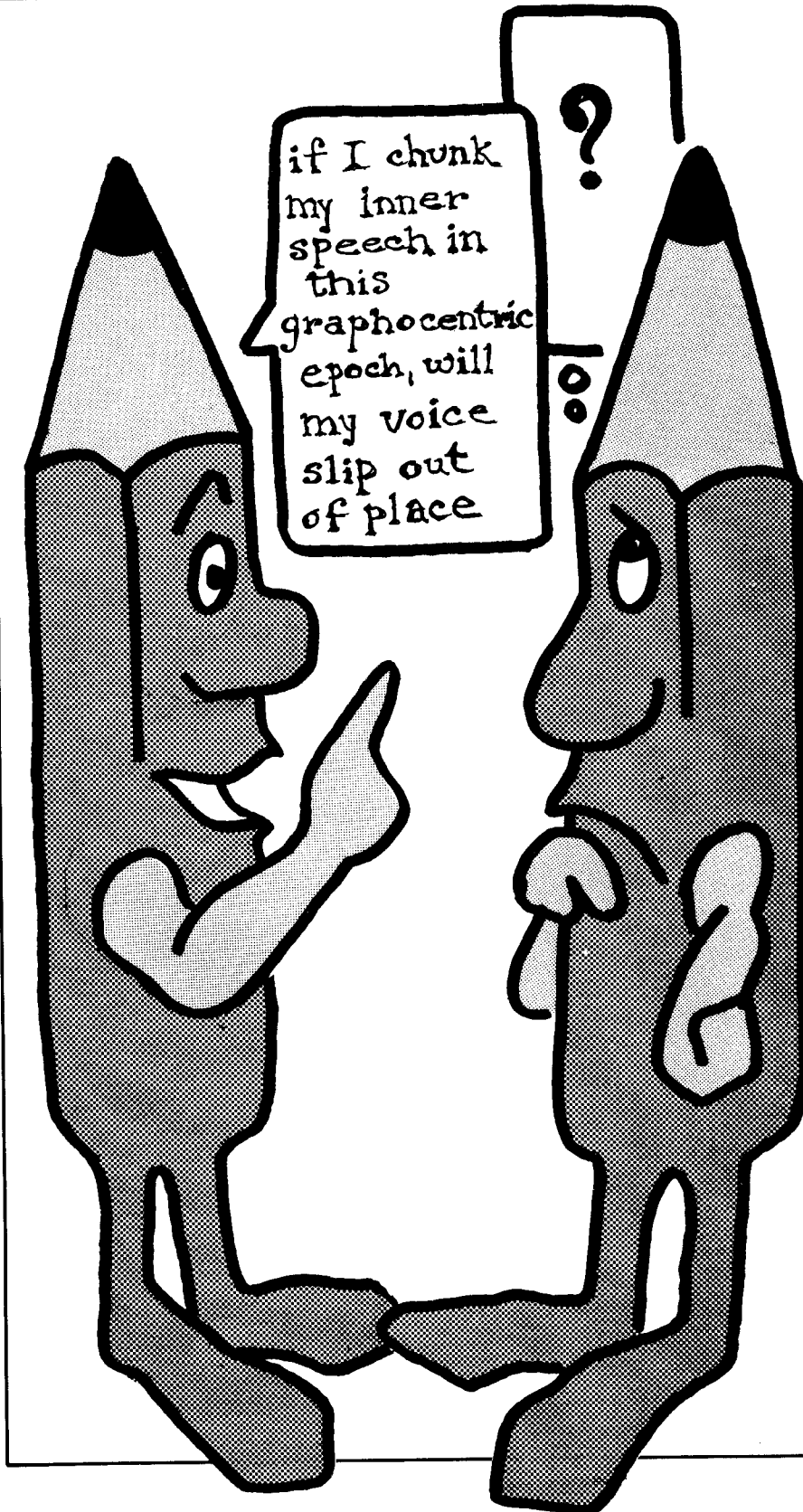
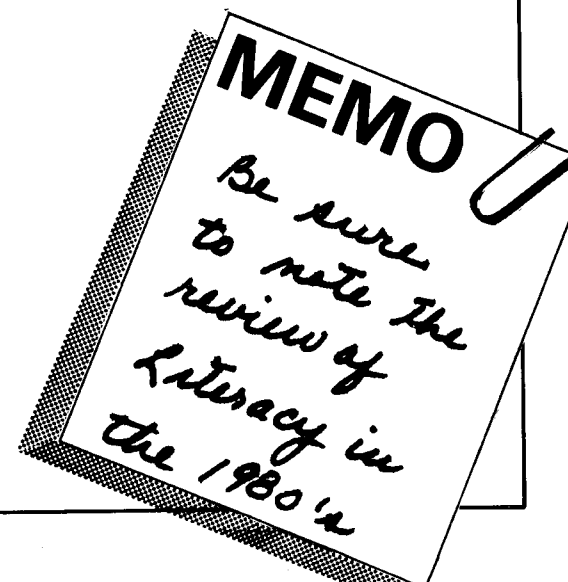


FFORUM

A Newsletter of the English Composition Board, University of Michigan



Speaking and Writing



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A Note About This Issue

Patricia L. Stock

This issue of *fforum* is the outcome of what some people in the teaching-of-writing business call "the composing process." That is to say, the issue developed in ways its editor had not originally planned. The original plan was for an issue in which teachers of English language and literature, as well as linguists, would explore the relationships between talking and writing.

I invited Barry Kroll, a teacher of writing who has recently edited a book about speech and writing, (**Speaking-Writing Relationships in the Growth of Writing Abilities**, p. 11) and Nancy Martin, whose work with the British Schools Council Project based at the University of London has been the source of many writings about the importance of language across the curriculum, (**Contexts for Writing**, p. 15) to share their views from Iowa and London with *fforum's* readers.

Richard W. Bailey of the University of Michigan's English Department agreed to reflect upon the Ann Arbor Black English Case in which he had been a witness for the plaintiffs (**Litigation and Literacy: The Black English Case**, p. 29); and Lee Hansen, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction of the Ann Arbor Public Schools, offered to share his retrospective views of both the case and the plans and activities which the school district developed in compliance with the verdict of the judge (**The Black English Case in Retrospect: A Participant's Postscript**, p. 31).

Pleased with these beginnings of the issue, I called Robert Root, Director of Introductory Composition at Central Michigan University, to describe plans for the issue. Bob indicated that his **Resources in Composition**, (p. 39) featured in each issue of *fforum* would relate to the speech and writing theme as well as refer teachers to recently published books and articles on composition.

At the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March, 1981, two persons agreed to contribute articles: Winifred Byran Horner of the University of Missouri, who spent a year studying with the Speech-Act theorist John Searle (**Speech-Act Theory and Writing**, p. 9) and Barbara Couture, of Wayne State University, (**Research on Speech and Writing and the Composition Class**, p. 22). It was especially gratifying to learn that Deborah Tannen, who had distinguished herself as Program Chairperson of the Georgetown Roundtable, was willing to contribute an article of her own to this issue (**Two Kinds of Knowing in Spoken and Written Language**, p. 20). Moreover, Ms. Tannen led the way to Robin Lakoff (**Literacy in a Non-Literate Age**, p. 13) and Wallace Chafe (**Speakers and Writers Do Different Things**, p. 5), both of The University of California at Berkeley. And Walter J. Ong, of St. Louis University, gave his blessing to excerpting and reproducing his article "**Literacy and Orality in Our Times**" (p. 16).

By now the issue seemed to have taken its final form. Not only had provocative thinkers agreed to contribute articles to the issue but this number of *fforum* together with the one to follow in the Winter of 1982 (Relationships between Reading and Writing) would provide a useful contemporary view of the language arts from an inter-disciplinary perspective.

Meanwhile, the ECB had planned not just one, but two, workshops for teachers of writing to be held in Ann Arbor in June, 1981: and as if that were not enough, between the two workshops, the Board scheduled **Literacy in the 1980's** — a conference in which representatives of the professions, vocations, and education would examine both the role of literacy and how it will be taught during the next decade.

