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A LIST OF BASIC SIGHT WORDS FOR OLDER DISABLED READERS

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The Dolch basic sight vocabulary of 220 words has generally been recognized by reading authorities as a valuable asset to reading instruction. Research by Dolch (1941), Fry (1960), and Zintz (1966) and Johns (in press) has shown that the 220 words comprising the Dolch list represent 50 to 75 per cent of all school reading matter in the elementary grades. According to Dolch, these 220 words are recognized instantly by good second-grade readers and by average third-grade readers.

The Dolch basic sight vocabulary, as the name implies, is a short list of basic words which children should recognize instantly at sight. The Dolch list contains conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, and verbs. According to Dolch, there are no nouns included on the list because each noun is tied to special subject matter. A casual perusal of the Dolch list, however, reveals that several words (fly, work, today, show) may function as nouns depending upon the context.

The 220 words Dolch compiled have been very useful in helping to build a basic sight vocabulary for children who are beginning formal reading instruction. These words have also been used in elementary and secondary remedial reading programs as well as adult literacy programs. The rationale for using the Dolch list in these programs apparently stems from Dolch (1952) and others who believe that the first step in remedial reading is to see that the child recognizes such words instantly by sight. Because the Dolch list was based on three word lists primarily related to young children, it is somewhat difficult to generalize about the frequency of these words in the materials often read by older children and adults. As previously mentioned, there is evidence to indicate that the words on the Dolch list comprise nearly 50 per cent of the words in most adult reading material. It is possible, however, that there exists a further list of words common to newspapers, magazines, and popular books that could be added to the Dolch list for use with older students and adults who are experiencing difficulty in reading. Such a list may be useful to remedial reading teachers attempting to help disabled readers in secondary schools and others involved in adult literacy programs.

Of special interest in this regard is a book of 1,014,232 words of

natural language text compiled by Kucera and Francis (1967). The Corpus, as the book is called, was compiled from 500 samples of various materials published during 1961, each of which contained approximately 2,000 words. To insure representativeness, the 500 samples were distributed among fifteen categories, representing the full range of subject matter and prose styles, from the sports page of the newspaper to the scientific journal and from popular romantic fiction to abstruse philosophical discussion. The fifteen categories, for example, contained samples taken from the various sections of the newspaper, several types of fiction, and magazines on various skills and hobbies.

The purpose of this study was to compare the first 220 most frequently occurring words from the Corpus list to the Dolch list. The first 220 words on the rank list were compared to the Dolch list resulting in a preliminary list, containing words on the Corpus list which were not on the Dolch list. This preliminary list was then compared with the Dolch list of 95 common nouns since numerous nouns appeared on the Corpus list. All words on the Corpus list which also appeared on the Dolch list of common nouns were then eliminated. This procedure resulted in a final list of 63 words which did not appear on either the Dolch basic sight vocabulary list or the Dolch list of 95 common nouns. Several words, however, were not included in this list because the root word appeared on one of the Dolch lists.

It is this list of words which might be useful for teachers who work with disabled readers in secondary schools or assist in adult literacy programs. The remedial reading teacher in the secondary school who assumes that the Dolch list will provide all the essential words for older students experiencing difficulty with reading may be mistaken. It would appear, from this analysis, that elementary textbooks contain many high frequency words which do not occur with the same degree of frequency in newspapers, magazines, and popular books often read by older persons.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this comparison of the Dolch list to the Corpus list is the realization that the Dolch list has limitations, especially in secondary remedial reading programs and adult literacy programs. The Dolch list should, of course, still be taught to these students; however, it could be augmented with the 63 words from the Corpus list which did not appear on the Dolch lists. It is hoped that this list of 63 words beyond the Dolch lists, if taught to older remedial students, will reduce even further the burden of unknown words they will be confronted with when reading newspapers, magazines, and popular books.

A LIST OF BASIC SIGHT WORDS
FOR OLDER DISABLED READERS

1. more	22. last	43. course
2. than	23. might	44. war
3. other	24. great	45. until
4. such	25. year	46. something
5. even	26. since	47. fact
6. most	27. against	48. though
7. also	28. himself	49. less
8. through	29. few	50. public
9. should	30. during	51. almost
10. each	31. without	52. enough
11. people	32. place	53. took
12. Mr.	33. American	54. yet
13. state	34. however	55. government
14. world	35. Mrs.	56. system
15. still	36. thought	57. set
16. between	37. part	58. told
17. life	38. general	59. nothing
18. being	39. high	60. end
19. same	40. united	61. didn't
20. another	41. left	62. later
21. while	42. number	63. knew

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