGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

by NOELA M. LEAMY

A Field Study Report submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education
in the Canberra College of Advanced Education.

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ABSTRACT

The Review of the Five Year Education Plan (1976-1980) carried out by the Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research (IASER, 1979) presented thoroughly researched, factual information regarding the standard of education in Papua New Guinea. The Review stated that there had been a decline in standards of education. It claimed that "there [was] the greatest need for a more highly skilled and dedicated professional group of teachers" (IASER, 1979:61) and that considerable dissatisfaction had been noted at community level because of the "reported evidence that many Grade 6 leavers [were] illiterate" (IASER, 1979:24).

Since English is the nationally prescribed language of instruction at all levels of education, the standard achieved in English is particularly important. It has been shown that the skills students have in the use of English "stand out as contributing most in overall academic prediction" (Ord, 1971:8). It is also claimed that a psycholinguistic analysis of oral reading miscues following the taxonomy of Goodman (1968, 1971, 1977) enables the researcher to examine the subject's total language competence and that such an analysis can reveal the degree of bilingualism achieved by second language learners (Allen, 1976). The purpose of this study was therefore, to examine the oral reading of a large sample of first-year students at Teachers' College in Papua New Guinea.

It was hypothesised that a pattern of strengths and weaknesses would emerge from the study of oral reading miscues (Goodman and
Burke, 1971). It was further hypothesised that an examination of the actual problems that were revealed by an analysis of the miscues would provide evidence to be used as the basis for recommendations to be formulated regarding the teaching of Reading in the Community Schools of Papua New Guinea and also regarding remedial and developmental emphases that might prove beneficial to students in the Teachers' Colleges.

On the basis of this research it would appear that students at College level do have "serious reading problems" (Price, 1973: 15) and that they are unable to read text judged to be College level with understanding. Students seemed to have achieved a certain degree of oral fluency in reading which could be the result of their skill in using the grapho-phonic and syntactic cueing systems. However, this fluency was found to cloak a lack of understanding of content. There was evidence that students achieved a relatively low level of comprehension when the readings contained concepts that were familiar; however, when the concepts contained in the passage were unfamiliar, the scores for Comprehension were significantly lower. During the retelling of passages read orally, students gave evidence of a relatively low level of facility in English expression. It was judged to be doubtful that in the period of their training those students could acquire the command of oral English considered indispensible for their profession in an education system where the English language is the medium of instruction.

The students tested were the products of the present national policy of education through English from Grade One. While changes regarding the optimum academic level of students
to be accepted into Teachers' Colleges, necessary inservicing of College Staff, appropriate Courses in Educational Psychology and English Language Method have been recommended, these can only be seen as remedial. In order to effect the desired change at the Teachers' College Level it would seem necessary to introduce change at the level of the Community Schools in the language of initial literacy.
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