I revised my plan; hired a photographer; and expanded the issue — this time to include a photographic essay of the three events to be held in Ann Arbor from 20-30 June, 1981. It seemed a happy accident, after all, that *fforum* devoted to the relationships between talking and writing could include photographs of teachers who had come together to talk about the teaching of writing (**Literacy in the 1980's Revisited**, p. 41). In addition, John Reiff and James Middleton, two ECB lecturers who had participated in Workshop I, agreed to describe in this issue their model for an interactive assignment-making process (**A Model for Designing and Revising Assignments**, p. 34), and Barbra Morris, whose television program **Write Write** (in production) is a visual realization of one aspect of rhetorical theory, agreed to describe her project to *fforum's* readers in (**Write Write**, p. 37). By this time it was clear: this issue of *fforum* would present not only theory but also some of the practice based upon theory.

Plans were to be adjusted yet again; for teachers who had attended the workshops and the conference wrote about their experience here. And they sent their essays — expressing pleasure and provocation, inspiration and frustration, and always engagement — with the teaching of writing (**After the Talk, the Writing**, p. 50, and **And Writing, And Writing, And . . .**, p. 52).

In the course of Workshops I, a new-word contest was conceived and executed under *fforum's* sponsorship. And the outcomes are reported in Bernard Van't Hul's article (**fforum's New Word Contest**, p. 57). From Oakland University, Donald Morse submitted a progress report in behalf of a group of the Michigan teachers who, having participated in the ECB's young tradition of annual writing workshops, are committed to keeping the tradition alive (**Oakland University Offers to Host Writing Workshop '82**, p. 59).

One more revision — articles were shifted, graphics re-

placed, copy added. This issue of *fforum* would consist of a collection of articles by theorists and another collection by teachers — each a complement to the other on the complex relationships of talking and writing.

The revised plan suggested at least one essay that would fuse theoretical and practical concerns in one scholar-teacher's experience: Professor Penelope Eckert, a linguist in the Anthropology Department at The University of


Michigan, has been conducting research on spoken language in schools in Southeastern Michigan. And she agreed, in spite of an imminent deadline for publication, to share her findings with *fforum's* readers (*Hedging the Standard English Bet*, p. 7)

Now, as I read the final copy of this issue, I remember the faces of students to whom I have said: "This is a fine paper. It was worth all those revisions. Wasn't it?"

Talk to Text

Patricia L. Stock

For some time, I have self-consciously avoided the language currently used by many theorists and teachers of writing to describe the processes of composition to themselves and their students. I have avoided their language because it is made of metaphors inappropriate to my notion of the act of writing. I believe that to write is to engage in a particularly human — potentially humane — enterprise. Therefore, it is uncomfortable for me to conceive of writing in martial language — with such labels as *tactics*, *strategies*, and *attack skills*; or in the lexicon of computer technology — *reader-based*, *writer-based*, *input*, or *feedback*, and *bottom lines*; or even with the contractual and product-labelling terms of business and industry.

I am particularly unsettled by these metaphors of our time because as a student and teacher of language and literacy, I respect the power of the symbol system which language is. The words we use to describe writing to our students suggest to them the kind of activity we believe writing to be. Our words are not merely audible or visible signs. They are not substitutes for concrete objects or events or procedures — such as the smoke which represents fire; or the marker , which indicates the contour of the road; or the name "Patches," which is herself to my cat. That is to say, words are not terms associated in one-to-one correspondence to what they concretely signify. Rather, the words we use are what Suzanne Langer calls "symbols," or "proxies for their objects" or "*vehicles for the conception of objects*" (Langer, p. 45). The language of our descriptions of the acts of writing is rich in latent meanings. If we suggest to our students that they "develop writing strategies" or "attack writing problems," we lead them to regard the acts of writing as, if not militaristic and combatant, at least competitive, adversarial. The writing itself is the enemy to be defeated. If we suggest that their prose be "reader-based" or "writer-based," we suggest that they should strive for products much like computer print-outs, the result of orderly programmed, step-by-step procedures. If we refer to

their products we imply that their work is the end result of a series of assembly-line procedure calling for fulfillment of the *specs*.

Consequently, I find it more comfortable to conceive of writing in self-consciously human metaphors — in terms of voice and vision. I understand that I describe metaphorically when I suggest: To write is to commit one of the many voices each of us possesses to the page and thereby to see one's words graphically. My metaphors shape my practices even as my epistemology shapes my metaphors. For example, I ask my inexperienced students to talk about their assignments for my class with each other, with me, and with other students outside of our class to whom I introduce each of them at the beginning of the semester. I also ask my students to write a letter about each assignment to their out-of-class peers and to meet with those students to discuss each assignment before they write their first drafts of the assignment for classmates. Having talked with classmates about their writing, my students revise their drafts for a conference with me. They prepare their final text only after this weekly multi-staged process of talking-writing-writing-talking. While students are writing and talking to one another about assignments, they are also writing in their journals about a variety of tasks associated with the assignments. I ask them to contemplate the audience and purpose for the piece (Who will read the piece? What does the reader need or want to learn from the writing? And so on.) I ask them to reflect upon primary and secondary research they have done for the assignment (Record an experience; react to readings, and so on). The tasks I ask my students to perform as they prepare a text are a rhetorical statement on my part: All uses of natural language — speaking, listening, and reading — can serve writers as they shape texts. Metaphorically and practically I ask my students to shape their voices upon the page as they talk, read, listen, and write their way to effective texts.

Speakers and Writers Do Different Things

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The activity of writing is fundamentally different from the activity of speaking. Among other things, people write much more slowly than they talk. And they have the chance to go back and change what they have written before anyone sees it, whereas speakers can't hide what they have said. Writers are isolated from their audiences; speakers are normally in face-to-face situations. Writers, furthermore, are likely to feel more accountable for what they say, since their product may stay around for a long time. It is interesting to consider how differences like these affect the nature of written language, as language. **How do both the special nature of what people do when they write and the special circumstances in which they write lead to the special properties of written language?**

Only recently have the unusual characteristics of the writing process received serious attention, and only recently have we begun to understand the distinctive kind of language which results from this process. Several of us at Berkeley have been looking at an extensive collection of written and spoken data, trying to learn more about what is involved in each of these distinctive uses of language.

Speaking, which people have been doing for a million years and which will probably always be the most common means of using language, is a fast-paced activity. We speak at an average of about three words a second, and we can't really slow things down very much without losing our listener's attention and our own train of thought. I suspect that this speaking rate in fact reflects the pace of natural thought processes (Chafe, "The Deployment"). Writing is nothing like this. We can write as slowly as we like, but we would have to be pretty fast at a typewriter to approach anywhere near the speed of normal speech. Writing is commonly a leisurely activity. Our thoughts, nevertheless, are likely to be jumping along at a much faster pace. Thus we have plenty of time to think about more carefully structuring the language itself as well as reviewing and revising it as we see fit. The result is a language which no longer consists of a sequence of brief spurts, as spoken language does:

It's just a program of Victorian and Modern poetics.

It's just a seminar. It's tangential to reality.

Instead it is a language which uses a variety of more complex syntactic devices — nominalizations, participles, complement clauses, attributive adjectives, and so on — to mold information into more elaborate, integrated products of deliberate creation:

Critics have used George Eliot's failure to accomplish her

self-proclaimed goal of writing realistic novels as evidence of the impossibility of the realistic undertaking itself.

These two examples were produced by one and the same speaker/writer. They illustrate well how the integrated quality of written language, made possible by the slow, deliberate nature of its production, contrasts with the fragmentation of language which is spoken on the fly (Chafe, "Integration").

Walter Ong has pointed out the irony of the fact that a writer who may expect his product to be read by hundreds of thousands of people sets about his task by closeting himself with his typewriter (see p. 16, this issue of *forum*). Isolated from his audience, a writer lacks the direct feedback and interaction enjoyed by a speaker; he also cannot share with his *reader* any of the immediate context and environment which he would have with his listener. Typical written language lacks the ego involvement, interaction, and liveliness of spoken language:

I'm feeling OK now (laugh), but uh I had last week I thought I was (laugh) dying. You heard that I fainted in the shower.

Evidence for the detachment of written language can be found, for example, in the impersonal references, use of passive verbs, and lack of reliance on shared context which characterizes written texts. Compare the following written example, produced by the same person, with the spoken example above:

Only by taping an event at which one is a natural participant is it possible to gather data which is not distorted by the presence of a non-participant analyst.

