



## Working Papers in Educational Linguistics (WPEL)

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### Foreword

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## Foreword

F O R E W O R D

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Working Papers in Educational Linguistics (WPEL) renews a concern that is as old as the origins of the University of Pennsylvania and of organized linguistics in the United States. Benjamin Franklin founded the institution that later became the University out of a concern for the teaching of English in the multilingual Pennsylvania of his day. Leonard Bloomfield was the symbolic center of the first generation of autonomous linguists in this country, especially through his book, Language (1933), a book which is at one and the same time a theoretical statement, a definition of a field, and a textbook from which to learn. Throughout his career, Bloomfield was passionately concerned to relate linguistic research to the practice of schooling and the education of every citizen.

If the concern is old, the term, 'educational linguistics,' is new. It is justified because the practice of linguistics, like the meaning of words, is always an interaction with context. As ordinary users of English, we have to recognize that the term 'language' itself may mean a finite sequence of words (the 'language' of an amendment), the verbal characteristics of an author or genre (the 'language' of Shakespeare, the 'language' of the novel), a judgment of competence ("why they have no 'language' at all"), a defining attribute of our own species (of which there are three: language, tools and incest taboo, Roman Jakobson opined a decade ago), the title of a book (by Jespersen, Sapir, Bloomfield, or Whatmough), a complexity one wishes to avoid in favor of 'grammar' as the object of

a science (as in recent remarks by Chomsky). As academic users of English, we have to recognize that the meaning of 'linguistics' also is very much a function of interactions with context. We have some sense of the differences among institutions, as between those in which 'linguistics' involves a close connection with an English department and those in which it involves a close connection with a philosophy department, an anthropology department, a psychology department, or some combination of departments. Our university is fortunately one in which a close connection between linguistics and a School of Education has grown up in recent years.

In each context, the person with a technical competence in linguistics finds a somewhat different set of problems and needs with regard to language. Whatever the ideas that may hold the center of the stage in linguistics proper at a certain period, there will always be persons in other fields who sustain a tradition of concern with language from the standpoint of logic or epistemology, of kinship or prehistory, of cognition or motivation, and so on. What it means to use linguistics in each of these connections will differ. Almost never will it be a case simply of taking the results of current problematics of linguistics as given. (In a strict sense, the dialectic of interaction with context means that there is never really such a thing as 'applied' linguistics). The problems and needs of the cognate field will require a selection and grouping of the contents of linguistics that is somewhat sui generis, and will pose questions to which linguistics as such does not have answers. To answer the questions will require discovery of additional data and, sometimes, method. Such is the case with the philosophy of language or linguistic philosophy, the anthropology of language, linguistic anthropology or anthropological linguistics, the psychology of language or psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, educational linguistics.

Of the manifold ramifications of linguistics today, sociolinguistics is closest kin to educational linguistics, as

the contents of this first number of WPEL indicate. The common ground indeed is very great. For both, language is inherently social. For both, the strategic organization of verbal means to encompass or address situations (to adapt terms put forth by Kenneth Burke more than forty years ago in his 'Philosophy of Literacy Form' (1941) is fundamental to understanding. Competence is a function of social as well as biological heritage.

There is nonetheless a distinction to be made. Linguists working in the context of education must address a speech community, and aspirations with regard to the acquisition and display of competence; the differential access and ability in regard to language that exists in every group; the local institutional structure of teaching and learning. In a phrase, ethos, equity, curriculum. The phrase oversimplifies, but it points in the needed direction.

Many may contribute to this conjuncture of questions and tasks. We are fortunate at the University of Pennsylvania to have the kind of cooperation that makes it possible to identify 'educational linguistics' as a focus of concern in both a School of Education and a Department of Linguistics. By identifying such a focus, we facilitate advance in dealing with the questions involved. May these Working Papers contribute for many years with both the researches they report and the consciousness they raise.