



# Language development and literacy

Last update: October 2018

**Topic Editor:**

Susan Rvachew, PhD, McGill University, Canada

# Table of content

Synthesis	4
<hr/>	
Speech Development and Literacy	8
SUSAN RVACHEW, PHD, S-LP(C), ASHA FELLOW, SEPTEMBER 2018	
<hr/>	
Language Development at an Early Age: Learning Mechanisms and Outcomes from Birth to Five Years	16
ERIKA HOFF, PHD, OCTOBER 2009	
<hr/>	
Factors that Influence Language Development	21
JUDITH JOHNSTON, PHD, JANUARY 2010	
<hr/>	
Biological Bases of Language Development	27
ERIC PAKULAK, <sup>1,2</sup> PHD, AMANDA HAMPTON WRAY, <sup>3</sup> PHD, OCTOBER 2018	
<hr/>	
Parents' Role in Fostering Young Children's Learning and Language Development	34
CATHERINE S. TAMIS-LEMONDA, PHD, EILEEN T. RODRIGUEZ, PHD, NOVEMBER 2009	
<hr/>	
Literacy, Language and Emotional Development	43
MONIQUE SÉNÉCHAL,* PHD, DECEMBER 2009	
<hr/>	
Language Development and its Impact on Children's Psychosocial and Emotional Development	49
JOSEPH BEITCHMAN, MD, ELIZABETH BROWNLIE, PHD, FEBRUARY 2010	
<hr/>	
The Impact of Language Development on the Psychosocial and Emotional Development of Young Children	56
NANCY J. COHEN, PHD, JANUARY 2010	
<hr/>	

Language Development and Literacy: Comments on Beitchman and Cohen ROSEMARY TANNOCK, PHD, JANUARY 2010	62
Literacy as an Outcome of Language Development and its Impact on Children’s Psychosocial and Emotional Development DAWNA DUFF, <sup>1</sup> PHD, J. BRUCE TOMBLIN, <sup>2</sup> PHD, OCTOBER 2018	67
Literacy and its Impact on Child Development: Comments on Tomblin and Sénéchal LAURA M. JUSTICE, PHD, JANUARY 2010	74
Early Identification of Language Delay PHILIP S. DALE, PHD, JANET L. PATTERSON, PHD, FEBRUARY 2017	78
Programs Supporting Young Children's Language Development KATHY THIEMANN-BOURQUE, PHD, STEVEN F. WARREN, PHD, SEPTEMBER 2018	84
Services and Programs Supporting Young Children’s Language Development: Comments on Girolametto, and Thiemann and Warren PATRICIA L. CLEAVE, PHD, JANUARY 2010	91

---

## Synthesis

### How important is it?

Learning to talk is one of the most visible and important achievements of early childhood. New language tools mean new opportunities for social understanding, for learning about the world, for sharing experience, pleasures and needs. Then, in the first three years of school, children take another big step in language development as they learn to read. Although these two domains are distinct, they are also related. Early-language skills have been linked to later successful reading. As well, pre-literacy and literacy activities can help further children's language competencies in both the preschool years and later schooling.

Children with poor listening and speaking skills are referred to as having language impairment. An estimated 8 to 12% of preschool children and 12% of children entering school in Canada and the U.S. have some form of language impairment. Studies also show that 25 to 90% of children with language impairment experience reading disorder, usually defined as poor reading achievement occurring after sufficient opportunity to learn to read. Reading disorder among school-aged children is estimated to be between 10 and 18%.

When children have difficulty understanding others and expressing themselves, it is not surprising that psychosocial and emotional adjustment problems ensue. Children with delayed or disordered language are therefore at increased risk for social, emotional and behavioural problems. As well, research shows that most children who have poor reading skills at the end of Grade One will continue to experience difficulties reading later on.

### What do we know?

While the nature of the mental activity that underlies language learning is widely debated, there is considerable agreement that the course of language development is influenced by determining factors in at least five fields: social, perceptual, cognitive processing, conceptual and linguistic. As well, although individual differences among children do exist, language development has predictable sequences. Most children begin speaking during their second year, and by 21 months are likely to know about 100 words and are able to combine them in short phrases. By age of four to six, most children are speaking in grammatically complete and fully intelligible sentences. Their

first sentences are made of content words and are often missing grammatical function words (e.g., articles and prepositions) and word endings (e.g., plurals and tense markers). Although there is a predictable sequence, the rate of language development among children varies substantially primarily due to the complex interaction between genetic and environmental factors.

The amount and kind of language stimulation at home and family stresses such as child abuse contribute to children's language development. As well, the quality of interaction between a caregiver and a child – such as when playing word games or reading books – plays an important role in literacy outcomes. Children's skills progress more quickly and readily in instructional interactions characterized by sensitive, responsive and non-controlling adult input. Other aspects of parental behaviours, such as frequent and regular participation to learning activities and the provision of age-appropriate learning materials, favour the child's literacy outcomes. In addition, parents with more resources (e.g., education, income) are more likely to provide positive learning experiences for their young child. Although child characteristics (e.g, birth order) also play a key role in their own learning experiences with firstborn children having in average a larger vocabulary than their later-born siblings.

Children with limited expressive vocabulary (less than 40-50 words) and who use no word combinations at the age of 24 months are identified as having slow expressive language development (SELD). These children are at higher risk for language impairment persisting into late preschool to elementary school years. In addition, children with impaired language development are at greater risk for later academic difficulties, learning disabilities, anxiety disorders, social difficulties, and behaviour problems. The most common behavioural problem is Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); studies also show high rates of internalizing problems such as shyness and anxiety. Children with speech impairments are more likely to have difficulty with phonological processing, phonological learning and literacy.

Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to identify, compare and manipulate the smallest units of spoken words, phonemes. During the first year, children are more sensitive to phonemes in their native language and are less sensitive to acoustic differences not relevant to their language. At the age of 7.5 months, the increased children's brain response to their native language contrasts predicts later language skills. Phonemic awareness and vocabulary skills are, respectively, the best predictors of reading and reading comprehension. Some children are sufficiently competent in listening and talking, but have poor phonological processing abilities. At school entry, these

children may be viewed as being at risk for reading disorder. There is a markedly disproportionate representation of children who are poor and who belong to ethnic or racial minorities among those who struggle with reading.

Finally, bilingual children's language development and age onset for word combinations are comparable to monolingual children.

### **What can be done?**

Early language interventions during infancy or the preschool years can have a significant impact on child outcomes. There are at least four general contexts in which language intervention can be provided: individual, small group, classroom and caregiver training. Four language-teaching strategies have been demonstrated to improve children's language abilities. These are: *prelinguistic milieu teaching*, to help children make the transition from pre-intentional to intentional communication; *milieu teaching*, which consists of specific techniques embedded within a child's ongoing activities and interactions; *responsive interaction*, which involves teaching caregivers to be highly responsive to the child's communication attempts; and *direct teaching*, characterized by prompting, reinforcing and giving immediate feedback on grammar or vocabulary within highly structured sessions. In all cases, it is important to set the stage for language learning by creating opportunities for communication, following the child's lead, and building and establishing social routines.

In parent-administered language interventions, parents are trained by speech-language pathologists to become the primary intervention agents, learning how to facilitate their children's language development in daily, naturalistic contexts. (This differs from parent involvement, in which children receive direct attention from the speech-language pathologist and parents play a secondary but supportive role.) Parent-administered interventions have yielded short-term developmental progress in communication and language skills in a wide range of preschool-aged children with delayed or disordered language. However, little is known about the long-term effects of this cost-effective intervention model.

High-intensity training is an intervention strategy that aims to increase the attention of children diagnosed with specific language impairment. Considering that attention deficit is associated with language impairment in young children, and especially boys, high-intensity training involving the parents and the child should be encouraged. Based on recent studies, this intervention has been

found to improve both children's language proficiency and attention skills.

Social-policy initiatives should focus on early identification with a speech pathologist, comprehensive assessments and providing highly responsive environments early on. As well, appropriate training and continuing education should be provided to everyone who works with children and their families, such as speech-language pathologists, early interventionists, early childhood educators and child-care providers. Yet there are still several barriers to overcome. These include developing more sensitive screening measures to identify the various kinds of impairments, achieving consensus on case definition, and enhancing parent recognition of children's potential problems and the need to seek help.

---

# Speech Development and Literacy

Susan Rvachew, PhD, S-LP(C), ASHA Fellow

School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, McGill University, Canada

September 2018

## Introduction

Literacy is essential to success in modern life. Literacy levels predict school completion,<sup>1</sup> vocational outcomes,<sup>2</sup> mental<sup>3</sup> and physical health,<sup>4,5</sup> and quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Ensuring optimum literacy levels requires a focus on young children because oral language skills are the foundation of literacy.<sup>6</sup> According to the “simple view of reading”<sup>7</sup> the ability to comprehend text is determined by oral language comprehension and decoding skills. Decoding, or sounding out letters to recover words from print, is founded on the ability to perceive speech accurately, pronounce speech clearly and understand how speech sounds are combined to form words. These are all aspects of phonology. For most children, phonological development begins before birth, when the fetus hears the melody of maternal speech in the womb, and continues through 9 years of age when the child has learned to accurately pronounce all sounds in the native language.<sup>8</sup>

## Subject

Speaking and reading are related because these skills are dependent upon phonological processing.<sup>9,10</sup> Phonological processing includes perceiving speech sounds in speech input (‘bin’ and ‘pin’ sound different), recognizing patterns in speech input (‘hat’, ‘mat’, and ‘sat’ share a similar ending), and holding phonological information in memory long enough to use it (‘b’-‘a’-‘t’, that makes ‘bat’).<sup>11,12</sup> Within the first year the normal-hearing infant has learned which speech sounds are important in the native language and which speech rhythms are commonly used in words and phrases.<sup>13</sup> This knowledge supports the onset of babbling as well as word learning.<sup>14</sup> Over time the young child learns how speech sounds are combined to form words and gradually speech accuracy improves.<sup>15,16</sup> The older child combines an explicit awareness of the sound structure of words with the alphabetic principle to acquire reading.<sup>17,18</sup>

## Problem



Children vary greatly in phonological processing skills<sup>19</sup> and in the rate and typology of speech development.<sup>20</sup> Children with the slowest speech development are at risk for reading disability (dyslexia) when they are school-age. However, some children with unclear speech have no difficulty learning to read and many children with dyslexia had no prior speech difficulties. The challenge of identifying and intervening to prevent reading difficulties is even greater when the child speaks more than one language or does not speak the school language at school entry. Another complication is that the relationship between accurate speech production and reading acquisition is not direct: it is mediated by phonological processing which is a relatively hidden ability. If the child has poor phonological processing but reasonably clear speech the child may not be referred for intervention. When a child with unclear speech is referred to a speech-language pathologist, the intervention may focus on producing accurate speech sounds while ignoring the underlying deficit in phonological processing.

## **Research Context**

Longitudinal studies have revealed how earlier developing skills (speech accuracy, word learning, emergent literacy) predict later developing skills (decoding, reading comprehension). These studies might follow large samples of children drawn from the general population<sup>21-23</sup> or clinic-referred samples with known delays in speech and language development.<sup>24-26</sup> Other longitudinal studies have examined the relative contributions of genetic and environmental factors to language and literacy outcomes by following twins<sup>27</sup> or children born to dyslexic parents.<sup>28,29</sup> Other studies have examined family characteristics and parent behaviours that are associated with the development of emergent literacy skills during the preschool period.<sup>30,31</sup> Finally, some studies have tried to determine best practices for speech-language pathologists and preschool teachers when providing services to children who are at-risk for reading difficulties.<sup>32-35</sup>

## **Key Research Questions**

What can parents do to help their children be ready to learn to read at school entry? Which children with speech problems are most likely to have difficulties learning to read? What are the implications of this research literature for speech-language pathology practice when treating preschoolers with speech sound disorders?