Written language then, tends to be detached and distant where spoken language tends to be involved.

Finally, speakers seem willing to operate with a kind of hit-or-miss epistemology, not worrying so much about the ultimate truth of what they say, but trying on ideas for size. Spoken language is sprinkled with expressions that suggest the tentative origins and reliability of what is being said:

I think if I had gotten the police, I probably would have just gotten my things back.

Not only do writers have more time to ponder what they are saying, but they are likely to realize that their product will be read by a critical audience, that it may exist for a long

time, and that it may be perused by many people. These factors impose a kind of accountability on a writer which does not normally constrain a speaker. The result is often that the writer assumes a more authoritative stance than the speaker, as evidenced by the words "specifically," "constantly," and "fact" in the following example of written language:

Since all puppet heads are specifically good or evil, the fact of struggle between the opposing forces is constantly clear, both verbally and visually.

The precise tone of much written language contrasts with the more hesitant tone which is typical of spoken language.

Qualities like **integration**, **detachment**, and **authority** are thus fostered by the process and circumstances of writing. They may appear in speaking too, of course, but in writing they are strikingly more prevalent. As we delve further into the speaking and writing processes and their products, we expect to be learning more about these differences. Both the teaching and the practice of writing should profit from a clearer knowledge of the ways in which writing is a very special use of language.

Hedging the Standard English Bet

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With all the attention paid in recent years to non-standard dialects of English, the white middle class has passively acquired a reputation as standard speakers. But it is clear to any English teacher that most middle class students speak English with at least some non-standard forms: Schools abound with multiple negatives, object pronouns in subject position, and non-standard past participles. Those students who come to school using few or no non-standard forms are a welcome sight to the teacher, and are rewarded academically for their language skills. But these skills may be illusory, for the definition of standard English is a negative one, and what are perceived as standard language skills may actually be "negative skills."

It is generally acknowledged that there is no clear definition of American standard pronunciation: Any pronunciation qualifies as "standard American" that contains no *noticeable* regional or ethnic features. So an easterner and a midwesterner who rid their speech of stereotyped regional pronunciation features will both qualify as standard speakers although their speech will be far from identical. The same is true on the grammatical level. While standard English grammar *can* perhaps be described in positive terms, the notion is usually applied negatively: Any speech that shows no stigmatized non-standard grammatical forms is identified as "standard English." And while speakers are rewarded for not using non-standard forms, it generally goes unnoticed if they fail to use certain kinds of standard constructions. Rarely is it noticed if a speaker uses a wide range of standard grammatical options: it is not a common compliment, for instance, to say, "person x uses pronouns beautifully," or "what a variety of standard negative constructions person y uses." On the contrary, such a comment would more likely be an observation that the speaker is making a pretentious display of standard usage. Good English is simply English with no grammatical errors.

The difficulty with our negative definition of standard grammar is that a speaker who uses no stigmatized forms does not necessarily control the full complement of standard forms, and may in fact have little more knowledge of standard English than the speaker who uses non-standard forms regularly. Such a standard speaker may, in fact, simply know how to avoid "difficult" constructions, and the main difference between the two groups of speakers may be in their attitudes toward using non-standard forms "in public." The avoidance of non-standard constructions is considered a useful linguistic skill, since avoiders are heard as the better speakers. But in fact they are restricting their style, by using only a portion of their syntactic competence. For while the non-standard speakers may produce more stigmatized forms, they are using a wider range of construc-

tions and thus have more stylistic flexibility than the avoiders.

Such avoidance is a common linguistic strategy, part of a general hypercorrect tendency that is particularly characteristic of lower middle class speakers. Linguistic features (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary) are socially stratified, and forms associated with the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy are traditionally considered "incorrect." Speakers are of course aware of the correlation between socioeconomic class and linguistic forms, and monitor their own speech as a function of their ambitions and their feelings about their status. Virtually all people use fewer stigmatized forms in their formal, carefully monitored speech than in their everyday casual speech. But since different groups of people have differing feelings about their social status, they do not all "correct" their speech to the same extent. The upwardly mobile lower middle class in this country has far more self-conscious speakers than the other classes, and this self-consciousness is reflected in both their patterns of correction in careful speech and in their overt reactions to the speech of others. Lower middle class speakers correct their pronunciation in formal speech far more than any other socio-economic group, and they judge the speech of others using stigmatized forms more harshly (Labov, *The Social*). This hypersensitivity to linguistic "correctness" is generally referred to as *linguistic insecurity*, and is a response of upwardly mobile people to the perception that their speech borders between standard and non-standard. This insecurity frequently results in hypercorrect errors, which amount to a misinterpretation of standard rules (as in, for instance, *between you and I*, and *whom shall I say is calling?*). Far less noticeable, but more insidious from an English teacher's point of view, is the simple avoidance of troublesome constructions.

As examination of high school students' speech in several Detroit suburbs shows, just such patterns of avoidance in the use of negative constructions (Huyser, *et. al.*). The speakers who use non-standard, multiple, negatives freely produce a full range of negative sentences. But a number of these speakers who use few or no non-standard negatives apparently do so by avoiding certain constructions. Negative sentences beginning with indefinites (no, nothing, etc.) appear to be particularly problematic for these speakers. An examination of false starts makes it clear that the absence of such sentences from their speech is a result of an effort. On the occasions when they actually begin sentences with negative indefinites, they stop before they arrive at the verb (where they will have to decide whether or not to add a negative participle) and begin the sentence all over, using a simpler grammatical option:

“Well, nothing – you think everything you say comes out real funny and usually it does.”

“No one really – you know, they won’t make you do it.”

While the alternatives chosen in the above examples are simpler for the speaker who is insecure about negative constructions, they are far less attractive stylistically. These speakers’ linguistic insecurity is forcing them into an awkward style: “Correctness” wins over grace.

Attention to standard language may have a stifling effect on the spoken and written performance of all but the true native speakers of standard English. The upwardly mobile, particularly the college-bound, students, in their concern for producing “acceptable” speech and writing, are forced into patterns of expression that can only be described as impoverished. Their attention to “negative” linguistic skills may very well prevent them from developing a fluid and varied style. Unabashed nonstandard speakers, on the other hand, are probably being penalized for their use of non-standard forms, and not rewarded for the very fluidity and richness of style that they achieve through the use of their natural patterns.

All of this is not to say that standard English should not be taught or even emphasized in school. But it should be remembered that most people are natively non-standard speakers, and can achieve standard usage through either a

positive or a negative effort. It has been emphasized in recent years that radically different non-standard varieties of English, such as the Black English Vernacular, are indeed separate systems and cannot be profitably treated as a series of errors. Such treatment will only result in alienation and/or the kind of hypercorrect behavior discussed here. It may be useful to consider the range of English varieties available in our society as a continuum ranging from the most non-standard speech to written standard norms. No speaker learns the written norms natively; they must be earned as an auxiliary system to one’s native speech. For speakers at increasing distances from this end of the continuum, the acquisition of standard writing skills will involve increasing difficulty as it involves learning more and more standard rules. The problems of those closer to the standard end should not be ignored, nor should the close relation between their problems and those of very non-standard speakers. For many speakers, standard rules will always be auxiliary, never “natural,” and care must be taken that in giving attention to these rules one does not lose sight of stylistic ease as a separate goal.

Whether one believes in the increasing use of non-standard varieties, or in the emphasis on standard language, all will agree that style is an important skill. And style will be difficult to develop if it is confused with mastery of standard grammar, for however the two sets of skills may interact, they are not mutually dependent.

Speech-Act Theory and Writing

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Speech-act theory is based on the premise that communication is a series of actions or interactions between a speaker (writer) and a hearer (reader). The theory contends that a speaker (writer) in performing the act of utterance (or writing) also performs a second act, the **illocutionary act**, in which he *intends* the utterance to do something. Thus, in making the assertion, "*That dog is dangerous,*" a speaker may not only *intend* to inform his hearer but he may also *intend* to warn his hearer as well. Similarly, I may request you to turn up the thermostat by saying, "*I am cold.*" In fact, all uses of language including much of our daily conversation is composed of such speech acts.

