

COMMUNICATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

TRANSFER OF SPELLING VOCABULARY

In 1912-1913, the writer and four advanced students in education at DePauw University made a minor investigation regarding the transfer of spelling vocabulary. The problem specifically stated was, "To what extent do students use the accurate spelling vocabulary of their themes in English in themes in sociology?" Papers containing such themes were collected from the two departments concerned. Thirty students were found in the two courses for whom there were papers in both subjects. These students are indicated by number in the table following. For example, student 4 was represented by a theme in English and one in Sociology, for student 20, there was a theme in each subject, etc., etc. Thus it was possible to compare the work of the same individuals but in different types of themes. For example, it was possible to compare the manuscripts of student 4 in both subjects. It was the original plan to compare such themes as to several different matters such as writing, spelling, punctuation, etc. The comparison as to writing was made, but the resulting data have never been organized. The comparison as to spelling was made. The method used was as follows: The four students of education, hereafter known as Ni., Sand., Ay., and Pr., examined the same manuscripts. But they were not required to examine the whole manuscript, or the same portions of them. Ni. examined 5 pages of the manuscripts in English and sociology for student 7, while Sand., examined 4 pages for each theme for student 7. One examiner studied the same number of pages in the two themes as he examined them, but the pages were not necessarily the same pages examined by the others for the same themes. The numbers of pages actually examined are shown in the columns 2, 5, 8, and 11 of the following table. The English themes had been very carefully marked by the instructor of English and all misspelled words were indicated by red ink. No marks for misspelled words had been placed on the theme papers in sociology. The instructor in English had given even more than the usual stress to the necessity of accuracy in usage of spelling and other matters of elementary composition. The instructor in sociology had given practically no attention to the status of English in such themes, unless he found one in very inferior condition. The results of the

investigation are given entire in the following table. This table reads as follows: Ni. found one error in one page of English and one error in one page of sociology in the themes for student 4. Sand. found three errors in four pages of English and nine errors in four pages of sociology in the two themes written by student 8. Ay. found one error in five pages of English and three errors in five pages of sociology in the themes written by student 33. Pr. found the same facts for student 33.

RESULTS

No.	Ni.			Sand.			Ay.			Pr.		
	Pp.	Eng. Errors	S-Errors	Pp.	Eng. Errors	S-Errors	Pp.	Eng. Errors	S-Errors	Pp.	Eng. Errors	S-Errors
4	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	1	0	1	1	3
7	5	0	3	4	1	4	5	4	3	5	1	2
8	5	3	2	4	3	9	5	2	4	5	1	0
9	1	2	1	4	1	40	1	1	0	1	1	2
11	5	1	0	4	1	15	5	1	1	5	0	0
12	1	1	0	4	1	18	1	1	5	1	1	0
13	1	1	1	4	0	3	1	0	1	1	0	1
20	5	0	2	4	1	4	5	1	2	5	0	0
22	5	0	0	4	0	4	5	0	0	5	0	0
23	5	0	2	4	3	2	5	0	0	5	0	3
24	10	0	0	4	0	12	10	0	1	10	0	1
28	5	0	0	4	0	40	5	0	2	5	0	0
30	1	1	3	4	1	16	1	1	1	1	0	0
32	1	0	0	4	0	10	1	0	0	1	0	0
33	5	1	4	4	0	1	5	1	3	5	1	3
39	5	4	6	4	3	3	5	4	1	5	1	1
40	1	0	0	4	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
51	1	0	2	4	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
52	1	0	1	4	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	1
55	5	0	4	4	0	15	5	0	0	5	0	1
56	1	0	0	4	0	5	1	1	0	1	1	0
59	5	1	2	4	2	1	5	1	1	5	1	1
61	5	3	1	4	1	0	5	3	2	5	1	1
68	5	0	2	4	0	0	5	0	0	5	0	0
79	5	0	0	4	0	3	5	0	0	5	0	1
80	5	3	1	4	0	4	5	5	1	5	1	2
90	2	2	3	4	2	3	2	2	2	2	0	0
92	1	0	0	4	0	18	1	0	1	1	0	0
95	1	1	2	4	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	2
98	5	1	0	4	1	2	5	1	2	5	0	0

No. of themes compared	No. of pp. compared	Errors—Misspelled words				Corrected totals	Averages
		Sand.	Ni.	Ay.	Pr.		
30 English.....	426	23	26	31	12	92	23.00
30 Sociology.....	429	240	43	36	26	245	61.25
Actual increase in errors in so- ciology themes.....		117	17	5	14	153	38.25
(After correction)							
Percentages of increase in errors							
(Corrected).....		519%	65.4%	16%	116.6%	166 3%	166 1%

The total number of errors found by Sand. in sociology themes is very much greater than the totals found by the other examiners. This was due to three factors: (1) Sand. counted each repetition of a misspelled word as an error. The others did not. (2) Sand. examined 13 pages more of manuscript than the other three examiners. (3) Sand. was much more accurate in discovering misspelled words for he had had more years of experience in general, several years' successful teaching experience, and had practiced to a considerable extent the detection of misspelled words. The others had not. The other three found an average of 35 errors in 104 pages, or one-third error per page. On this same basis, the total for Sand. would be 39 errors for 117 pages. A fair estimate of the increased number of errors found by Sand. due to his greater skill is judged by the writer to be one error per page. This would account for 117 errors, and would make the total for Sand. (39 plus 117) 156. This would make the error due to repetitions be about 84 (240-156). Probably this should be 100 rather than 84. It is held, then, that the total for Sand. is approximately 140 rather than 240. This is the correction referred to in the table above. On the other hand, it should be recognized that the unskilled examiners must have overlooked many misspelled words. If, then, our estimates for the total errors found by Sand. are too high, they would be counterbalanced to some degree by the inaccuracy of the others in the opposite direction.

There were then, approximately 160% more misspelled words in the sociology themes than in the English themes. *In other words, there was a very general tendency to lower the standard of efficiency in spelling used in the sociology themes.* In matters of punctuation and capitalization a beginning of a study was made. Here, too, a similar tendency was observed.

The writer believes that this minor study shows a very prevalent tendency in the effectiveness of the teaching of English in high schools and colleges, although the investigation made concerned college students only. As he interprets the situation, it represents a failure to

secure habits which transfer, or ideals which are consciously generalized. As such, it suggests the following: (1) teachers of English should strive to secure such transfer; (2) there should be a very much greater coöperation in the teaching of English. Had the instructor in sociology placed emphasis upon correct spelling, why should the students not have had a stronger tendency to spell correctly? (3) if such conditions exist as to spelling, the very *content* of one phase of the English language, what must be the conditions regarding the transfer of the more intangible elements of the mother tongue. It is probably easier to secure transfer of *content* than of some other elements. Hence, it is probable that many of the values of English are being realized only in a very minor degree.

A. R. MEAD.

Ohio Wesleyan University.