## **Recent Research Results**

Children with delayed or disordered speech development are at increased risk for dyslexia. It is important for parents and professionals to monitor the child's achievement of important milestones in speech development, specifically:

- 7 to 11 months: onset of babbling, that is, repetitive strings of speech-like syllables like “baba” and “deedee;”<sup>36</sup>
- 3 to 4 years: intelligible speech, that is, even strangers can understand almost all or all of the child's speech;<sup>37,38</sup>
- 4 to 6 years: implicit awareness of alliteration and rhyme and sounds in words;
- 7 to 9 years: accurate speech sound production, that is, all speech sounds are produced correctly although slight distortion of some sounds might occur but decline during this period.

The ages at which these milestones are achieved are roughly similar regardless of the language(s) that the child is learning even though the details of speech development vary by language group.<sup>39,40</sup> A useful tool has been developed for measuring speech intelligibility in different languages (see <http://www.csu.edu.au/research/multilingual-speech/ics>).<sup>41</sup> Not all children with unclear speech are at equal risk of dyslexia however. Referral to a speech-language pathologist is most important when there are additional risk factors, specifically concomitant delay in language skills and a family history of speech, language or reading problems.<sup>42</sup> Note that multilingualism is not a specific risk factor for delayed acquisition of decoding skills.<sup>43</sup>

Parents can teach their child phonological awareness which is the knowledge that words are made up of smaller parts.<sup>44</sup> Spoken language is a continuous stream of sound that does not map easily onto the letters or words that we see in print. Word games that involve breaking up words into parts and recombining them get the point across (football, tee-ball, teacup, buttercup). Matching words that share the same beginning (sun, soup, sand) to the appropriate letter (s) is an important activity that 4-year-olds can learn.<sup>45</sup> Most children know some of the alphabet before they begin kindergarten.<sup>46</sup> Phonological awareness skills are heritable because there is a strong genetic component to the neurodevelopmental underpinnings of phonological processing.<sup>27,47-50</sup> When phonological processing is poor, a large vocabulary helps the child acquire better phonological awareness than they might otherwise<sup>9</sup> as well as supporting future reading comprehension.<sup>18,51</sup> High quality parental language input is essential to language development and shared reading is an excellent context for vocabulary teaching.<sup>52-54</sup>

These kinds of parental inputs will be especially important if the child is struggling to speak clearly. Speech sound disorders affect 3 to 5% of preschool aged children,<sup>23</sup> 11% of kindergarten aged children<sup>55</sup> (with at least a third of these also having a language disorder)<sup>56</sup> and 18% of 8-year-old children.<sup>57</sup> Children with unclear speech should be referred to a speech-language pathologist. Early intervention is desired because persistence of the speech problem past the point at which reading instruction begins is another risk factor for dyslexia.<sup>58-60</sup> The speech-language pathologist must organize resources to address the child's challenges in the areas of speech accuracy, phonological processing and oral language development.<sup>61-66</sup>

## **Research Gaps**

Children with speech sound disorders are a heterogeneous population made up of different subgroups with varied risk of future reading difficulty.<sup>59</sup> The development of effective interventions for these specific subgroups is in the beginning stages. Furthermore, little is known about optimum intensity and scheduling of treatment.<sup>64,67</sup> Boys are at greater risk of speech disorders<sup>68,69</sup> and often score worse than girls on measures of emergent literacy and reading.<sup>70,71</sup> More research to understand these gender differences and to develop gender-sensitive responses to speech and reading difficulties is required.

## **Conclusions**

Phonological development begins before birth and continues throughout childhood with parallel and gradual improvements in speech perception, speech production accuracy and phonological awareness. Phonological development is closely linked to reading development and the ability to decode words in print is built upon these earlier developing oral language skills.

## **Implications for Parents, Services and Policy**

Parents, educators and health care workers should monitor the child's achievement of certain easily observable milestones in speech production development—babbling by 11 months, speech intelligibility by 4 years and speech accuracy by 7 to 9 years. Parents and teachers can use direct teaching and shared reading to increase vocabulary size and phonological awareness, thus preparing the child for success when reading instruction begins in school.

For children with delayed speech development, the speech-language pathologist must attend to speech accuracy and underlying deficits in phonological processing that put the child at risk for

dyslexia. Service providers should ensure that speech therapy services are sufficiently intense and multidisciplinary, engaging families, educators, and other professionals when necessary, to ensure that children achieve normalized speech, language and emergent literacy skills before the onset of formal reading instruction.

## References

1. Hernandez DJ. *Double jeopardy: How third grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation; 2012.
2. OECD/Statistic Canada. *Literacy for life: Further results from the adult literacy and life skills survey*. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2011. <http://dx.doi.org/9789264091269-en>
3. Lincoln A, Espejo D, Johnson P, Paasche-Orlow M, Speckman JL, Webber TL, White RF. Limited literacy and psychiatric disorders among users of an urban safety-net hospital's mental health outpatient clinic. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 2008;196(9):687-693. doi:10.1097/NMD.0b013e31817d0181.
4. Dewalt DA, Berkman ND, Sheridan S, Lohr KN, Pignone MP. Literacy and health outcomes: a systematic review of the literature. *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 2004;19(12):1228-1239.
5. Marcus EN. The silent epidemic — The health effects of literacy. *New England Journal of Medicine* 2006;355(4):339-342.
6. Rvachew S, Savage R. Preschool foundations of early reading acquisition. *Pediatrics and Child Health* 2006;11(9):589-593.
7. Gough PB, Tunmer WE. Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special education* 1986;7(1):6-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074193258600700104>
8. Rvachew S, Brosseau-Lapr e F. *Developmental phonological disorders: Foundations of clinical practice*. 2nd ed. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, Inc.; 2016.
9. Rvachew S, Grawburg M. Correlates of phonological awareness in preschoolers with speech sound disorders. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2006;49(1):74-87.
10. Lyon GR, Shaywitz SE, Shaywitz BA. A definition of dyslexia. *Annals of Dyslexia* 2003;53(1):1-14. doi:10.1007/s11881-003-0001-9
11. McBride-Chang C. Phonological processing, speech perception, and reading disability: An integrative review. *Educational Psychologist* 1995;30(3):109-121.
12. Metsala JL. Young children's phonological awareness and nonword repetition as a function of vocabulary development. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 1999;91(1):3-19.
13. Kuhl PK. Early language acquisition: Cracking the speech code. *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience* 2004;5(11):831-843.
14. McGillion M, Herbert JS, Pine J, Vihman M, dePaolis R, Keren-Portnoy T, Matthews D. What paves the way to conventional language? The predictive value of babble, pointing, and socioeconomic status. *Child Development* 2017;88(1):156-166. doi:10.1111/cdev.12671
15. Roulstone S, Miller LL, Wren Y, Peters TJ. The natural history of speech impairment of 8-year-old children in the Avon Longitudinal Study of parents and children: Error rates at 2 and 5 years. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2009;11(5):381-391.
16. Smit AB, Hand L, Freilinger JJ, Bernthal JE, Bird A. The Iowa articulation norms project and its Nebraska replication. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1990;55(4):779-798.
17. Lonigan CJ, Burgess SR, Anthony JL. Development of emergent literacy and early reading skills in preschool children: evidence from a latent-variable longitudinal study. *Developmental psychology* 2000;36(5):596-613.

18. Storch SA, Whitehurst GJ. Oral language and code-related precursors to reading: Evidence from a longitudinal structural model. *Developmental psychology* 2002;38(6):934-947.
19. Noble KG, McCandliss BD, Farah MJ. Socioeconomic gradients predict individual differences in neurocognitive abilities. *Developmental Science* 2007;10(4):464-480.
20. Vick JC, Campbell TF, Shriberg LD, Green JR, Abdi H, Rusiewicz HL, Venkatesh L, Moore CA. Distinct developmental profiles in typical speech acquisition. *Journal of Neurophysiology* 2012;107(10):2885-2900. doi:10.1152/jn.00337.2010
21. Thomas E, Senechal M. Long-term association between articulation quality and phoneme sensitivity: A study from age 3 to age 8. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 2004;25(4):513-541.
22. Durand VN, Loe IM, Yeatman JD, Feldman HM. Effects of early language, speech, and cognition on later reading: A mediation analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology* 2013;4:586. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00586
23. Eadie P, Morgan A, Ukoumunne OC, Ttofari Eecen K, Wake M, Reilly S. Speech sound disorder at 4 years: prevalence, comorbidities, and predictors in a community cohort of children. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology* 2015;57(6):578-584. doi:10.1111/dmcn.12635
24. Bird J, Bishop DV, Freeman NH. Phonological awareness and literacy development in children with expressive phonological impairments. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 1995;38(2):446-462.
25. Rvachew S. Phonological processing and reading in children with speech sound disorders. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2007;16(3):260-270.
26. Lewis BA, Avrich AA, Freebairn LA, Hansen AJ, Sucheston LE, Kuo I, Taylor HG, Iyengar SK, Stein CM. Literacy outcomes of children with early childhood speech sound disorders: Impact of endophenotypes. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 2011;54(6):1628-1643. doi:10.1044/1092-4388(2011/10-0124)
27. Hayiou-Thomas ME, Harlaar N, Dale PS, Plomin R. Preschool speech, language skills, and reading at 7, 9, and 10 years: Etiology of the relationship. *Journal of Speech, Language & Hearing Research* 2010;53(2):311-332.
28. Snowling MJ, Melby-Lervåg M. Oral language deficits in familial dyslexia: A meta-analysis and review. *Psychological Bulletin* 2016;142(5):498-545. doi:10.1037/bul0000037
29. Lyytinen H, Aro M, Eklund K, Erskine J, Guttorm T, Laakso ML, Leppänen PH, Lyytinen P, Poikkeus AM, Torppa M. The development of children at familial risk for dyslexia: Birth to early school age. *Annals of Dyslexia* 2004;54(2):184-220.
30. Burgess SR. The influence of speech perception, oral language ability, the home literacy environment, and pre-reading knowledge on the growth of phonological sensitivity: A one-year longitudinal investigation. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2002;15(7):709-737.
31. Senechal M, LeFevre JA. Parental involvement in the development of children's reading: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development* 2002;73(2):445-460.
32. Justice LM. Evidence-based practice, response to intervention, and the prevention of reading difficulties. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools* 2006;37(4):284-297.
33. Justice LM, McGinty AS, Piasta SB, Kaderavek JN, Fan X. Print-focused read-alouds in preschool classrooms: Intervention effectiveness and moderators of child outcomes. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools* 2010;41(4):504-520.
34. Lonigan CJ, Anthony JL, Bloomfield BG, Dyer SM, Samwell CS. Effects of two shared-reading interventions on emergent literacy skills of at-risk preschoolers. *Journal of Early Intervention* 1999;22(4):306-322.
35. Hesketh A, Dima E, Nelson V. Teaching phoneme awareness to pre-literate children with speech disorder: a randomized controlled trial. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 2007;42(3):251-271.
36. Oller DK, Eilers RE, Basinger D. Intuitive identification of infant vocal sounds by parents. *Developmental Science* 2001;4(1):49-60.