In making a request a speaker assumes that a hearer is both willing and able to perform the act, and the speaker may form a polite request by questioning the hearer's willingness or ability.

1. *Would you mind closing the window.*
2. *Can you close the window.*

It is important to note that these two utterances can be intended as true questions if the speaker feels that the hearer is either unwilling or unable to close the window: "*Can you close the window*" becomes a true question if the hearer has his arm in a cast.

As these examples suggest, meaning depends in part on the speaker's understanding of the feelings and desires of the hearer. When a wife requests that her husband wash the dishes by saying, "*Would you mind washing the dishes,*" he may respond by denying his willingness, "*Yes, I mind —*" while, at the same time, recognizing the intended request, "*— but I will.*" In all our interactions with one another, we assume roles and attitudes for ourselves within certain contexts, and we presume roles and attitudes for others. And meaning is highly dependent on the relationship of speakers and hearers.

In non-fictional writing, the same rules apply, but authors and contexts must be reconstructed by the reader. A good writer will always assist his reader in making that reconstruction, because voices must be clear and contexts well established. In ordinary spoken conversation, speakers and hearers are physically attached to their texts; in written and recorded discourse, on the other hand, writers may be removed from their utterances by both time and distance. When I pick up a week old Detroit newspaper, I am able to read it within the Detroit context of my experience and, furthermore, as a reader, I know that the news events being reported occurred a week ago rather than at the time of my reading. Hence I am able to reconstruct the context of place as Detroit and time as a week ago.

In written acts of communication, a writer must be especially aware of his readers; furthermore, he must make his readers aware of himself as writer. It is important that a reader know not only who the writer of a written text is, but also what the writer's purpose or intention is. According to the precepts of speech-act theory, in writing as well as in speaking, individuals are performing intentional acts. As a writer, one needs to recognize, to be constantly aware of his readers, and to establish his voice and purpose early in the discourse. In written discourse, since the author and the physical context are not present, it is especially important for the writer to establish the context, the purpose, and his identity as a writer as well as the identity of his readers. In the following opening paragraph from his well-known "Letter from Birmingham Jail," note how Martin Luther King, Jr. establishes his identity, his intention, the context, and his immediate readers.

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

King imposes a role on his readers when he calls them "men of genuine good will" whose "criticisms are sincerely set forth." Although his immediate readers are his fellow clergymen, he is obviously writing for a larger audience. However, anyone who reads this essay must read it with the writer's conception of his readers in mind.

In the following opening paragraph from "What Life Means to Me," Jack London establishes his background in an equally forceful fashion.

I was born in the working-class. Early I discovered enthusiasm, ambition, and ideals; and to satisfy these became the problem of my child-life. My environment was crude and rough and raw. I had no outlook, but an up-look rather. My place in society was at the bottom. Here life offered nothing but sordidness and wretchedness, both of the flesh and the spirit: for there flesh and spirit were alike starved and tormented.

Because contextual indicators are seldom physically present in written language, authors must make their intentions

clear either directly or indirectly at the beginning of their essays. Sometimes writers declare their intentions directly in the opening paragraph, but sophisticated writers are often more subtle. Although written or recorded language can and usually does exist in time and place separated from its author and its original context, that fact does not mean that there is no context for their works. Readers will reconstruct contexts, complete with speakers, intended hearers, and purposes. Consequently, authors must make their voices and their purposes clear within their texts or they might be misunderstood. Every effective piece of writing must have what Wayne Booth calls a rhetorical stance.

The common ingredient that I find in all of the writing I admire – excluding for now novels, plays, and poems – is something that I shall reluctantly call the rhetorical stance,

a stance which depends on discovering and maintaining in any writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interest and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker (Booth, p. 141).

Speech-act theory recognizes that meaning in spoken discourse depends upon the interaction between the speaker and the hearer within a given context. So too, meaning in written discourse is equally dependent upon the interaction between writer and reader. Skillful writers establish the context, the purpose, and the relationship between themselves and their readers within their texts, so that meaning can survive long after the original writers, readers, and contexts cease to exist.

Speaking-Writing Relationships in The Growth of Writing Abilities

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Editor's note: *An elaboration of Barry Kroll's model of the four relationships he writes about here may be found in "Developmental Relationships Between Speaking and Writing," to be published in Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships: Connections and Contrasts, Barry Kroll and Robert J. Vann (eds.), Urbana, IL, NCTE.*

It's not unusual to hear conflicting claims about the relationships between speaking and writing, as well as contradictory advice about the implications of these relationships for the teaching of writing. Some experts in the language arts, stress the close connections between speaking and writing, and believe that students should be encouraged to draw on the strengths of their oral language when they engage in written composition. Other experts stress the differences between speaking and writing; they observe that the demands of writing require new skills, and they believe that if students rely heavily on oral language skills and strategies, the quality of their written discourse will in fact suffer. Which of these expert claims are we to accept?

Paradoxically, each claim seems to be correct. One key to understanding this paradox is to recognize that the functional relationships between oral and written language change during the individual's development of writing skills. I want to suggest that there are, in fact, four principal relationships between oral and written language and that each of the four characterizes a **phase** during the student's development of the skills of writing. I call the four phases **preparation, consolidation, differentiation, and integration**. By attending to the ways in which the relationships between speaking and writing change for individuals during these phases, we are in a better position, I believe, to understand and promote students' growth in writing.

During the **preparation** phase, our primary pedagogical goal is to help each young child learn those skills which will enable him or her to engage in the first stages of independent writing. Obviously, a child must learn the "technical" skills of handwriting and spelling. But there is also a need for the child to develop the ability to "compose." Many language arts specialists agree that having a child dictate while the teacher writes out the child's sentences is an important aspect of **preparation** for writing, both because dictation provides practice in composing original texts and because dictation translates the connection between spoken and written language into concrete form.

Preparation leads into the next important phase in writing development, a period in which our goal as teachers is to

strengthen written expression by drawing on the child's ability to talk well. This **consolidation** of a child's oral competence with his or her resources for writing is generally accomplished by the teacher's providing activities in which the forms and functions of writing are made similar to those of speaking. Many language arts specialists propose that children should engage in "personal writing" or exploration of the "senses" or "expressive writing" — writing which remains close to the child's experience, which addresses an intimate audience, and which provides a legitimate context for "talk written down." But **consolidation** can also involve such oral language activities as oral monologue, a form of speech which is like writing in that the communicator assumes full responsibility for sustaining the discourse.

Such **consolidation** of the child's oral and written resources may function to extend and strengthen the child's nascent writing abilities. However, since speaking and writing also differ in important ways, the child must ultimately master **differentiation** of the two modes. A child needs to learn that written texts — particularly texts with transactional functions — are often free from features which characterize the language of conversation and, furthermore, such texts are often particularly explicit in meaning. The compositions of inexperienced writers contain many stylistic features of oral language, such as the use of stock phrases or the use of "and" as an all-purpose joining device. Inexperienced writers often tend to write as though they were conversing with a reader who shares their context — as though writing were, like speaking, an interactive construction of meaning, rather than an autonomous production of text. This leads inexperienced writers to represent meaning in ways that are not sufficiently explicit — often these writers use ambiguous references, fail to define terms, omit transitional devices, and so on.

Thus, while we as teachers must encourage children to draw on their oral language resources during the early phases of their development as writers, we must actually curb their reliance on oral language during later phases of their growth as writers. Continued reliance on their oral competence might actually limit students' abilities to develop more specialized writing skills.

It seems important, therefore, that the focus in teaching shift from **consolidation** to **differentiation**, from assignments eliciting writing, drawing heavily on spoken language to assignments which require students to use the increasingly explicit and autonomous discourse of literate texts. This shift in pedagogical emphasis from **consolidation** tasks to

differentiation tasks does not mean that children must suddenly abandon their oral language resources, striving for an artificial, "bookish" style that is far removed from their experience and competence. During a period of transition children can continue to **consolidate** their oral and writing resources, even as they also begin to **differentiate** certain features of speaking and writing.

