

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS
IN LINGUISTICS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION
IN THE STUDY OF GRAMMAR IN THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Modern educators have expressed the need for a new approach to the teaching of grammar. Research has indicated that conventional grammar programs have been ineffective in achieving practical results. Within the past fifty years linguistic scholars have provided new insights into the nature of our language. Their theories are collectively called linguistics. This study surveys the background of linguistics and attempts to demonstrate how the most modern theories of linguistics can be implemented into the study of grammar in the elementary school.

Following a brief introduction the study presents a history of linguistics. Four major theories of grammar have been advanced since the eighteenth century. They are traditional grammar, conventionally taught in our schools, historical grammar, structural grammar, and the most recent, generative-transformational grammar. This last is actually a synthesis of many of the features of its predecessors plus its own discoveries about sentence structure. It contends that there are a limited number of basic structures called "kernel sentences" from which all other sentences are generated. This is done by applying specific rules called transformations. Generative-transformational grammar has had the greatest impact upon teaching programs since traditional grammar.

A chapter on the linguistic approach shows that linguistic science has provided new attitudes about language study. Linguistics is concerned with the learner and the learning process. It stresses discovery; it is descriptive. By contrast, the traditional approach to language is authoritarian and prescriptive. A linguistics program attempts to foster facility in language usage through the process of inductive inquiry. It attempts to develop the child's ability to think for himself.

Chapter four deals with the role of linguistics in the teaching of grammar. In order to implement a linguistics program the teacher must have training, which many school systems are providing, and materials. The most comprehensive series published to date is The Roberts English Series. This provides an explanation of our language system based on generative-transformational grammar. Whether the teacher chooses Roberts or another linguistic text, she must remember that the inductive approach is important.

The study of sentence structure is begun with the introduction of the "kernel sentence" concept. By drawing upon the knowledge that students already possess, the teacher can gradually present transformation rules.

Through the study of sentence structure, parts of speech, or "word classes" are introduced. The children learn to recognize word classes through experiences with them, not simply by conventional definitions as in traditional grammar. Only two tenses of verbs are recognized

in linguistics; all other time is shown by adding words to the verb forms. The word "be" is treated as a class by itself, not as a verb.

The concept of morpheme (the smallest unit of meaning) is introduced in the elementary grades and used to explain differences in word forms and meanings. Sentence structure can be analyzed in "morpheme strings" which show all the units of meaning.

Through inductive experiences with various sentence patterns, and encouragement to produce their own sentences, students should be able to transfer their knowledge of grammar to composition.

In the final chapter, the author concludes that the science of linguistics, its attitudes, aims and concepts, offers the potential for an effective grammar program.