37. Coplan J, Gleason JR. Unclear speech: Recognition and significance of unintelligible speech in preschool children. *Pediatrics* 1988;82(3 Pt 2):447-452.
38. McLeod S, Harrison LJ, McCormack J. The Intelligibility in Context Scale: Validity and reliability of a subjective rating measure. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2012;55(2):648-656. doi:10.1044/1092-4388(2011/10-0130)
39. Brosseau-Lapr e F, Rvachew S, MacLeod A, Findlay K, B erub e D, Bernhardt B. Une vue d'ensemble : Les donn ees probantes sur le d veloppement phonologique des enfants francophones canadiens. *Revue canadienne d'orthophonie et d'audiologie* 2018;42(1):1-19.
40. Brosseau-Lapr e F, Rvachew S. Cross-linguistic comparison of speech errors produced by English- and French-speaking preschool age children with developmental phonological disorders. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2014;16(2):98-108.
41. McLeod S. Intelligibility in Context Scale: A parent-report screening tool translated into 60 languages. *Journal of Clinical Practice in Speech-Language Pathology* 2015;17(1):7-12.
42. Rvachew S, Rafaat S. Report on benchmark wait times for pediatric speech sound disorders. *Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology* 2014;38(1):82-96.
43. Chiappe P, Siegel LS, Gottardo A. Reading-related skills of kindergartners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 2002;23(1):95-116. doi:10.1017/S014271640200005X
44. Senechal M, LeFevre J, Thomas EM, Daley KE. Differential effects of home literacy experiences on the development of oral and written language. *Reading Research Quarterly* 1998;33(1):96-116.
45. Schaefer B, Stackhouse J, Wells B. Phonological awareness development in children with and without spoken language difficulties: A 12-month longitudinal study of German-speaking pre-school children. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2017;19(5):465-475. doi:10.1080/17549507.2016.1221449
46. Lerner MD, Lonigan CJ. Bidirectional relations between phonological awareness and letter knowledge in preschool revisited: A growth curve analysis of the relation between two code-related skills. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 2016;144:166-183. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2015.09.023>
47. Newbury DF, Monaco AP. Genetic advances in the study of speech and language disorders. *Neuron* 2010;68(2):309-320.
48. Lewis BA, Shriberg LD, Freebairn LA, Hansen AJ, Stein CM, Taylor HG, Iyengar SK. The genetic bases of speech sound disorders: Evidence from spoken and written language. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2006;49(6):1294-1312.
49. Tkach JA, Chen X, Freebairn LA, Schmithorst VJ, Holland SK, Lewis BA. Neural correlates of phonological processing in speech sound disorder: A functional magnetic resonance imaging study. *Brain and Language* 2011;119(1):42-49.
50. Preston JL, Felsenfeld S, Frost SJ, Mencl WE, Fulbright RK, Grigorenko EL, Landi N, Seki A, Pugh KR. Functional brain activation differences in school-age children with speech sound errors: Speech and print processing. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2012;55(4):1068-1082.
51. Dickinson DK, McCabe A, Anastopoulos L, Peisner-Feinberg ES, Poe MD. The comprehensive language approach to early literacy: The interrelationships among vocabulary, phonological sensitivity, and print knowledge among preschool-aged children. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 2003;95(3):465-481.
52. Silven M, Niemi P, Voeten MJM. Do maternal interaction and early language predict phonological awareness in 3 to 4 year olds? *Cognitive Development* 2002;17(1):1133-1155.
53. Weizman ZO, Snow CE. Lexical input as related to children's vocabulary acquisition: Effects of sophisticated exposure and support for meaning. *Developmental psychology* 2001;37(2):265-279.
54. Mol SE, Bus AG, de Jong MT, Smeets DJH. Added value of dialogic parent-child book readings: A meta-analysis. *Early Education and Development* 2008;19(1):7-26.

55. Beitchman JH, Nair R, Clegg M, Patel PG, Ferguson B, Pressman E, Smith A. Prevalence of speech and language disorders in 5-year-old kindergarten children in the Ottawa-Carleton region. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1986;51(2):98-110.
56. Shriberg LD, Tomblin JB, McSweeney JL. Prevalence of speech delay in 6-year-old children and comorbidity with language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 1999;42(6):1461-1481.
57. Wren Y, McLeod S, White P, Miller LL, Roulstone S. Speech characteristics of 8-year-old children: Findings from a prospective population study. *Journal of Communication Disorders* 2013;46(1):53-69.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcomdis.2012.08.008>
58. Nathan L, Stackhouse J, Goulandris N, Snowling MJ. The development of early literacy skills among children with speech difficulties: A test of the "critical age hypothesis". *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2004;47(2):377-391.
59. Hayiou-Thomas ME, Carroll JM, Leavett R, Hulme C, Snowling MJ. When does speech sound disorder matter for literacy? The role of disordered speech errors, co-occurring language impairment and family risk of dyslexia. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2017;58(2):197-205. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12648
60. Raitano NA, Pennington BF, Tunick RA, Boada R, Shriberg LD. Pre-literacy skills of subgroups of children with speech sound disorders. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2004; 45(4):821-835.
61. Rvachew S, Brosseau-Lapr e F. An input-focused intervention for children with developmental phonological disorders. *Perspectives on Language Learning and Education* 2012;19(1):31-35.
62. Williams AL. Integrating phonological sensitivity training and oral language within an enhanced dialogic reading approach. In: Justice LM, ed. *Clinical approaches to emergent literacy intervention*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing Inc.; 2006:261-294.
63. Schmitt MB, Justice LM. Optimal intervention intensity for emergent literacy: What we know and need to learn. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2012;14(5):451-455. doi:10.3109/17549507.2012.687057
64. Schmitt MB, Justice LM, Logan JA. Intensity of language treatment: contribution to children's language outcomes. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2017;52(2):155-167. doi:10.1111/1460-6984.12254
65. Torgesen JK. The response to intervention instructional model: Some outcomes from a large-scale implementation in Reading First Schools. *Child Development Perspectives* 2009;3(1):38-40. doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2009.00073.x
66. Snow CE, Scarborough HS, Burns MS. What speech-language pathologists need to know about early reading. *Topics in Language Disorders* 1999;20(1):48-58.
67. Williams AL. Intensity in phonological intervention: Is there a prescribed amount? *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2012;14(5):456-461. doi:10.3109/17549507.2012.688866
68. Campbell TF, Dollaghan CA, Rockette HE, Paradise JL, Feldman HM, Shriberg LD, Sabo DL, Kurs-Lasky M. Risk factors for speech delay of unknown origin in 3-year-old children. *Child Development* 2003;74(2):346-357.
69. McLeod S, McKinnon DH. Prevalence of communication disorders compared with other learning needs in 14,500 primary and secondary school students. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2007;42(Suppl. 1):37-59.
70. Deasley S, Evans A, Nowak S, Willoughby D. Sex differences in emergent literacy and reading behaviour in junior kindergarten. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology* 2018;33(1):26-43.
71. Walker S, Berthelsen D. Gender differences in early literacy and mathematics achievement and self-regulatory behaviours in the first year of school: An Australian study. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 2017;42(1):70-78.  
[doi:10.23965/AJEC.42.1.08](https://doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.42.1.08)

# Language Development at an Early Age: Learning Mechanisms and Outcomes from Birth to Five Years

Erika Hoff, PhD

Department of Psychology, Florida Atlantic University, USA

October 2009

## Introduction

The acquisition of language is one of the more remarkable achievements of early childhood. By age 5, children essentially master the sound system and grammar of their language and acquire a vocabulary of thousands of words. This report describes the major milestones of language development that typically-developing, monolingual children achieve in their first 5 years of life and the mechanisms that have been proposed to explain these achievements.

## Subject

Young children's language skills are important to their interpersonal and academic success.<sup>1,2</sup> It is therefore crucial to have descriptions of normative development that allow identification of children with language impairment and to have an understanding of the mechanisms of language acquisition that can provide a basis for optimizing all children's development.

## Problem

Although all normal children in normal environments acquire the language (or languages) they hear, children's rates of development— and thus skill levels at any age— vary enormously. One goal of research in the field is to understand the roles of innate abilities and environmental circumstances in explaining both the universal fact of language acquisition and the variability in language development.<sup>3</sup>

## Research context

Children's language development has been a topic of interest since antiquity and the focus of substantial scientific research since the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Although the field has broadened its scope of inquiry in recent years, there is still more research that describes middle-class, monolingual



children acquiring English than other groups and other languages.

## **Recent Research Results**

The course of language development and its underlying mechanisms are usually described separately for the subdomains of phonological development (the sound system), lexical development (the words), and morpho-syntactic development (grammar), although these domains are interrelated both in language development and in language use.

*Phonological development.* Newborns have the ability to hear and discriminate speech sounds.<sup>5</sup> During the first year, they become better at hearing the contrasts their language uses, and they become insensitive to acoustic differences that are not relevant to their language. This tuning of speech perception to the ambient language is the result of a learning process in which infants form mental speech sound categories around clusters of frequently-occurring acoustic signals. These categories then guide perception such that within category variation is ignored and between category variation is attended to.<sup>6,7</sup>

The first sounds infants produce are cries and noises that are not speech-like. The major milestones of pre-speech vocal development are the production of canonical syllables (well-formed consonant + vowel combinations), which appear between 6 and 10 months, followed shortly by reduplicated babbling (repetitions of syllables). When first words appear, they make use of the same sounds, and they contain the same numbers of sounds and syllables, as the preceding babbling sequences.<sup>8</sup> One process that contributes to early phonological development appears to be infants' active efforts to reproduce the sounds they hear. In babbling, infants may be discovering the correspondence between what they do with their vocal apparatus and the sounds that come out. The important role of feedback is suggested by findings that children with hearing impairment are delayed in achieving canonical babbling. At approximately 18 months, children appear to have achieved a mental system for representing the sounds of their language and producing them within the constraints of their articulatory abilities. At this point children's production of speech sounds becomes consistent across different words— in contrast to the earlier period when the sound form for each word was a separate mental entity.<sup>9</sup> The processes underlying this development are not well understood.

*Lexical development.* Infants understand their first word as young as 5 months, produce their first words between 10 and 15 months of age, reach the 50-word milestone in productive vocabularies around 18 months of age, and the 100-word milestone between 20 and 21 months.<sup>10</sup> After that, vocabulary development proceeds so rapidly that tracking the how many words children know becomes unwieldy. The vocabulary size of an average 6-year-old has been estimated at 14,000

words.<sup>11</sup>

The task of word learning has multiple components and recruits multiple mechanisms.<sup>12</sup> Infants make use of statistical learning procedures, tracking the probability that sounds appear together, and thereby segmenting the continuous stream of speech into separate words.<sup>13</sup> The capacity to store those speech sound sequences, known as phonological memory, comes into play as entries in the mental lexicon are created.<sup>14</sup> In the task of mapping a newly-encountered word onto its intended referent, children are guided by their abilities to make use of socially-based inferencing mechanisms (i.e., speakers are likely to be talking about the things they are looking at),<sup>15</sup> by their cognitive understandings of the world (some word learning involved mapping new words onto pre-existing concepts),<sup>16</sup> and by their prior linguistic knowledge (i.e., the structure of the sentence in which a new word appears provides clues to word meaning).<sup>17</sup> Full mastery of the meanings of words may require new conceptual developments as well.<sup>18</sup>

*Morpho-syntactic development.* Children begin to put two, then three and more words together into short sentences at approximately 24 months of age. Children's first sentences are combinations of content words and are often missing grammatical function words (e.g., articles and prepositions) and word endings (e.g., plural and tense markers). As children gradually master the grammar of their language, they become able to produce increasingly long and grammatically complete utterances. The development of complex (i.e., multi-clause) sentences usually begins some time before the child's second birthday and is largely complete by age 4. In general, comprehension precedes production.<sup>4</sup>

The mechanism responsible for grammatical development is one of the mostly hotly-debated topics in the study of child language. It is argued that children come to the language-learning task equipped with innate knowledge of language structure and that language could not be achieved otherwise. It is also clear, however, that children have the ability, even in infancy, to detect abstract patterns in the speech they hear,<sup>19</sup> and there is very strong evidence that children who hear more speech and who hear structurally more complex speech acquire grammar more rapidly than do children with less experience<sup>3,20</sup> – which suggests that language experience plays a substantial role in language development.

## **Research Gaps**

One gap or disconnect in the field is between the theoretically-driven quest to account for the universal fact of language acquisition and the applied need to understand the causes of individual differences in language development. Relatedly, there is less research on minority populations and on bilingual development than on monolingual development in middle-class samples. This is a

serious gap because most standardized assessment tools are not suited to identifying organically-caused delay in minority children, in children from low socioeconomic strata, or in children acquiring more than one language.

## Conclusions

The course of language development is very similar across children and even across languages, suggesting a universal biological basis to this human capacity. The rate of development varies widely, however, depending both on the amount and nature of children's language experience and on children's capacities to make use of that experience.