For mature writers the phases of **preparation, consolidation, and differentiation** come together in a systematic manner to produce **integration** of the complex relationships between speaking and writing. Mature writers both **consolidate** and **differentiate**. In fact, aspects of oral language continue to influence their writing: The expressive qualities most typical

of speech ("voice," "tone," "expressiveness") distinguish the character of the texts of advanced writers.

In this essay, I have presented a model which suggests how teachers may use the relationships between children's oral and written language resources to foster children's growth as writers. Most models have limitations, of course. This model makes writing development appear more linear and uni-dimensional that it is. It also oversimplifies the difficulties that students can encounter in the transitions between phases, particularly in the important shift from **consolidation** to **differentiation**. Nevertheless, the model defines sequential relationships between speaking and writing which are pedagogically useful to those of us who teach writing.

Literacy in a Non-Literate Age

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Editor's note: *In this article, Robin Lakoff summarizes a longer essay written for *Spoken and Written Language*, edited by Deborah Tannen (in press).*

Writing skills, like most other academic skills, tend to be taught locally: they are taught in terms of sentence structure — or at a slightly more abstract level — in terms of cohesive devices and narrative strategies. While teaching these skills is necessary, it can be argued that by concentrating on teaching them, one loses a sense of the issues that underlie the real problem for teachers of writing: Why has writing (and reading, for that matter) become so hard to learn? Perhaps it is time to take a global, more abstract, look at the problem, to ask broader questions such as: What is it like to write — as opposed to talking? What is the purpose of communicating in writing? What function does literate communication play in our lives and in our cultural consciousness today? What are the benefits of literacy?

It is worthwhile to point out that, just as the human race has not been literate from its beginnings, neither has it been in agreement about the virtues of the written medium since the advent of literacy. Indeed, it is often noted that Plato, only a couple of centuries after literacy had been introduced into Greece, wrote into the voice of Socrates words about literacy that sound remarkably like the words of contemporary commentators about non-literate communication:

The fact is that this invention (writing) will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it. They will not need to exercise their memories, being able to rely on what is written, calling things to mind no longer from within themselves by their own unaided powers but under the stimulus of external marks that are alien to themselves. . . . And as for wisdom, you're equipping your pupils with only a semblance of it, not with truth. (Phaedrus, 275).

Plato's dour view soon gave way to another, which prevails into the present day. More often implicitly than explicitly, we feel that literature and literacy are unequivocally good, that literacy is an essential skill, valuable for its own sake, a mark of a person's — or a culture's — entry into true civilization. This view was expressed long ago by Cicero:

But these pursuits (literature) nurture youth, give pleasure to old age. They are an embellishment in good fortune, and in adversity a refuge and comfort. They entertain us at home, are no inconvenience in public; they pass nights with us, they travel with us, they go to the country with us. (Pro Archia Poeta Oratio, 7)

In fact, today, we view the ideal human being as a literate person. Hence, the preferable channel of communication is the written one, and the ideal way to represent discourse — whether it originates in the written medium or not — is as it appears in writing. As we see, this attitude, dating back a couple of millennia, was strengthened by the invention of movable type 500 years ago. The press made literacy and its products generally accessible, so that reading and writing were no longer reserved for the few. At the same time the gulf between written and oral communication widened because they produced different emotive effects. Talk, produced by speakers for hearers in face-to-face contexts, is immediate and personal; written manuscripts, produced by scribes, in some sense still remain personal documents, one-to-one communication between writer/copier and reader; printed works, produced in huge impersonal numbers, fail to communicate the personal transmission of meaning from writer to reader. The printing press simultaneously increased our expectations for universal literacy and intensified our different attitudes toward the written and oral media and their effects upon us.

Consider an example of what I suggest: There is a preference, even in the recording of oral discourse, for doing so in the written medium. For example, Boswell represented Samuel Johnson's talk — those wonderfully orotund, perodic sentences — as if it were literate discourse. Granting that Johnson was probably unusually fluent, even for his time, a time when the most articulate conversationalist was one who adhered most closely to literate forms of expression, and granting further that the rhetorical style in Johnson's time encouraged the development of a more convoluted oral style than one usually encounters today, it is hard to believe that anyone could have spontaneously produced the utterances attributed to Johnson. It is equally hard to image someone intending to memorialize a great person today who would choose to do so by exemplifying the person's "wit and wisdom" in Johnsonian style. Something has changed.

Still, even in the works of most contemporary writers, the representation of oral conversation is "cleaned up" in ways seldom obvious to the reader. An un-retouched transcript of authentic ordinary conversation is almost impenetrable to us because we are so accustomed (1) to the conventions of "idealized" conversation as represented in writing and (2) to the oral, non-spontaneous dialogue of the movies or television. We do not find false starts, interruptions, overlaps, and hesitations used in these forms which we do find in truly spontaneous discourse. In real conversation, inadvertencies

are profuse, and tend to have a pragmatic rather than a semantic function: They give us organizational "space" in conversation, but they do not have real "meaning." We do not assume that a **vocalized pause means**: "I am nervous"; or a **hesitation means**: "I have something to hide." In the constructed dialogue of film or television such devices are utilized specifically for these semantic purposes; in such dialogue, we do not adhere to the conventions of ordinary spontaneous conversation, in spite of the fact that we are at pains to represent our constructed dialogue as spontaneous conversation.

Consider still another example of our preference for writing over speaking. Writing is cool, dignified, controlled; while ordinary talk is warm and responsive, but not quite trustworthy. In part this attitude is due to the fact that, until very recently, oral discourse could not be reproduced: Once uttered, it was gone, so that it really could not be taken very seriously.

Now, with the advent of audio- and video-tape, oral productions are as permanent as written ones, and this is making a difference in our attitudes toward the two media once again. In addition to new technology, re-evaluation of the preferred "character-style" of people has added to renewed appreciation for the spoken medium. In the past the good person was one who was reticent, private, and logical rather than emotional; controlled rather than spontaneous. Today's ideal person is quite the reverse. If we begin to look at the differences between talk and writing from this newer global perspective, talking begins to be seen as preferable to writing.

We have, a number of pieces of evidence that this is happening. For one thing, non-spontaneous speech style has changed, from a form intended to recall the written medium (think of the Churchill era) to one structured to evoke a sense of spontaneity, a conversational responsiveness to an audience (a style which Ronald Reagan uses superlatively). In formal and sophisticated writing, too, we find reflections of a change. Consider someone whom many have called one of the foremost stylists of our time — Tom Wolfe: His most salient characteristic as a stylist is his incorporation of the conventions of ordinary conversation — exclamations, italics, false starts, and so forth — into expository prose.

The thing was, he said, the Mercury system was completely automated. Once they put in the capsule, that was the last you got to say about the subject.

whuh!

"Well," said Yaeger, "a monkey's gonna make the first flight."

A monkey?

The reporters were shocked . . . Was this national heresy? What the hell was it . . .

But fr chrissake . . . (The Right Stuff, pp. 105-6).

We see further evidence of this trend in the proliferation of italics and quotation marks in written prose where formerly they would never have appeared. They are found in numerous forms of expository prose, as if to signal, "This is only meaningful if you can hear a human voice literally speaking behind this print." Although the italicized style abounds in such genres as *Cosmopolitan* magazine, examples are everywhere. Quotation marks, enclosing everything that is not an aspect of a formal, "voiceless" style of written discourse is often found in student papers, but can be seen elsewhere too; for example, a sign held up in Wiesbaden, Germany, to greet the returning American hostages from Iran, read, "WELCOME!"

In our society we indeed note evidence of a shift from the primacy of the literate medium to its secondary place as non-print media assume the primary place. It can no longer be asserted with confidence that literacy is an essential part of the equipment of a cultured and sophisticated person. Since this is true, we must — if we are to inculcate literacy at all — reassess the way in which it is presented. To tell students, overtly or covertly, that they *must* achieve literacy to survive, if they are to have respect, is rapidly becoming a dangerous strategy: It will backfire once it becomes clear that this is no longer really true. Rather, perhaps it is time for us to think of literacy as a skill akin to, say, quilting: Once a survival skill, part of one's ordinary set of skills, but now something learned as an adornment, a special aesthetic ability, yielding a special and unique kind of pleasure to its possessor. It isn't that literacy makes us better — just that it makes us happier.

Contexts For Writing

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I asked a six-year-old if he was a writer yet.

