

COMPARATIVE PHONICS

A course introduced
in the
Huli language area

DEFINITION

- Phonics is a method of teaching reading by helping learners understand the sounds of their language (phonemes) and the correspondence between the sounds and their symbols. Symbols may be single letters or clusters of letters in alphabetic languages.
- Comparative phonics, then, is a method of comparing and contrasting phonemes (and their corresponding symbols) between two (or more) languages.

BACKGROUND

- This course in comparative phonics came about in two ways:
 1. as a result of the introduction of Elementary Schools; and
 2. as a result of the earlier English only' education system
- The outcome of both cases was 'schooled' Huli who could neither read nor write their own language; and
- a crop of people who misheard and mispronounced English.

EMERGENCE OF PROBLEMS

- ‘English only’ schooling
- The elementary fiasco
 - Language of the community
 - Myths of failure (e.g. use of the vernacular hinders achievement)
- The real reasons
 - Teachers’ ignorance of their own language
 - Teachers’ lack of practical training

OUTLINE

- ◉ INTRODUCTION
- ◉ Grabbing attention - oral before written
- ◉ Introducing the vowels
- ◉ Consonants which are the same
- ◉ Consonants which are recognizably similar
- ◉ The problem of the fricated 'y' and its allophone
- ◉ The problem of the plosives
- ◉ Nasalized vowels
- ◉ Tones

INTRODUCTION

- ◉ Aimed at enlightening those MT Huli speakers who have had some schooling in English - particularly Elementary Teachers
- ◉ Carries the warning “This course must be taught by teachers fluent in both languages”
- ◉ Cannot be taught from the written text
- ◉ It is ‘live’ and ‘interactive’
- ◉ It requires immediate responses and feedback

GRABBING ATTENTION ORAL BEFORE WRITTEN

- ⦿ I show / write the letter “a”
- ⦿ I ask “What does this say?”
- ⦿ When responses are given, I then put my ear to the letter and quip,
“I did not hear it say anything - you were the ones that said something”
- ⦿ When teaching phonics we leave the wrong impression by saying this letter “says . . .”

INTRODUCING THE VOWELS

- Huli vowel sounds: How many? (5?)
- English vowel sounds: How many?
Huli believe there are 5
- Disregarding the diphthongs (glides),
there are 13.
- Long and short vowels.
 - Differ from the usual approach that calls the letter names 'long' vowels
 - Differ also in the labelling of diphthongs as single phonemes

CONSONANTS REGARDED AS 'SAME'

- ◉ Nasals: m, n
- ◉ h
- ◉ Undisputed semi-vowel: w
- ◉ Disputed semi-vowel: y

CONSONANTS ALMOST 'SAME'

- ◉ No confusion / no argument
l and r
- ◉ The curious case of introduced confusion by
early patrolls and written text
 - Writing names
 - But has not confused the cognitive phonemic
categories

PROBLEM OF THE PLOSIVES

- ◉ Same three points of articulation:
bi-labial, alveo-dental, velar

BUT

- ◉ English: 3 minimal pairs
- ◉ Huli: 3 minimal trios / triplets

SCHEMA

- ◉ English: aspirated and non-aspirated pairs: allophones of the same phoneme: may use the same symbol
- ◉ Huli morphologically distinct: need separate symbols
- ◉ English voiced plosive
- ◉ Huli voiced plosive always prenasalized
- ◉ Huli ears mishear the English voiced plosive.

TEACHING APPROACH

- ◉ Adage: oral before written
- ◉ The fixation: “this letter says this sound”
[the letters in a written text do not “say” anything]
- ◉ Sounds (phonemes) presented *without* visual symbols (graphemes)
- ◉ Sounds are numbered

| Aspirated unvoiced | Unaspirated unvoiced | voiced | Pre-nasalised |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------|---------------|
| p | p | b | |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ |
| p | b | | mb |

VOWELS REVISITED

- ◉ Introducing nasalized vowels

| | |
|----------|-----------------|
| a | <u>a</u> |
| e | <u>e</u> |
| i | <u>i</u> |
| o | <u>o</u> |
| u | <u>u</u> |