## Implications

Normally-endowed children need only to experience conversational interaction in order to acquire language. Many children, however, may not experience enough conversational interaction to maximize their language development. Parents should be encouraged to treat their young children as conversational partners from infancy. Educators and policy makers should realize that children's language skills reflect not only their cognitive abilities but also the opportunities to hear and use language their environments have provided.

## References

1. Black B, Logan A. Links between communication patterns in mother-child, father-child, and child-peer interactions and children's social status. *Child Development* 1995;66(1):255-271.
2. Morrison F, Bachman H, Connor C. *Improving literacy in America: Guidelines from research*. New Haven: Yale University Press; 2005.
3. Hoff E. How social contexts support and shape language development. *Developmental Review* 2006;26(1):55-88.
4. Hoff E. *Language development*. 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning; 2009.
5. Aslin RN, Jusczyk PW, Pisoni D. Speech and auditory processing during infancy: Constraints on and precursors to language. In: Damon W, ed-in-chief. *Handbook of child psychology*. 5th Ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons; 1998: 147-198. Kuhn D, Siegler RS, eds. Cognition, perception, and language. Vol 2.
6. Kuhl PK, Conboy B, Padden D, Nelson T, Pruitt J. Early speech perception and later language development: Implications for the "critical period." *Language Learning and Development* 2005;1(3-4):237-264.
7. Werker JF, Curtin S. PRIMIR: A developmental framework of infant speech processing. *Language Learning and Development* 2005;1(2):197-234.
8. Fagan MK. Mean Length of Utterance before words and grammar: Longitudinal trends and developmental implications of infant vocalizations. *Journal of Child Language* 2009; 36(3):495-527.
9. Stoel-Gammon C, Sosa AV. Phonological development. In: Hoff E, Shatz M, eds. *Blackwell Handbook of Language Development*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2007: 238-256.
10. Pine J M. Variation in vocabulary development as a function of birth order. *Child Development* 1995;66(1):272-281.

11. Templin M. *Certain language skills in children, their development and interrelationships*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1957.
12. Diesendruck, G. Mechanisms of word learning. In: Hoff E, Shatz M, eds. *Blackwell Handbook of Language Development*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2007: 257-276.
13. Saffran JR, Thiessen ED. Domain-general learning capacities. In: Hoff E, Shatz M, eds. *Blackwell Handbook of Language Development*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2007: 68-86.
14. Gathercole SE. Nonword repetition and word learning: The nature of the relationship. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 2006;27(4):513-543.
15. Baldwin D, Meyer M. How inherently social is language? In: Hoff E, Shatz M, eds. *Blackwell Handbook of Language Development*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2007: 87-106.
16. Poulin-Dubois D, Graham SA. Cognitive processes in early word learning. In: Hoff E, Shatz M, eds. *Blackwell Handbook of Language Development*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2007: 191-211.
17. Naigles LR, Swensen LD. Syntactic supports for word learning In: Hoff E, Shatz M, eds. *Blackwell Handbook of Language Development*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2007: 212-232.
18. Carey S. *The origin of concepts*. New York, NY : Oxford University Press; 2009.
19. Gerken L. Acquiring linguistic structure. In: Hoff E, Shatz M, eds. *Blackwell Handbook of Language Development*. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; 2007: 173-190.
20. Vasilyeva M, Waterfall H, Huttenlocher J. Emergence of syntax: Commonalities and differences across children. *Developmental Science* 2008;11(1):84-97.

# Factors that Influence Language Development

Judith Johnston, PhD

University of British Columbia, Canada

January 2010, 2e éd.

## Introduction

Learning to talk is one of the most visible and important achievements of early childhood. In a matter of months, and without explicit teaching, toddlers move from hesitant single words to fluent sentences, and from a small vocabulary to one that is growing by six new words a day. New language tools mean new opportunities for social understanding, for learning about the world, and for sharing experiences, pleasures and needs.

## Subject

### *The nature of language knowledge*

Language development is even more impressive when we consider the nature of what is learned. It may seem that children merely need to remember what they hear and repeat it at some later time. But as Chomsky<sup>1</sup> pointed out so many years ago, if this were the essence of language learning, we would not be successful communicators. Verbal communication requires productivity, i.e. the ability to create an infinite number of utterances we have never heard before. This endless novelty requires that some aspects of language knowledge be abstract. Ultimately, “rules” for combining words cannot be rules about particular words, but must be rules about *classes* of words such as nouns, verbs or prepositions. Once these abstract blueprints are available, the speaker can fill the “slots” in a sentence with the words that best convey the message of the moment. Chomsky’s key point was that since abstractions cannot ever be directly experienced, they must emerge from the child’s own mental activity while listening to speech.

## Problems and Context

### *The debate*

The nature of the mental activity that underlies language learning is widely debated among child language experts. One group of theorists argues that language input merely triggers grammatical

knowledge that is already genetically available.<sup>2</sup> The opposition argues that grammatical knowledge results from the way the human mind analyzes and organizes information and is not innate.<sup>3</sup> This debate reflects fundamentally different beliefs about human development and is not likely to be resolved. However, there are at least two areas in which there is a substantial consensus that can guide educators and policy-makers: (a) the predictability of the course of language acquisition; and (b) its multi-determinate nature.

## **Research Results**

### *Predictable language sequences*

In broad strokes, the observable “facts” of language development are not in dispute. Most children begin speaking during their second year and by age two are likely to know at least 50 words and to be combining them in short phrases.<sup>4</sup> Once vocabulary size reaches about 200 words, the rate of word learning increases dramatically and grammatical function words such as articles and prepositions begin to appear with some consistency.<sup>5</sup> During the preschool years, sentence patterns become increasingly complex and vocabulary diversifies to include relational terms that express notions of size, location, quantity and time.<sup>6</sup> By the age of four to six or so, most children have acquired the basic grammar of the sentence.<sup>7</sup> From that point onward, children learn to use language more efficiently and more effectively. They also learn how to create, and maintain, larger language units such as conversation or narrative.<sup>8</sup> Although there are individual differences in rate of development, the sequence in which various forms appear is highly predictable both within and across stages.<sup>9</sup>

### *Determining factors*

There is also considerable agreement that the course of language development reflects the interplay of factors in at least five domains: social, perceptual, cognitive processing, conceptual and linguistic. Theorists differ in the emphasis and degree of determination posited for a given domain, but most would agree that each is relevant. There is a large body of research supporting the view that language learning is influenced by many aspects of human experience and capability. I will mention two findings in each area that capture the flavour of the available evidence.

## **Social**

1. Toddlers infer a speaker's communicative intent and use that information to guide their language learning. For example, as early as 24 months, they are able to infer solely from an adult's excited tone of voice and from the physical setting that a new word must refer to an object that has been placed on the table while the adult was away.<sup>10</sup>
2. The verbal environment influences language learning. From ages one to three, children from highly verbal "professional" families heard nearly three times as many words per week as children from low verbal "welfare" families. Longitudinal data show that aspects of this early *parental* language predict language scores at age nine.<sup>11</sup>

## Perceptual

1. Infant perception sets the stage. Auditory perceptual skills at six or 12 months of age can predict vocabulary size and syntactic complexity at 23 months of age.<sup>12</sup>
2. Perceptibility matters. In English, the forms that are challenging for impaired learners are forms with reduced perceptual salience, e.g. those that are unstressed or lie united within a consonant cluster.<sup>13</sup>

## Cognitive processes

1. Frequency affects rate of learning. Children who hear an unusually high proportion of examples of a language form learn that form faster than children who receive ordinary input.<sup>14</sup>
2. "Trade-offs" among the different domains of language can occur when the total targeted sentence requires more mental resources than the child has available. For example, children make more errors on small grammatical forms such as verb endings and prepositions in sentences with complex syntax than in sentences with simple syntax.<sup>15</sup>

## Conceptual

1. Relational terms are linked to mental age. Words that express notions of time, causality, location, size and order are correlated with mental age much more than words that simply refer to objects and events.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, children learning different languages learn to talk about spatial locations such as *in* or *next to* in much the same order, regardless of the grammatical devices of their particular language.<sup>17</sup>

2. Language skills are affected by world knowledge. Children who have difficulty recalling a word also know less about the objects to which the word refers.<sup>18</sup>

## Linguistic

1. Verb endings are cues to verb meaning. If a verb ends in -ing, three-year-olds will decide that it refers to an *activity*, such as *swim*, rather than to a *completed change of state*, such as *push off*.<sup>19</sup>
2. Current vocabulary influences new learning. Toddlers usually decide that a new word refers to the object for which they do not already have a label.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusions

### *Nature and nurture*

These are just some of the findings that, taken together, speak convincingly of the interactive nature of development. Children come to the task of language learning with perceptual mechanisms that function in a certain way and with finite attention and memory capacities. These cognitive systems will, at the least, influence what is noticed in the language input, and may well be central to the learning process. Similarly, children's prior experience with the material and social world provides the early bases for interpreting the language they hear. Later, they will also make use of language cues. The course of language acquisition is not, however, driven exclusively from within. The structure of the language to be learned, and the frequency with which various forms are heard, will also have an effect. Despite the theoretical debates, it seems clear that language skills reflect knowledge and capabilities in virtually every domain and should not be viewed in an insular fashion.

## Educational and Policy Implications

Educators and policy-makers have often ignored preschoolers whose language seems to be lagging behind development in other areas, arguing that such children are "just a bit late" in talking. The research evidence suggests instead that language acquisition should be treated as an important barometer of success in complex integrative tasks. As we have just seen, whenever language "fails" other domains are implicated as well – as either causes or consequences. Indeed, major epidemiological studies have now demonstrated that children diagnosed with specific language disorders at age four (i.e. delays in language acquisition *without* sensori-motor



impairment, affective disorder or retardation) are at high risk for academic failure and mental-health problems well into young adulthood.<sup>20,21</sup> Fortunately, the research evidence also indicates that it is possible to accelerate language learning.<sup>22</sup> Even though the child must be the one to create the abstract patterns from the language data, we can facilitate this learning (a) by presenting language examples that are in accord with the child's perceptual, social and cognitive resources; and (b) by choosing learning goals that are in harmony with the common course of development.

## References

1. Chomsky N. A Review of Verbal Behavior by B.F. Skinner. *Language* 1959;35:26-58.
2. Pinker S. *Language learnability and language development*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press; 1984.
3. Elman JL, Bates EA, Johnson MH, Karmiloff-Smith A, Parisi D, Plunkett K. *Rethinking innateness: A connectionist perspective on development*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press; 1996.
4. Rescorla L. The language development survey: A screening tool for delayed language in toddlers. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1989;54(4):587-599.
5. Bates E, Goodman JC. On the inseparability of grammar and the lexicon: Evidence from acquisition, aphasia, and real-time processing. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 1997;12(5-6):507-584.
6. Clark EV. *The lexicon in acquisition*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 1993.
7. Paul R. Analyzing complex sentence development. In: Miller JF. *Assessing language production in children: experimental procedures*. Baltimore, Md: University Park Press; 1981:36-40.
8. Owens R. *Language development: An introduction*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, Mass: Allyn and Bacon; 2001.
9. Crystal D, Fletcher P, Garman M. *The grammatical analysis of language disability: a procedure for assessment and remediation*. London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold; 1976.
10. Akhtar N, Carpenter M, Tomasello M. The role of discourse novelty in early word learning. *Child Development* 1996;67(2):635-645.
11. Hart B, Risley TR. *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, Md: P.H. Brookes; 1995.
12. Trehub SE, Henderson JL. Temporal resolution and subsequent language development. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 1996;39(6):1315-1320.
13. Leonard L. The use of morphology by children with specific language impairment: Evidence from three languages. In: Chapman RS, ed. *Processes in language acquisition and disorders*. St. Louis, Mo: Mosby Year book; 1992:186-201.
14. Nelson KE, Camarata SM, Welsh J, Butkovsky L, Camarata M. Effects of imitative and conversational recasting treatment on the acquisition of grammar in children with specific language impairment and younger language-normal children. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 1996;39(4):850-859.
15. Namazi M, Johnston J. Language performance and development in SLI. Paper presented at: Symposium for Research in Child Language Disorders; 1997; Madison, Wis.
16. Johnston JR, Slobin DI. The development of locative expressions in English, Italian, Serbo-Croatian and Turkish. *Journal of Child Language* 1979;6(3):529-545.