“Yes,” he replied, “you just put down what’s in your head.”

True, but like all other activities, writing is sustained or constrained — by its context. It is illuminating to observe the different settings in which school writing is done, since these figure largely in students’ expectations of themselves and of teachers. Most teachers set the topics, and most writing is graded; by producing the kind of writing their teachers seem to want, students hope to gain a good mark. Over the years they lose the six-year-old’s sense of having things to say of their own. Meanwhile, teachers suppose that students cannot write without suggested topics and the incentive of marks — and indeed, for a time they cannot.

A College of Education student wrote:

At secondary school it was always writing to please whichever teacher was teaching you. Essays all had to be very descriptive and interesting to the teacher we had, otherwise they were no good.

The circle of passivity is complete.

And then there are the constraints of time, occasion, and absence of audience other than the teacher. However, the teacher who abandons the role of assessor, to become an advisor, begins to change the picture. And the writing changes too; it begins to take on the character of a conversation, one with reflections or questions. That is to say, the writer’s own intentions begin to operate, and the teacher-audience is now seen as a real listener who may even be expected to reply, in conversation or writing. Such are the expectations of the senior high school boy who wrote this journal entry:

I think I went fairly well (in a maths exam) after such a disastrous start, and this is probably because I enjoy maths so much this year. You would too if you had Captain Brown for a teacher. With a unique combination of nautical terminology and mathematical theory delivered at great volume through the smoke haze of the occasional Marlborough, one cannot help but pay attention.

What has happened here is the crucial change in the role of the teacher. By becoming a partner in — rather than a director of — the student’s writing, he has cleared the way for the student’s own intentions. At first the student may not in fact know his own intentions; but the way is now clear for the teacher to help the student to discover them. Consider this log entry from a fifteen-year-old girl:

Would you give me some English please. Would you give me an interesting book to read, for example a humorous

one. I have finished all my Geography off. We have done a great amount of work in Geography since September. Can you also give me some work on my project because I am getting bored with just taking notes and putting my own views down on paper. I would like to do something different with this project. Today I started to answer those questions you set me on primitives but I am stuck so I will carry on with them on Monday with your help.

On the way to becoming an autonomous learner, this student has yet to find a language, her own language; and she is on the edge of escape from the all-pervading school sense that you must use other people’s language — the language you may never manage. As a less fortunate student put it:

I knew what he was on about, but I only knew what he was on about in my words. I didn’t know his words. In my exams I had to change the way I learnt you know. In all my exercise books, I put it down the way I understood, but I had to remember what I’d written there and then translate it into what I think they will understand, you know.

Written conversation would seem to be the language bridge; and the form of writing nearest to speech is the journal. It has no set form and does not, therefore hold the anxieties for students that other forms of writing carry — no problems of topic sentences or beginnings and conclusions. In addition, a journal has built-in rights and needs of reflection, comment, and questions. It can move from trivia to a student’s deepest reflection and back; and it has the continuity which provides for sheer quantity, which is also an important element in writing progress. A seventeen-year-old student commented as follows on the effect of her journal writing:

I found that with writing regularly, my ability to write improved enormously, not only in the quality of the result but in the ease of actually doing the writing . . . I often used my writing as a thought formulating process . . .

Given the writing that journals require and the confidence that they may foster, students will begin to move into other literary forms, whether in their journals or as additions to them. If it is made clear to them that all forms are welcome, some will write poems, or more formal descriptions of events, or narratives, or, by negotiation, essays which take up themes they have explored in their journals or their reading. They move into these transitions naturally if their teachers show them the possibilities. Of course the amount and quality from different students varies; but the students’ access to autonomy in learning and to a language to match — that is the essential feature behind this kind of work. It turns upon a non-authoritarian relationship with their

(continued on p. 58)

Literacy and Orality in Our Times

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Editor's Note: *I am grateful to Walter Ong and the ADE for their permission to reproduce excerpts from Father Ong's provocative essay "Literacy and Orality in Our Times" which first appeared in Profession '79, published by the Modern Language Association.*

I shall treat orality and literacy in two ways, first examining the ubiquitous and persistent problem of moving from oral expression to writing and then considering briefly some special approaches we might take in teaching writing today because of the new secondary orality that surrounds us on radio and television. In both instances my remarks are intended to be provocative rather than inclusive. There is no way to treat this protean subject inclusively.

Although its founding fathers were steeped in a still strong oral and oratorical tradition, the United States was founded in literacy, as Denis Brogan liked to point out from his vantage point in England. Written documents — the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution* — are crucial to our feeling for national identity in a way unmatched in any other nation through history, so far as I know. Most Americans, even those who write miserably, are so stubbornly literate in principle as to believe that what makes a word a real word is not its meaningful use in vocal exchange but rather its presence on the pages of a dictionary. We are so literate in ideology that we think writing comes naturally. We have to remind ourselves from time to time that writing is completely and irremediably artificial, and that what you find in a dictionary are not real words but coded marks for voicing real words, exteriorly or in imagination.

To point out that writing is artificial is not to deny that it is essential for the realization of fuller human potential and for the evolution of consciousness itself. Writing is an absolute necessity for the analytically sequential, linear organization of thought such as goes, for example, into an encyclopedia article. Without writing, as I have undertaken to explain in *The Presence of the Word* and in *Interfaces of the Word*, the mind simply cannot engage in this sort of thinking, which is unknown to primary oral cultures, where thought is exquisitely elaborated, not in analytic linearity, but in formulary fashion, through "rhapsodizing," that is stitching together proverbs, antitheses, epithets, and other "common-places" or *loci (topoi)*. Without writing, the mind cannot even generate concepts such as "history" or "analysis," just as without print, and the massive accumulation of detailed documented knowledge which print makes possible, the mind cannot generate portmanteau concepts such as "culture" or "civilization," not to mention "macroeconomics" or "polyethylene." The *New English Dictionary* entry for "civilization" notes Boswell's report of March 23, 1772,

that Dr. Samuel Johnson would not permit the word "civilization" in his first *Dictionary* — it was too much of a neologism. Probably most of the words in our English lexicon today represent concepts which could not even be formed without writing and often without print.

In the world of the creative imagination, writing appears necessary to produce accounts of human life, that is, of what Aristotle calls "action," which are closely plotted in the sense in which Greek drama is closely plotted, with a steady rise of complex action to climax, *peripeteia* or reversal, and subsequent falling action and **denouement**. Oral genres of much length treating human "action" are typically not tightly organized in this fashion but are loose-knit and episodic. Greek drama, which first provides such tight plotting in the West, is the first verbal genre in the West to be controlled entirely by writing; staged plays were oral renditions of written compositions. Similarly, print, an extension and intensification of the visualized word produced by writing, appears absolutely, and somewhat mysteriously necessary to produce tightly plotted narrative about the in-close human life world that we find in novels, which are the products of the deep interiorization of print achieved in the Romantic Age.

All this is to say that writing, and to a degree print, are absolutely essential not just for distributing knowledge but for performing the central noetic operations which a high-technology culture takes for granted.

But, however crucial for man to arrive at his present state of consciousness, writing is still totally artificial, a technology consciously and reflectively contrived. In this it contrasts with oral speech. In any and all cultures, every human being who is not physiologically or psychologically impaired, inevitably learns to speak. Speech wells up out of the unconscious supported by unconsciously organized grammatical structures that even the most ardent structural and transformational grammarians now admit can never all be surfaced entirely into consciousness. Speech is structured through the entire fabric of the human person. Writing depends on consciously contrived rules.

Moreover, it depends on absences — which amount to the same thing as artificiality. I want to write a book which will be read by hundreds of thousands of people. So, please, everyone leave the room. I have to be alone to communicate. Let us face the utter factitiousness and fictitiousness of such a situation, which can in no way be considered natural or even normal.

To move from the entirely natural oral world into this artificial world of writing is bewildering and terrifying. How do I deal with persons who are not present to me and who never will be? For, except in the case of personal letters or their equivalents, writers commonly know almost none of their putative readers.