17. McGregor KK, Friedman RM, Reilly RM, Newman RM. Semantic representation and naming in young children. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2002;45(2):332-346.
18. Carr L, Johnston J. Morphological cues to verb meaning. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 2001;22(4):601-618.
19. Fazio BB, Johnston JR, Brandl L. Relation between mental age and vocabulary development among children with mild mental retardation. *American Journal of Mental Retardation* 1993;97(5):541-546.
20. Beitchman JH, Wilson B, Johnson CJ, Atkinson L, Young A, Adlaf E, Escobar M, Douglas L. Fourteen year follow-up of speech/language-impaired and control children: psychiatric outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 2001;40(1):75- 82.
21. Young AR, Beitchman JH, Johnson C, Douglas L, Atkinson L, Escobar M, Wilson B. Young adult academic outcomes in a longitudinal sample of early identified language impaired and control children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 2002;43(5):635-645.
22. Nye C, Foster SH, Seaman D. Effectiveness of language intervention with the language/learning disabled. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1987;52(4):348-357.

# Biological Bases of Language Development

Eric Pakulak,<sup>1,2</sup> PhD, Amanda Hampton Wray,<sup>3</sup> PhD

<sup>1</sup>University of Oregon, USA

<sup>2</sup>Stockholm University, Sweden

<sup>3</sup>Michigan State University, USA

October 2018, Éd. rév.

## Introduction and Subject

Advances in neuroimaging allow for the investigation of the neurobiological bases of language and the effects of environmental and genetic factors on neural organization for language in children. An understanding of the neurobiology of language has important implications for those seeking to optimize language development. Insights from this research may support practical, evidence-based advice for parents as well as the development of language and literacy curricula for first and second language learners.

## Problems

A complex interaction between genetic and environmental factors produces substantial variation in rates of language development among children. Many behavioural studies illuminate the effects of environmental factors on language development; however, less is known about the neurobiological underpinnings of these effects. Most neurobiological research concerns individuals from middle and higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.

## Research Context

Research on the neurobiology of language uses neuroimaging techniques with exquisite temporal resolution (e.g., event-related potentials; ERPs) and complementary techniques with exquisite spatial resolution (e.g., functional magnetic resonance imaging; fMRI). ERPs are better suited for use with infants and children, although fMRI is also used with younger populations. Increasingly, these methods are being used to characterize the developmental timecourse of different language subsystems and to more precisely examine the effects of language experience, and the timing of these effects, on the development of different language functions and on the neural mechanisms which mediate these subsystems.

## Key Research Questions

Key research questions involve the use of neuroimaging techniques to characterize:

1. the timecourse of the development of neural substrates of different subsystems of language,
2. the effects of environmental and genetic factors on the development of these neural substrates, and
3. the time periods during which the effects of environmental and genetic factors are maximal (i.e., sensitive periods) for each subsystem.

## Recent Research Results

The neurobiological bases of three linguistic subsystems have been studied, specifically phonology (sound system of the language), semantics (vocabulary and word meanings), and syntax (grammar). This research shows that brain responses to language at early ages are predictive of later language proficiency.

Within the first year of life infants become increasingly sensitive to speech sound contrasts important to their native language(s) and insensitive to unimportant phonetic contrasts.<sup>1</sup> This sensitivity to native language contrasts is reflected in a brain response which has been shown in adults to be a neural index of phonetic discrimination: in 7.5-month-old infants the brain response to native language contrasts correlated with behavioural perception of these contrasts.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, an increased neural response at 7.5 months predicts word production and sentence complexity at 24 months and mean length of utterance at 30 months. The inverse relationship was noted for discrimination of non-native contrasts.<sup>2</sup>

ERP methodology has also been used to examine early word learning and associated changes in neural specialization. In 13-month-olds the brain response to known words differs from that to unknown words, with this effect broadly distributed over both the left and right hemispheres.<sup>3</sup> By 20 months of age this effect was limited to the left hemisphere, a pattern more like that seen in adults and one associated with increased specialization for language processing. In addition, such increased brain specialization is also associated with greater language ability in children of the same chronological age.<sup>4</sup>

Developmental increases in neural specialization for language are associated with differences in SES. For example, differences in the structure of left frontal brain areas important for language processing were found in five-year old children as a function of SES.<sup>5</sup> Another study found that SES predicted brain volume in left frontal and posterior brain areas important for language; furthermore, these SES differences may increase with age.<sup>6</sup> Lower SES was also associated with reduced surface area in multiple brain regions, including frontal regions supporting language.<sup>7</sup> These relationships may endure into adulthood: in adults, socioeconomic deprivation predicts the degree of thinning in the cortex in posterior language areas.<sup>8</sup> Retrospective childhood SES also predicts language proficiency and early neural response to syntax over left frontal brain areas in adults.<sup>9</sup>

Neuroimaging studies of young children show increasingly adult-like brain activation patterns to printed letters and cortical thickening in language-relevant areas with differences in parental language input and following reading interventions with children at-risk for reading disorders and with children from lower SES backgrounds.<sup>10,11,12</sup>

Numerous ERP sentence processing studies of adults have shown that semantic and syntactic subsystems are processed by different brain systems across spoken, written and signed languages, which share these different subsystems.<sup>13</sup> Studies of bilinguals of both spoken and signed languages show that these distinct subsystems display different degrees of plasticity with different sensitive periods.<sup>14,15,16</sup> In these studies, a comparison is made between the brain responses to correct sentences versus sentences that violate semantic or syntactic expectations (e.g., “My uncle will blow the movie” or “My uncle will watching the movie”). In adults, specialized and efficient brain function is indexed by neural responses that originate from relatively focal brain areas whereas such responses in children may be more widespread in the brain.<sup>17-23</sup>

The few ERP studies of sentence processing in children suggest that this specialization of different brain systems occurs early in development. A brain response similar to that elicited by semantic violations in adults has been reported reliably in five-year old children, and even in children as young as 19 months.<sup>17,20</sup> This brain response predicted expressive language proficiency at 30 months of age and becomes faster and more specialized with age.<sup>18,19</sup> ERP responses to syntactic violations in children are qualitatively different than the response to semantic violations. Though slower and more widely distributed, the response to syntactic violations found in children is similar to that found in adults.<sup>22-24</sup> The neural response to semantic and syntactic violations in 3- to 8 year-old children has also been found to vary as a function of language proficiency, other cognitive

skills, and SES.<sup>25</sup> Longitudinal ERP studies suggest that, between ages four and five years, children from higher SES backgrounds exhibit more rapid maturation of ERP indices of both semantic and syntactic processing than peers from lower SES backgrounds.<sup>26</sup>

Recent ERP research has also examined a cognitive system shown to be important for the development of language skills: specifically selective attention to one auditory stimulus while ignoring a competing auditory stimulus. Selective attention is indexed by a larger brain response (ERP) to the attended auditory event compared with the competing auditory event. This attention effect is reduced in children diagnosed with specific language impairment<sup>27</sup> and in typically developing children from lower SES environments.<sup>28,29,30</sup> Differences in the effects of attention on neural processes in children from lower SES backgrounds have been found to be associated with genetic allelic differences, specifically in the serotonin system (i.e., 5-HTTLPR<sup>31</sup>).

Importantly, this cognitive system is changeable with experience in young children. For example, high-intensity training was found to increase both language proficiency as well as the effects of attention on neural processing in 6-8 year-olds.<sup>32</sup> Essentially, parents can change these cognitive systems: a two-generation intervention study found changes specific to families who received a more parent-focused model of the program. Parents increased conversational turn-taking with their children, and children improved language proficiency as well as brain function for selective attention.<sup>33</sup>

## **Research Gaps**

Further research on the neurobiology of language development is required to better understand underlying environmental and genetic factors; for example, studies of typically developing children from a wider range of SES backgrounds. Additional studies with clinical populations will increase understanding of neurobiological changes that occur with different disorders. For example, see emerging research on neurobiology of stuttering.<sup>34-36</sup> Another important next step is to employ results from this research to design and implement evidence-based interventions which improve the skills necessary for the development of language and to determine the age(s) at which they are most effective.<sup>11,12,33</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Modern neuroimaging techniques are powerful tools for investigating the effects of environmental and genetic factors on the neurobiology of language development. Research using these

techniques with children from a wider range of SES backgrounds and other differences in early experience will lead to a more complete characterization of the developmental timecourse of language subsystems and effects of environmental factors on this development.

## Implications for Parents, Services and Policy

This basic research can drive the development of evidence-based policies and services which improve language and other cognitive skills important for academic achievement.e.g.,<sup>11,12,33</sup> Such research can also provide specific, evidence-based suggestions for parents. This is the focus of a non-profit video program produced by the University of Oregon Brain Development Lab ([changingbrains.org](http://changingbrains.org)).

## References

1. Kuhl P, Rivera-Gaxiola M. Neural substrates of language acquisition. *Annual review of neuroscience* 2008;31:511-534.
2. Kuhl PK, Conboy BT, Coffey-Corina S, Padden D, Rivera-Gaxiola M, Nelson T. Phonetic learning as a pathway to language: new data and native language magnet theory expanded (NLM-e). *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London - Series B: Biological sciences* 2008;363(1493):979-1000.
3. Mills DL, Coffey-Corina S, Neville HJ. Language comprehension and cerebral specialization from 13 to 20 months. *Developmental Neuropsychology* 1997;13(3):397-445.
4. Mills DL, Coffey-Corina SA, Neville HJ. Language acquisition and cerebral specialization in 20-month-old infants. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 1993;5(3):317-334.
5. Raizada RD, Richards TL, Meltzoff A, Kuhl PK. Socioeconomic status predicts hemispheric specialisation of the left inferior frontal gyrus in young children. *Neuroimage* 2008;40(3):1392-1401.
6. Noble KG, Houston SM, Kan E, Sowell ER. Neural correlates of socioeconomic status in the developing human brain. *Developmental science* 2012;15(4):516-527.
7. Noble KG, Houston SM, Brito NH, et al. Family income, parental education and brain structure in children and adolescents. *Nature neuroscience* 2015;18(5):773-778.
8. Krishnadas R, McLean J, Batty GD, et al. Socioeconomic deprivation and cortical morphology: psychological, social, and biological determinants of ill health study. *Psychosomatic medicine* 2013;75(7):616-623.
9. Pakulak E, Neville H. Proficiency differences in syntactic processing of monolingual native speakers indexed by event-related potentials. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 2010;22(12):2728-2529.
10. Romeo RR, Leonard JA, Robinson ST, et al. Beyond the 30-Million-Word Gap: Children's Conversational Exposure Is Associated With Language-Related Brain Function. *Psychological science*. 2018;29(5):700-710.
11. Yamada Y, Stevens C, Harn B, Chard D, Neville H. Emergence of the neural network for reading in five-year-old beginning readers: A longitudinal fMRI study. *NeuroImage* 2011;57:704-713.
12. Romeo RR, Christodoulou JA, Halverson KK, et al. Socioeconomic status and reading disability: Neuroanatomy and plasticity in response to intervention. *Cerebral Cortex* 2017;28(7):2297-2312.
13. Neville HJ, Nicol JL, Barss A, Forster KI, Garrett MF. Syntactically based sentence processing classes: Evidence from event-related brain potentials. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 1991;3(2):155-170.

14. Capek CM, Grossi G, Newman AJ, McBurney SL, Corina D, Roeder B, Neville HJ. Brain systems mediating semantic and syntactic processing in deaf native signers: biological invariance and modality specificity. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 2009;106(21):8784-8789.
15. Weber-Fox C, Neville HJ. Maturational constraints on functional specializations for language processing: ERP and behavioral evidence in bilingual speakers. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 1996;8(3):231-256.
16. Pakulak E, Neville H. Maturational constraints on the recruitment of early processes for syntactic processing. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 2011;23(10):2752-2765.
17. Neville HJ, Coffey SA, Lawson DS, Fischer A, Emmorey K, Bellugi U. Neural systems mediating American sign language: effects of sensory experience and age of acquisition. *Brain and Language* 1997;57(3):285-308.
18. Holcomb PJ, Coffey SA, Neville HJ. Visual and auditory sentence processing: A Developmental analysis using event-related brain potentials. *Developmental Neuropsychology* 1992;8(2-3):203-241.
19. Hahne A, Eckstein K, Friederici AD. Brain signatures of syntactic and semantic processes during children's language development. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 2004;16(7):1302-1318.
20. Neville HJ, Coffey SA, Holcomb PJ, Tallal P. The neurobiology of sensory and language processing in language-impaired children. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 1993;5(2):235-253.
21. Friedrich M, Friederici AD. N400-like semantic incongruity effect in 19-month-olds: processing known words in picture contexts. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 2004;16(8):1465-1477.
22. Silva Pereyra JF, Klarman L, Lin LJ, Kuhl PK. Sentence processing in 30-month-old children: An event-related potential study. *Neuroreport* 2005;16(6):645-648.
23. Silva-Pereyra J, Rivera-Gaxiola M, Kuhl PK. An event-related brain potential study of sentence comprehension in preschoolers: semantic and morphosyntactic processing. *Cognitive Brain Research* 2005;23(2-3):247-258.
24. Oberecker R, Friederici AD. Syntactic event-related potential components in 24-month-olds' sentence comprehension. *Neuroreport* 2006;17(10):1017-1021.
25. Hampton Wray A, Weber-Fox C. Specific aspects of cognitive and language proficiency account for variability in neural indices of semantic and syntactic processing in children. *Developmental cognitive neuroscience* 2013;5:149-171.
26. Hampton Wray A, Pakulak E, Yamada Y, Weber C, Neville H. Development of neural processes underlying language subsystems in young children from higher and lower socioeconomic status environments. *Cognitive Neuroscience Society* 2016; New York City.
27. Stevens C, Sanders L, Neville H. Neurophysiological evidence for selective auditory attention deficits in children with specific language impairment. *Brain Research* 2006;1111(1):143-152.
28. Stevens C, Lauinger B, Neville H. Differences in the neural mechanisms of selective attention in children from different socioeconomic backgrounds: An event-related brain potential study. *Developmental Science* 2009;12(4):634-646.
29. Hampton Wray A, Stevens C, Pakulak E, Isbell E, Bell T, Neville H. Development of selective attention in preschool-age children from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. *Developmental cognitive neuroscience* 2017;26:101-111.
30. Giuliano RJ, Karns CM, Roos LE, Bell TA, Petersen S, Skowron EA, Neville HJ, Pakulak E. Effects of early adversity on neural mechanisms of distractor suppression are mediated by sympathetic nervous system activity in preschool-aged children. *Development Psychology* 2018;54(9):1674-1686. doi: 10.1037/dev0000499
31. Isbell E, Stevens C, Wray AH, Bell T, Neville HJ. 5-HTTLPR polymorphism is linked to neural mechanisms of selective attention in preschoolers from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. *Developmental cognitive neuroscience* 2016;22:36-47.
32. Stevens C, Fanning J, Coch D, Sanders L, Neville H. Neural mechanisms of selective auditory attention are enhanced by computerized training: Electrophysiological evidence from language-impaired and typically developing children. *Brain*



*Research* 2008(1205):55-69.

33. Neville H, Stevens C, Pakulak E, et al. Family-based training program improves brain function, cognition, and behavior in lower socioeconomic status preschoolers. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2013.
34. Cuadrado EM, Weber-Fox CM. Atypical syntactic processing in individuals who stutter: Evidence from event-related brain potentials and behavioral measures. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2003;46(4):960-976.
35. Hampton A, Weber-Fox C. Non-linguistic auditory processing in stuttering: evidence from behavior and event-related brain potentials. *Journal of Fluency Disorders* 2008;33(4):253-273.
36. Kreidler K, Wray AH, Usler E, Weber C. Neural indices of semantic processing in early childhood distinguish eventual stuttering persistence and recovery. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2017;60(11):3118-3134.

# Parents' Role in Fostering Young Children's Learning and Language Development

Catherine S. Tamis-LeMonda, PhD, Eileen T. Rodriguez, PhD

New York University, USA

November 2009, Éd. rév.

## Introduction

During the first years of life, children undergo major developmental changes across a range of domains. In particular, the entry into “formal language” is one of the most heralded achievements of early development. Language enables children to share meanings with others, and to participate in cultural learning in unprecedented ways. Moreover, language is foundational to children’s school readiness and achievement. For these reasons, a vast body of research has been dedicated to understanding the social-contextual factors that support children’s early language and learning. This work is also central to practitioners, educators and policy makers who seek to promote positive developmental outcomes in young children.

## Subject

Developmental scholars have long been interested in documenting the social experiences that help explain within- and between-group variation in children’s early language and learning.<sup>1,2</sup> This work is anchored in the writings of scholars such as Bruner<sup>3,4</sup> and Vygotsky,<sup>5</sup> who posited that learning occurs in a socio-cultural context in which adults and primary caregivers support or “scaffold” young children to higher levels of thinking and acting. According to this view, children who experience sensitive, cognitively stimulating home environments early in development are at an advantage in the learning process.

## Problem

Research into the factors that promote positive language growth and learning in young children is central to addressing achievement gaps that exist in children from different ethnic, language, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Children enter school with different levels of skill, and these initial differences often affect children’s subsequent language growth, cognitive development, literacy and academic achievement.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Children who exhibit delays at the onset of

schooling are at risk for early academic difficulties and are also more likely to experience grade retention, special education placement, and failure to complete high school.<sup>9,10,11</sup>

These delays are particularly evident in children living in poverty. Children from low-income households lag behind their peers in language skills from early on,<sup>2,12</sup> and have been shown to develop vocabularies at slower rates than their peers from more economically advantaged households.<sup>7</sup> Smaller receptive and productive vocabularies, in turn, predict children's later reading and spelling difficulties in school.<sup>8,13</sup>

## **Research Context**

The demographic profiles of minority and immigrant populations in the U.S. and Canada have changed dramatically over the past decade— a shift that has generated research on the widespread disparities that exist in children's school readiness across ethnic, racial and socioeconomic lines.<sup>14,15,16,17,18</sup> Because group disparities in learning exist prior to kindergarten, researchers and practitioners alike seek to understand the role of children's early home environment in the learning process.<sup>19,20,21,22,23</sup>

## **Research Questions**

Inquiry into the role of the home environment on young children's language and learning can be classified under two broad questions:

1. *Which aspects of parenting matter for children's early language and learning, and why?*
2. *What factors enable parents to provide a supportive environment to their young children?*

## **Recent Research Results**

*Which aspects of parenting matter, and why?*

Three aspects of parenting have been highlighted as central to children's early language and learning: (1) the frequency of children's participation in routine *learning activities* (e.g., shared bookreading, storytelling); (2) the *quality of caregiver-child engagements* (e.g., parents' cognitive stimulation and sensitivity/responsiveness); and (3) the provision of age-appropriate *learning materials* (e.g., books and toys).<sup>24</sup>

Early and consistent participation in routine *learning activities*, such as shared book reading, storytelling, and teaching about the letters of the alphabet, provide children with a critical foundation for early learning, language growth and emergent literacy.<sup>25,26,27,28</sup> Routine activities provide young children with a familiar structure for interpreting others' behaviors and language, anticipating the temporal sequencing of events, and drawing inferences from new experiences.<sup>29,30</sup> Moreover, engagement in learning activities expands children's vocabularies and conceptual knowledge.<sup>31</sup> In particular, shared bookreading, as well as the sharing of oral stories, facilitate young children's vocabulary growth, phonemic skills, print concept knowledge, and positive attitudes toward literacy.<sup>25,27,32,33,34,35</sup>

A plethora of studies also indicate that the *quality of parent-caregiver interactions* plays a formative role in children's early language and learning. In fact, the amount and style of language that parents use when conversing with their children is one of the strongest predictors of children's early language. Children benefit from exposure to adult speech that is varied and rich in information about objects and events in the environment.<sup>7,36,37</sup> Additionally, parents who contingently respond to their young children's verbal and exploratory initiatives (through verbal descriptions and questions) tend to have children with more advanced receptive and productive language, phonological awareness, and story comprehension skills.<sup>38,39,40,41</sup>

Finally, the *provision of learning materials* (e.g., books, toys that facilitate learning) has been shown to support young children's language growth and learning.<sup>42,43,44</sup> Learning materials provide opportunities for caregiver-child exchanges about specific objects and actions, such as when a parent and child pretend to cook a meal. In such instances, materials serve as a vehicle for communicative exchanges around a shared topic of conversation. Specifically, exposure to toys that enable symbolic play and support the development of fine motor skills has been shown to relate to children's early receptive language skills, intrinsic motivation and positive approaches to learning.<sup>45,46</sup> In addition, children's familiarity with storybooks has been linked to their receptive and expressive vocabularies and early reading abilities.<sup>26,27</sup>

### *What factors predict positive parenting?*

Researchers agree that parenting is multiply determined by characteristics of both parents and children. In terms of parent characteristics, parent age, education, income, and race/ethnicity (to name a few) have all been shown to relate to the three aspects of parenting discussed above. For example, compared to older mothers, teen mothers display lower levels of verbal stimulation and

involvement, higher levels of intrusiveness, and maternal speech that is less varied and complex.<sup>47,48</sup> Mothers with fewer years of education read to their children less frequently<sup>25,49</sup> and demonstrate less sophisticated language and literacy skills themselves,<sup>50</sup> which affects the quantity and quality of their verbal interactions with their children.<sup>2</sup> Parental education, in turn, relates to household income: poverty and persistent poverty are strongly associated with less stimulating home environments,<sup>51</sup> and parents living in poverty have children who are at risk for cognitive, academic, and social-emotional difficulties.<sup>52,53</sup> Finally, Hispanic and African American mothers are, on average, less likely to read to their children than White, non-Hispanic mothers;<sup>54</sup> and Spanish-speaking Hispanic families have fewer children's books available in the home as compared to their non-Hispanic counterparts.<sup>25</sup> These racial and ethnic findings are likely explained by differences in family resources across groups, as minority status is often associated with various social demographic risks.

Child characteristics, such as gender and birth order (as two of many examples), have also been linked to early measures of language and learning. For example, girls tend to have a slight advantage over boys in the early stages of vocabulary development,<sup>55,56,57</sup> and studies have documented that families spend substantially more time in literacy-related activities with girls than with boys.<sup>58</sup> Firstborn children have slightly larger vocabularies on average than their laterborn peers.<sup>59</sup> Further, mothers differ in their language, engagement and responsiveness toward their first- and laterborn children, with input favoring firstborns.<sup>60</sup>

## **Research Gaps**

In light of evidence that children from low-income and minority backgrounds are more likely to exhibit delays in language and learning at school entry, additional work is needed to understand why these differences exist, and how to best support parents in their provision of positive home environments for their children. Future research should investigate the ways in which multiple aspects of the home learning environment jointly contribute to developmental outcomes in children. Moreover, studies on "school readiness" should begin at the earliest stages of infancy, as this is the period when foundational language and knowledge develops. In this regard, research on the language development and school readiness of children from language minority households should focus on how in- and out-of-home language experiences jointly contribute to children's proficiency in both English and their native language. Finally, most research on the social context of children's language and learning is focused on children's interactions with mothers. Given the

rich social networks that comprise infants' and toddlers' environments, future studies should examine the literacy opportunities offered by multiple members of young children's social worlds, including fathers, siblings, extended family members, and childcare providers.