A recent article by a friend and former student of mine, Thomas Farrell, isolated nicely two of the basic problems a person has to face in moving from orality into the world of writing.* Everyone who teaches writing knows the common symptoms of the problems; students make assertions which are totally unsupported by reasons, or they make a series of statements which lack connections. Farrell notes that such performance is not necessarily an intellectual deficiency but only a chirographic deficiency. It is quite consistent with oral conversational situations. In conversation, if you omit reasons backing a statement and your hearer wants them, the normal response is to ask you for them, to challenge you. If the connections between the statements you make are not supplied by the concrete situation — which can supply connections of the most complex, multileveled sort, as students of ethnology well know — your interlocutor can be expected to ask you to specify the connections. Generally speaking, in live oral communication the hearer will not need many “logical” connections, again because the concrete situation supplies a full context which makes articulation, and thus abstraction, at many points, superfluous.

For the writer, the situation is totally different. No one is there to supply a real communication context, to ask anything. There is no full context other than that which the writer can project. The writer has to provide all the back-up or fill-in. In the case of creative writing, the writer has to anticipate how much detail readers are willing and able to settle for. For there is no absolute measure of how much detail you have to supply in writing about anything. In the case of expository writing, the writer must anticipate all the different senses in which any statement can be interpreted and correspondingly clarify meaning, making sure to anticipate every objection that might be made and to cover it suitably. Every objection? Well not quite. The situation is even worse than that. Select objections. The objections that the readers being addressed might think of. How is the writer to know what a particular group of imagined readers might think of? How do you imagine a group of readers anyway? For one thing, you have to read, read, read. There is no way to write unless you read, and read a lot. The writer's audience is always a fiction, and you have no way of fictionalizing your audience unless you know what some of the options for imaging audiences are — how audiences have been and are fictionalized.

The writer has also to anticipate all the connections which are needed by a particular audience of readers. In fictional

*Thomas J. Farrell, “Literacy, Basics, and All That Jazz,” *College English*, 38 (1977), 443-459.

or other narrative writing this is an exceedingly intricate and elusive business. In expository writing it is difficult, too. The writer has to learn to be “logical,” to put matters together in a sequential linear pattern so that anyone who comes along — or anyone of the group of readers being projected by the writer — can make complete sense of what is being written. There are no live persons facing the writer to clarify his thinking by their reactions. There is no feedback. There are no auditors to look pleased or puzzled. This is a desperate world, a terrifying world, a lonely, unpeopled world, not at all the world of natural oral-aural exchange.

Everyone who writes must move at some point or points in his or her life from the world of oral exchange and thought processes into the curiously estranged and yet fantastically productive world of absent audiences that the writer deals with. Today, however, the orality away from which the writer moves is of two sorts. One kind, to use a terminology which I have developed in *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology*, is “primary orality,” the pristine orality of mankind untouched by writing or print which remains still more or less operative in areas sheltered to a greater or lesser degree from the full impact of literacy and which is vestigial to some degree in us all. The noetic processes of primary orality, as we have seen, are formulaic and rhapsodic rather than analytic. As in Homeric epic and to a great extent in classical oratory, particularly of the more orotund variety, this orality operates with the sort of commonplaces, formulaic expressions, and clichés ordinarily despised by fully literate folk, for, without writing, an oral culture must maintain its knowledge by repeating it. Writing and, even more effectively, print store what is known outside the mind and downgrade repetitive styles. In lieu of more elaborate analytical categories, primary oral culture also tends to break down issues in simple polarities in terms of good and evil, “good guys” and “bad guys.”

The other kind of orality we now live with I have called “secondary orality.” This is the orality induced by radio and television, and it is by no means independent of writing and print but totally dependent on them. Without writing and print, electronic equipment cannot be manufactured and radio and television programming cannot be managed. (It should be noted here that, despite its name, television is in a fundamental way an oral-aural medium. It must have sound and, so far as I know, never uses purely visual devices: the weather map which you read without difficulty in the newspaper becomes a talk show on television, presided over by an articulate and attractive woman or an equally articulate and handsome man.)

The highly oral culture of our black urban ghettos as well as of certain isolated black and white rural areas is basically a primary oral culture in many ways, although it is more or less modified by contact with secondary orality today. The orality of nonghetto urban populations generally and of suburbia generally, white and black, is basically secondary orality. As Farrell has made clear in the article cited earlier,

the problems of moving students out of the two kinds of orality are not the same.

• • •

Let us take [an] example. Father Patrick Essien, an African diocesan priest of the diocese of Ikot-Ekpene, in South-East State in Nigeria, who has just finished a doctorate in educational administration at Saint Louis University, comes from a primary oral culture of a small village of the Annang, a tribe of some half million persons or more. In the curriculum vitae in his dissertation, which is about the present educational serviceability of proverbs, he proudly displays his oral credentials by noting explicitly that no one is sure of the date of his birth, and then produces complementary credentials as an experienced literate by carefully calculating what the most likely date is. Father Essien's father, now deceased, was a chief. Among the Annang, as among other peoples, this meant that he was also a judge. He used to sit in judgment over such things as property disputes: charges, for example, by a plaintiff that another was pasturing his cattle or planting his yams on the plaintiff's property. The judge-chief would listen to both sides of the case, take the matter under advisement for a while, then cite a saying or proverb, another proverb, perhaps a third and a fourth, and then deliver the verdict. Plaintiff and defendant would leave satisfied.

"But," Father Essien smiles, "you had better give voice to the proper proverbs or other sayings. Otherwise you are in deep trouble, for if you do not cite the ones that apply to the given case no one who hears the judgment is satisfied." The law is lodged in the proverbs or sayings of Annang culture — or the law was, for Father Essien remarks sadly that it is getting harder and harder to find anyone with the skills that his father practiced so well. The law has become something written and does not work that way any more. Inevitably, Father Essien's feelings are mixed, and agonizing. The Annang must move into writing, for its advantages are incontestable. But writing entails losses of much that was good and true and beautiful in the old primary oral culture. You do what you can: Father Essien's dissertation will preserve some of the orality, but alas! only in writing.

A few months ago I was telling this story to another friend. "Sayings still work that way in the oral world of young children," he said. "Sayings settle disputes." He had had some young children in a car with him for a rather long drive a few days before, and there was a dispute when one wanted to preempt a window seat for the whole ride. "Turn about is fair play," my friend had said. And the dispute evaporated; the boy at the window yielded his seat to one of the others. My friend noted the psycho-dynamics of the episode: the saying saved the youngster's face. He was moved out of place not because he was weaker or less worthy or unloved — considerations always urgent in the agonistically structured life-world of primary orality — but because "Turn about is fair play." This was something everybody knew, or should know, part of the common store of knowledge that a culture consists in. There is a deep humanity in the noetic processes of primary orality.

Settling a property dispute among adults, however, is a quite different matter from settling children's disputes. Not all have recognized this fact. Literates have had trouble understanding oral cultures precisely because in a highly literate culture experience of primary orality — or something close to primary orality — is likely to be limited to experience of the child's world. Hence persons from highly literate cultures have commonly been unable to react understandingly to adult, sophisticated levels of behavior in oral cultures but have tended to view the whole of "native" — that is, oral — populations as "child-like", including admirably adult men and women, middle-aged and older, who often have coped with life more adroitly and more successfully than their literate critics.

This defensive depreciatory interpretation of another culture by literates is itself curiously childlike. It has forced literary scholars consciously or unconsciously espousing it to go through incredible intellectual contortions to make out the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to be basically texts composed in writing instead of transcriptions of essentially oral performance, because of the supposition that oral performance is not capable of the sophistication these works manifest. Thanks to the work of Parry and Lord and Havelock and their now numerous epigoni, we should be beyond this today. We should know something of the psychodynamics of primary oral cultures of primary oral noetics — how the mind works when it cannot rely directly or indirectly on writing and on the thought patterns that writing alone can initiate.

Once we know something about the psychodynamics of the oral mind, we can recognize that primary orality, at least in residual form, is still a factor in the thought habits of many of those to whom we are called upon to teach writing. Such recognition does not automatically solve our problems, but it at least enables us better to identify them. Our students from oral or residually oral cultures come not from an unorganized world, but from a world which is differently organized, in ways which can now be at least partly understood.