## Conclusions

There exists irrefutable evidence for the importance of children's early language and learning for later school readiness, engagement and performance. Children's experiences at home are critical to early language growth and learning. In particular, three aspects of the home literacy environment promote children's learning and language: learning activities (e.g., daily book reading), parenting quality (e.g., responsiveness), and learning materials (e.g., age-appropriate toys and books). Additionally, parents with more resources (e.g., education, income) are better able to provide positive learning experiences for their young children. Finally, children also play a key role in their own learning experiences, as exemplified by links between child characteristics and parenting behaviors. Children affect parents just as parents affect children; it is therefore critical to acknowledge the transactional nature of children's early language and learning experiences.<sup>61</sup>

## Implications

Research on children's early learning environments is relevant to policy makers, educators, and practitioners who seek to promote the positive language development and learning of young children. Intervention and preventive efforts should target multiple aspects of children's early language and learning environments, including supporting parents in their provision of literacy-promoting activities, sensitive and responsive engagements, and age-appropriate materials that facilitate learning. Moreover, these efforts should begin early in development, as children are likely to benefit most from supportive home environments during the formative years of rapid language growth and learning.<sup>22,62,63</sup> Finally, interventions with parents that aim to support children's learning should attend to the cultural context of early development when working with parents from different backgrounds, and also consider the broader social context of parenting by attending to the barriers created by poverty and low parental education.

## References

1. Burns MS, Griffin P, Snow CE, eds. *Starting out Right: A Guide to Promoting children's Reading Success. Specific Recommendations from America's Leading Researchers on How To Help Children Become Successful Readers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1999.

2. Hoff E. The specificity of environmental influence: Socioeconomic status affects early vocabulary development via maternal speech. *Child Development* 2003;74(3):1368-1378.
3. Bruner JS. The ontogenesis of speech acts. *Journal of Child Language* 1975;2(1): 1-19.
4. Bruner J. *Child's Talk: Learning to use Language* . New York, NY: Norton; 1983
5. Vygotsky LS. *Myshlenie i rech'*. [Thought and language]. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; 1962.
6. Dickinson DK. *Bridges to Literacy: Children, Families, and Schools* . Cambridge, MA: Blackwell; 1994.
7. Hart B, Risley T. *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children* . Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes; 1995.
8. Snow CE, Porche MV, Patton ED, Tabors PO, Harris SR. *Is Literacy Enough? Pathways to Academic Success for Adolescents* . Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing; 2007.
9. Campbell FA, Ramey CT. Effects of early intervention on intellectual and academic achievement: A follow-up study of children from low-income families. *Child Development* 1994;65(2):684-698.
10. Kaufman P, Alt MN, Chapman CD. *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001. Statistical Analysis Report NCES 2005-046* . Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; 2004.
11. Lee VE, Burkam DT. *Inequity at the Starting Gate: Social Background differences in Achievement as Children Begin School* . Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2002.
12. Nord CW, Lennon J, Liu B, Chandler K. *Home literacy activities and signs of children's emerging literacy: 1993 and 1999* . *Education Statistics Quarterly* 2000;2(1):19-27.
13. Duncan GJ, Dowsett CJ, Claessens A, Magnuson K, Huston AC, Klebanov P, Pagani LS, Feinstein L, Engel M, Brook-Guns J, Sexton H, Duckworth K, Japel C. School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology* 2007;43(3):1428-1446.
14. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2005*. Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics; 2009.
15. Ferguson HB, Bovaird S, Mueller MP. The impact of poverty on educational outcomes for children. *Paediatrics & Child Health* 2007;12(8):701-706.
16. KewalRamani A, Gilbertson L, Fox M, Provasnik S. *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities* (NCES 2007-039). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education; 2007.
17. Rouse CE, Brooks-Gunn J, McLanahan S, eds. School readiness: Closing racial and ethnic gaps. *The Future of Children* 2005;15(1):1-195.
18. Thomas EM. *Readiness to Learn at School among five-year-old Children in Canada*. Catalogue No. 89-599-MIE. No. 004. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
19. Beals DE, DeTemple JM, Dickinson DK. Talking and listening that support early literacy development of children from low-income families. In: Dickinson DK, ed. *Bridges to literacy: Children, Families, and Schools* . Cambridge, MA: Blackwell; 1994:19-40.
20. Chall JS, Jacobs VA, Baldwin LE. *The Reading Crisis: Why Poor Children Fall Behind* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1990.
21. Dickinson DK, DeTemple J. Putting parents in the picture: Maternal reports of preschoolers' literacy as a predictor of early reading. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 1998;13(2):241-261
22. Shonkoff J, Phillips D. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 2000.

23. Whitehurst GJ, Lonigan CJ. Emergent literacy: Development from prereaders to readers. In: Neuman SB, Dickinson DK, eds. *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2003:11-29.
24. Rodriguez ET, Tamis-LeMonda CS, Spellmann ME, Pan BA, Raikes H, Lugo-Gil J, Luze G. The formative role of home literacy experiences across the first three years of life in children from low-income families. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. In press.
25. Raikes H, Pan BA, Luze G, Tamis-LeMonda CS, Brooks-Gunn J, Constantine J, Tarullo LB, Raikes HA, Rodriguez ET. Mother-child bookreading in low-income families: Correlates and outcomes during the first three years of life. *Child Development* 2006;77(4):924-953.
26. Payne AC, Whitehurst GJ, Angell AL. The role of home literacy environment in the development of language ability in preschool children from low-income families. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 1994;9(3-4):427-440.
27. Senechal M, LeFevre JA, Hudson E, Lawson P. Knowledge of storybooks as a predictor of young children's vocabulary. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 1996;88(3):520-536.
28. Snow CE, Dickinson DK. Social sources of narrative skills at home and at school. *First Language* 1990;10(29):87-103.
29. Nelson K. How children represent knowledge of their world in and out of language. In: Siegler RS, ed. *Children's Thinking: What Develops?* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum; 1978:255-273.
30. Nelson K. *Event Knowledge: Structure and Function in Development*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum; 1986.
31. Bloom L. Language acquisition in its developmental context. In: Damon W, ed. *Handbook of Child Psychology*. 5th ed. New York, NY: J. Wiley; 1998:309-370. Kuhn D, Siegler RS, eds. Cognition, perception, and language; vol 2.
32. DeBaryshe BD. Joint picture-book reading correlates of early oral language skill. *Journal of Child Language* 1993;20(2):455-462.
33. Dickinson DK, Tabors PO. Early literacy: Linkages between home, school and literacy achievement at age five. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 1991;6(1):30-46
34. Lyytinen P, Laasko M, Poikkeus A. Parental contributions to child's early language and interest in books. *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 1998;13(3):297-308.
35. Wagner RK, Torgesen JK, Rashotte CA. Development of reading-related phonological processing abilities: New evidence of bidirectional causality from a latent variable longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology* 1994;30(1):73-87.
36. Evans GW, Maxwell LE, Hart B. Parental language and verbal responsiveness to children in crowded homes. *Developmental Psychology* 1999;35(4):1020-1023.
37. Weizman ZO, Snow CE. Lexical input as related to children's vocabulary acquisition: Effects of sophisticated exposure and support for meaning. *Developmental Psychology* 2001;37(2):265-279.
38. Beals DE, DeTemple JM. Home contributions to early language and literacy development. *National Reading Conference Yearbook* 1993;42:207-215.
39. Hann DM, Osofsky JD, Culp AM. Relating the adolescent mother-child relationship to preschool outcomes. *Infant Mental Health Journal* 1996;17(4): 302-209.
40. Silven M, Niemi P, Voeten M. Do maternal interaction and early language predict phonological awareness in 3-to-4-year olds? *Cognitive Development* 2002;17(1): 1133-1155.
41. Tamis-LeMonda CS, Bornstein MH, Baumwell L. Maternal responsiveness and children's achievement of language milestones. *Child Development* 2001;72(3): 748-767.
42. Neuman SB, Roskos K. Access to print for children of poverty: Differential effects of adult mediation and literacy-enriched play settings on environmental and functional print tasks. *American Educational Research Journal* 1993;30(1): 95-122.



43. Senechal M, LeFevre JA, Thomas E, Daley K. Differential effects of home literacy experiences on the development of oral and written language. *Reading Research Quarterly* 1998;33(1):96-116.
44. Tabors PO, Roach KA, Snow CE. Home language and literacy environment: Final results. In: Dickinson DK, Tabors PO, eds. *Beginning Literacy with Language: Young Children Learning at Home and School*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes;2001:111-138.
45. Tomopoulos S, Dreyer BP, Tamis-LeMonda C, Flynn V, Rovira I, Tineo W, Mendelsohn AL. Books, toys, parent-child interaction, and development in young Latino children. *Ambulatory Pediatrics* 2006;6(2):72-78.
46. Gottfried AE, Fleming JS, Gottfried AW. Role of cognitively stimulating home environment in children's academic intrinsic motivation: A longitudinal study. *Child Development* 1998;69(5):1448-1460.
47. Keown LJ, Woodward LJ, Field J. Language development of pre-school children born to teenage mothers. *Infant and Child Development* 2001;10(3):129-145.
48. Whiteside-Mansell L, Pope SK, Bradley RH. Patterns of parenting behavior in young mothers. *Family Relations* 1996;45(3):273-281.
49. Scarborough HS, Dobrich W. On the efficacy of reading to preschoolers. *Developmental Review* 1994;14(3):245-302.
50. Rowe ML, Pan BA, Ayoub C. Predictors of variation in maternal talk to children: A longitudinal study of low-income families. *Parenting: Science and Practice* 2005;5(3):259-283.
51. Garrett P, Ng'andu N, Ferron J. Poverty experiences of young children and the quality of their home environments. *Child Development* 1994;65(2):331-345.
52. Brooks-Gunn J, Duncan GJ. The effects of poverty on children. *The Future of Children* 1997;7(2):55-71.
53. Smith JR, Brooks-Gunn J, Klebanov PK. The consequences of living in poverty for young children's cognitive and verbal ability and early school achievement. In: Duncan GJ, Brooks-Gunn J, eds. *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*. New York: Russell Sage; 1997: 132-189.
54. Yarosz DJ, Barnett WS. Who reads to young children? Identifying predictors of reading of family reading activities. *Reading Psychology* 2001;22(1):67-81.
55. Bornstein MH, Haynes OM, Painter KM. Sources of child vocabulary competence: A multivariate model. *Journal of Child Language* 1998;25(2):367-393.
56. Fenson L, Dale PS, Reznick JS, Bates E, Thal DJ, Pethick SJ. *Variability in Early Communicative Development*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Press; 1994. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development; vol 5(59).
57. Pan BA, Rowe ML, Singer J, Snow CE. Maternal correlates of toddler vocabulary production in low-income families. *Child Development* 2005;76(4):763-782.
58. Teale WH. Home background and young children's literacy development. In: Teale WH, Sulzby E, eds. *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.;1986:173-206.
59. Hoff-Ginsberg E. The relation of birth order and socioeconomic status to children's language experience and language development. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 1998;19(4):603-631.
60. Bornstein MH. Parenting Infants. In: Bornstein MH, ed. *Handbook of Parenting*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates; 2002:3-44. Children and parenting; vol 1.
61. Sameroff AJ, Fiese BH. Models of development and developmental risk. In: Zeanah CH Jr., ed. *Handbook of Infant Mental Health*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2005:3-19.
62. Tamis-LeMonda CS, Cristofaro TN, Rodriguez ET, Bornstein MH. Early language development: Social influences in the first years of life. In: Balter L, Tamis-LeMonda CS, eds. *Child Psychology: A Handbook of Contemporary Issues*. New York, NY:

Psychology Press, 2006:79-108.

63. Hirsh-Pasek K, Burchinal M. Mother and caregiver sensitivity over time: Predicting language and academic outcomes with variable- and person-centered approaches. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 2006;52(3):449-485.

Note:

This paper was financed by the Canadian Council on Learning - Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Centre

# Literacy, Language and Emotional Development

Monique Sénéchal,\* PhD

Carleton University, Canada

December 2009, Éd. rév.