What of those students who come from the world of secondary oral culture? Does the oral world of radio and television drive all its denizens back from literate culture to the primary oral noetic economy? Of course not. If it did, that would be the end of radio and television. There is nothing on radio or television, however oral, not subject to some — and most often to utterly massive — chirographic and typographic control, which enters into program design, scripts, advertising, contractual agreements, diction, sentence structure, and countless other details. Primary orality cannot cope with electronic media. I recall talking to radio and television producers in Dakar a few years ago and speculating with them about how it would be to have a television series run by a *griot*, the West African singer of tales, oral purveyor of genealogies, crier of praises and taunts, custodian of the *loci* of the culture. An individual performance by a *griot* could prove interesting, the Senegalese

media people knew, but would have to be carefully supervised, for the new kind of orality had made a world utterly different from the *griot's* world, using different techniques. There was no way for a *griot* to program a radio or television series.

But how about the audience? Does the oral world of radio and television reintroduce its viewers, as against its programmers or performers, to primary oral noetics? It appears not in any sophisticated way at all. Television viewers show no tendency, so far as I can discern, to organize their knowledge and express themselves the way the Nigerian villagers do in Chinua Achebe's novels. They have no such oral mastery of proverbial thinking at all. As I have noted in *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology*, even relatively unsophisticated audiences in a high-technology culture feel they should scorn formulas or clichés as such, although they might not always succeed in avoiding them. Consequently, clichés addressed to audiences in a high-technology milieu tend to be accompanied by signals, verbal or other, that downgrade the clichés themselves. Archie Bunker's clichés are systematically debased by his malapropisms. The audience is encouraged and assisted to reject them and laugh at them. This is only some of the abundant evidence that popular culture is discernably under the influence of literacy today, and at many levels, even in its relatively unsophisticated members.

Secondary orality, in other words, is to varying degrees literate. In fact, a residual primary orality, literacy, and sec-

ondary orality are interacting vigorously with one another in confusing complex patterns in our secondarily oral world.

This situation does not automatically create sensitivity to literature or equip everyone with the ability to write well, but it can be made to work toward such goals. The world of secondary orality is a media-conscious world. In fact, this is the world which effectively brought about the discovery of the contrast between primary orality and literacy, and ultimately the contrast between both and secondary orality. Milman Parry and Albert Lord discovered the orality of ancient Homeric Greece not simply by studying texts but largely through sound recordings of twentieth-century Yugoslavian epic singers.

Because we live in a media-conscious world, we can make students aware of what this paper has attempted to sketch: what oral speech is and what writing is by contrast. This awareness can increase sensitivity to literature and to the problems of writing.

I am not suggesting here more courses in "the media". But I am suggesting that both those who teach writing and those who teach literature can in their teaching make a productive issue of the contrasts between the noetic and psychological milieu of primary orality, that of writing and of print, and that of secondary orality. Understanding these differences not in terms merely of slogans but circumstantially and in depth is itself a liberal education.

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Two Kinds of Knowing in Spoken and Written Language

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Plato wanted to ban poets from the educational process in *The Republic*. This always puzzled and disturbed me because I loved poetry and always believed it ennobled souls and minds. My recent research into spoken and written language and oral and literate traditions has led me to an explanation of this seeming puzzle.

Eric Havelock, in his *Preface to Plato*, explains that Plato was ushering in an era of literacy. With his plan for the education of the young in a utopian society, Plato was preparing his contemporaries for a new way of knowing, one that would differ from the traditional way, in which wisdom was passed orally from adults to children in face-to-face communication. Plato anticipated a way of knowing information such as could be preserved only in written texts. In preliterate society, most of what children have to learn is already known by adults. Learning is therefore a matter of acculturation to society. But books and literacy make possible — in fact, require — a different way of knowing, one in which young people might very well need to know what their teachers have not known. Furthermore, as Walter Ong explains, the process of learning by acculturation is a subjective process while learning for information is an objective process (*The Presence of the Word*). While such dichotomies are never absolute, they help to highlight the key differences between the two systems of knowing.

This explains the problem with poets. Poets in classical times were oral bards, wandering entertainers who moved audiences with live performances. Such performances enabled audiences to identify with the characters in a tale, or with the poet himself. Listeners were moved by the rhythm of the performance and the charisma of the performer. They experienced the kind of mesmerization that takes over during a successful performance of any kind — theatrical, musical, oratorical. In fact, the techniques of oral poetry are those of ordinary spontaneous talk. Both include details that others can recognize from their own experience, vivid descriptions, lyrical or playful sound sequences. The images and rhythms of oral poetry and of talk move us emotionally; we feel involved; we feel that we understand; we “feel for” the speaker or the characters in the story.

Learning the new information that is conveyed in written texts is a totally different business. We want to keep our emotions out of it so we can judge the argument on its own merits. We do not ask if the people we are reading about seem real; we are not carried away by the sound and rhythm of words. Rather, we ask of written texts: Do these ideas make sense? Does this argument hang together?

By keeping poets out of the educational process in his utopia, Plato was hoping to train people to the demands of the new kind of knowing which would be required of them with the advent of literacy — new skills they would need for a fast changing culture in which new information has to be learned from writers whom one doesn't know and probably never will know. Plato realized the subjective knowing, learning for acculturation had built upon old attachments, but in the new, changing world, old attachments might obscure understanding rather than enhance it. Certainly, in social contexts, much of what people say to each other is neither new nor startling; the main point of talk is to reinforce social bonds. In an information-rich, industrialized society, the content of communication is often of central importance.

What has all this got to do with writing in and out of school?

Like Plato, we want children to learn information; and we teach them to use their objective rather than subjective powers in approaching texts. What is interesting, though, is that understanding both spoken and written modes depends on both objective and subjective powers. Just as literate adults need to approach written texts such as expository essays objectively, they also ought to apply objective and critical thinking when approaching information such as advertisements, television or radio shows, lectures, and talk about substantive issues. I think this explains why teaching composition so often turns out to be teaching critical approaches to information. It may explain as well the often repeated (if somewhat self-important) theme, that teaching writing is teaching thinking. If we teach thinking when we teach writing, we teach a certain kind of thinking — a kind of rhetorical process — which is different from the thinking that is learned and used in everyday social contexts.

On the other hand, there are many kinds of writing which require the very conventions and approaches to language associated with face-to-face communication, the knowing through identification that both Eric Havelock and Walter Ong write about in their helpful works. For example, in creative writing — poetry, short stories, drama — we find many of the features of spontaneous conversation, features which contribute to a sense of involvement between the audience and the speaker: The use of the specific references, familiar details, and vivid descriptions that make the experience real; the repetitions of words and the use of parallel constructions; the use of alliteration and assonance which are common to both poetry and every day talk. Thus when we read creative writing or when we hear it read aloud, we

feel involved; we care about the characters or the writer; and we use subjective processes in our response. Of course, we can also apply objective processes in our critical responses to creative writing; we can make objective analyses of texts in order to determine what devices have elicited our emotional responses to them.

The two-kinds of knowing to which I have been referring — subjective and objective — like different kinds of discourse, are not discrete; they get mixed up and intertwined. For example, news programs and newspaper stories, which once relied largely on objective knowing to create their texts, have shifted their formats to rely increasingly on knowing through identification. The chatty news format invites us to identify with newscasters; and on-the-spot reporting invites us to identify with the people involved in the news event. Examples of our invitation to know content subjectively can be seen in advertising as well, where the advertiser seeks to influence us not so much by giving us information about the product as by devices of face-to-face interchange — repetition, catchy sounds and tunes, and reference to the tes-

timony of ordinary people with whom we can identify. Finally, perhaps the most eloquent examples of the mixing of two kinds of knowing are found in the journalism which increasingly shapes the news in the form of short stories, or even of whole novels, in which imagined events are made up of pieces of real ones.

Do we have to keep poets out of the schools if we want students to learn to know objectively?

No, but we need to be clear that there are different kinds of knowing, that there are different uses of language that can be learned to construct and understand texts that take advantage of one or the other kind of knowing. Surely no one wants to go to a school — or live in a world — in which objective and subjective knowing are completely separate, in which mind and heart are separate. What we do want is what Bruno Bettelheim calls *the informed heart*. We want our students, as well as ourselves, to know when to listen or read with an open heart and when to listen or read with a critical mind.