## Introduction

Learning to read is the central achievement of early elementary schooling. Children bring with them experiences, knowledge and skills that facilitate their acquisition of efficient and accurate reading skills. The view adopted here is that children will spend their first three years of school learning to read, and then will start using reading to learn.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, accurate comprehension of written texts presupposes that children can read individual words effortlessly.<sup>2</sup> Early educators will want to understand what skills children need to ensure successful learning in grades one, two and three. This report will focus on early language skills that have been linked to efficient word reading and reading comprehension, namely children's awareness of the spoken language and their vocabulary. In addition, the report will present some of the limited evidence showing that the degree to which children learn to read successfully is linked to their self-concepts.

## Subject

Successful and full participation in Western societies presupposes that individuals know how to derive meaning from written texts. Unfortunately, the latest statistics show that a substantial number of Canadians have poor reading abilities that can jeopardize their integration in the workplace.<sup>3</sup> Longitudinal studies have clearly shown that differences in reading performance are established early and remain relatively stable over time.<sup>4,5</sup> Most children who have poor reading skills at the end of grade one will continue to experience difficulties reading later on. It is therefore important to intervene early in the lives of children to prevent reading problems and their negative consequences.

## Problem

Parents, educators and researchers share a common concern: how to ensure that every child can comprehend written texts efficiently and accurately.

## **Research Context**

Researchers have adopted various methodologies to understand better how children learn to read. Although the choice of one particular methodology, its underlying assumptions and the findings it produces can lead to heated debates, practitioners are wise to examine the available research for converging evidence to develop sound practices. Converging evidence is obtained when observational, correlational, experimental and intervention studies point to the same conclusion.

## **Key Research Questions**

A series of key questions continue to guide the research on reading that focuses on the transition from preschool to the early school years. Some of the most important questions are listed below:

1. What skills and knowledge do children bring with them that will facilitate the acquisition of reading?
2. What are the experiences that promote early literacy skills and knowledge as well as motivation to read?
3. How can we identify children who are at risk of having reading problems?
4. How can we intervene early in the lives of at-risk children to prevent reading problems?
5. What teaching methods are best suited to optimize the number of children who will learn to read successfully?

An adequate presentation of recent findings on each of these questions is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Readers can obtain an excellent understanding of recent findings that address these issues by reading the article by Rayner et al.<sup>6</sup> as well as the 2008 report of the National Early Literacy Panel (US).<sup>4</sup>

## **Recent Research Findings**

The view herein is that early language skills play an important role in the acquisition of reading, and that learning language and learning to read are related but distinct domains. Recent research findings pertaining to two language skills, phonemic awareness and vocabulary, are discussed below. In addition to these topics, some findings on the role of reading on children's developing self-concepts are discussed.

*Phonemic awareness.* Over the past 20 years, researchers have made important advances in understanding the role of children’s awareness of the spoken language. The term phonemic awareness refers to the ability to identify, compare and manipulate the smallest units of spoken words — phonemes.<sup>7</sup> Most spoken words contain more than one phoneme; for example, *cat* has three phonemes and *spill* has four phonemes.

- There is some evidence that children first become aware of larger units of spoken language such as words within sentences and syllables within words; however, awareness of phonemes themselves is the best predictor of reading.<sup>2,7,8</sup>
- Awareness of phonemes measured in kindergarten is one of the best single predictors of reading at the end of grade one. Phoneme awareness is thought to help children learn to read because it allows children to understand that letters correspond to the sounds of spoken language.<sup>7,8</sup>
- Intervention studies clearly show that teaching phonemic awareness to young children benefits word reading as well as reading comprehension.<sup>7,8</sup> Intervention studies that included alphabet letters in activities on phonemic awareness were the most successful.<sup>7</sup>

*Vocabulary.* The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to ensure that children understand the texts they read. Comprehending written texts is a complex process that involves fluent word recognition as well as the activation of word and world knowledge, making inferences and integrating parts into a coherent whole.<sup>2</sup> Given this view of reading comprehension, children’s vocabulary is one component of oral language that is necessary to reading comprehension.<sup>9</sup>

- Children’s vocabulary, measured in kindergarten, is one of the best predictors of reading comprehension in grades three and four.<sup>10</sup>
- Intervention studies show that teaching words presented in a text improves children’s understanding of the text.<sup>11</sup>
- It remains to be demonstrated that improving young children’s vocabulary skills will have long-term consequences for their reading comprehension.

*Self-concepts.* There is limited longitudinal evidence on how children’s reading skills might affect their self-perceptions. The research is correlational in nature, but it is consistent with the view that children who read poorly tend to perceive themselves as less able and to be less motivated to read.<sup>12,13,14</sup> The longitudinal results suggest that early reading skills predict the development of self-

perceptions and rather than the reverse.<sup>14,15</sup> That is, all children tend to have positive self-perceptions as beginning readers, but these change over time. There is also some evidence showing that children who perceive themselves as less able tend to avoid reading or read less frequently.<sup>15</sup> In turn, reading less frequently further impedes the acquisition of efficient word reading and comprehension skills.<sup>16</sup> Although there is a need for converging evidence, these findings are in accord with the idea that it is crucial for young children to develop strong reading skills quickly.

## Conclusions

The accumulated evidence suggests three things:

1. Children with stronger awareness of the structure of language will learn to read more easily than children who have weaker or no awareness of this structure. Most importantly, phonemic awareness can be fostered prior to grade one.
2. Children with stronger vocabulary skills tend to have better reading comprehension skills in grade three. Most importantly, vocabulary can be enhanced at home, in child-care centres and in kindergarten.
3. Children with weaker reading skills tend to have less developed self-concepts and tend to read less. This highlights the importance of early interventions to ensure that children start grade one with the necessary skills and knowledge to learn to read.

## Implications

Parents and educators can promote the development of phonemic awareness and vocabulary in young children. They can do so by incorporating into their daily routines such activities as:

1. *Playing word games* that emphasize the structure of the language. There is evidence that introducing the alphabet along with word games can help children understand that words are made of individual sounds.<sup>7,17</sup> Finally, having young children explore the sound structure of words by encouraging them to capture the sounds they hear with their limited knowledge of the alphabet can also be beneficial.<sup>18</sup>
2. *Reading children's books*. There is sound evidence that young children can learn new words introduced by an adult while looking at pictures in books, or when the adult reads the text in the book. To ensure learning, it is important to read the same books more than once.

## References

1. Chall JS. *Stages of reading development*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill; 1983.
2. Adams MJ. *Beginning to read: thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press; 1990.
3. Jones S, Pignal J. *Reading the future: a portrait of literacy in Canada*. Ottawa, Ontario: Statistics Canada; 1994. Cat. no. 89-551-XPE.
4. National Early Literacy Panel. *Developing early literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy; 2008. Available at: <http://iincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf>. Accessed October 21, 2015.
5. Snow CE, Burns MS, Griffin P, eds. *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Research Council, National Academy Press; 1998.
6. Rayner K, Foorman BR, Perfetti CA, Pesetsky D, Seidenberg MS. How psychological science informs the teaching of reading. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 2001;2(2):31-74.
7. Ehri LC, Nunes SR, Willows DM, Schuster BV, Yaghoub-Zadeh Z, Shanahan T. Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel’s meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly* 2001;36(3):250-287.
8. National Reading Panel. *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; 2000. NIH Pub. No. 00-4754.
9. Storch SA, Whitehurst GJ. Oral language and code-related precursors of reading: Evidence from a longitudinal structural model. *Developmental Psychology* 2002;38(6):934-945.
10. Sénéchal M, Ouellette G, Rodney D. The misunderstood giant: On the predictive role of vocabulary to reading. In: Neuman SB, Dickinson D, eds. *Handbook of early literacy research*. vol 2. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2006: 173-182.
11. Biemiller A. *Language and reading success*. Newton Upper Falls, Mass: Brookline Books; 1999.
12. Aunola K, Leskinen E, Onatsu-Arvilommi T, Nurmi JE. Three methods for studying developmental change: A case of reading skills and self-concept. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 2002;72(3):343-364.
13. Butkowsky IS, Willows DM. Cognitive-motivational characteristics of children varying in reading ability: Evidence for learned helplessness in poor readers. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 1980;72(3):408-422.
14. Tunmer WE, Chapman JW. The relation of beginning readers’ reported word identification strategies to reading achievement, reading-related skills, and academic self-perceptions. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2002;15(3-4):341-358.
15. Morgan PL, Fuchs D. Is there a bidirectional relationship between children’s reading skills and reading motivation? *Exceptional Children* 2007;73(2):165-183.
16. Wigfield A, Guthrie JT, Tonks S, Perencevich KC. Children’s motivation for reading: Domain specificity and instructional influences. *Journal of Educational Research* 2004;97(6):299-309.
17. Adams MJ, Foorman B, Lundberg I, Beeler T. *Phonemic awareness in young children: A classroom curriculum*. Baltimore, Md: P.H. Brookes; 1998.
18. Ouellette G, Sénéchal M. Pathways to Literacy: A study of invented spelling and its role in learning to read. *Child Development* 2008;79(4):899-913.

19. Hargrave AC, Sénéchal M. Book reading interventions with language-delayed preschool children: The benefits of regular reading and dialogic reading. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 2000;15(1):75-90.
  20. Mol SE, Bus AG, de Jong MT, Smeets DJH. Added value of dialogic parent-child book readings: A meta-analysis. *Early Education & Development* 2008;19(1):7-26.
  21. Senechal M, LeFevre J-A. Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development* 2002;73(2):445-460.
  22. Sénéchal M. Testing the home literacy model: Parent involvement in kindergarten is differentially related to grade 4 reading comprehension, fluency, spelling, and reading for pleasure. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Reading* 2006;10(2):59-87.
- 

\* Monique Sénéchal is a member of the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (<http://www.cllrnet.ca/>).



# Language Development and its Impact on Children's Psychosocial and Emotional Development

Joseph Beitchman, MD, Elizabeth Brownlie, PhD

University of Toronto, Canada

February 2010, Éd. rév.

## Introduction

Language is central to social life; speech and language development is a cornerstone for successful outcomes later in life. Speech and language competency does not progress normally for a sizeable number of children, however, and research shows that these children are at greater risk for later psychosocial problems than children who do not have speech or language impairments.

Studies have produced compelling evidence that the child and adolescent psychosocial outcomes of language impairment are disproportionately problematic; some disadvantages persist into adulthood. These outcomes include continued disadvantage in speech and language competence, intellectual functioning, and educational adjustment and achievement, psychosocial difficulties, and increased probability of psychiatric disorder. Key insights from the studies highlighted in this fact sheet imply a need for early identification of language problems and effective intervention addressing language problems and related cognitive, academic, behavioural and psychosocial concerns, and prevention of victimization in this population. Support for children and adolescents who have language impairment is particularly important in the school context.

## Subject

There is strong evidence for the association between speech and language impairments and psychiatric disorders.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Children with speech and language impairments have increased rates of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and anxiety disorders through childhood and adolescence.<sup>2,5,6,7</sup> Poor verbal skills have been linked to juvenile delinquency and conduct problems particularly in boys.<sup>8,9</sup> Children with childhood language impairment are more likely to experience both concurrent and future behavioural problems than are children with typically developing language.<sup>10,11,12,13</sup>

Language impairment, rather than speech impairment alone, is most associated with persisting behaviour problems.<sup>10,11</sup> Language-impaired youth often have social difficulties and may be bullied or socially excluded by their peers.<sup>10,14,15</sup> Continued social problems in adulthood have been reported in studies following clinically-referred children with language impairment.<sup>16</sup>

Language impairment is consistently associated with poor academic performance in childhood and adolescence. Clinically-referred language-impaired children and youth have, on average, poorer academic performance than children in the general population;<sup>17,18,19</sup> these results have been corroborated by prospective epidemiological studies.<sup>20,21,22,23</sup> Children with language impairments at age five were about eight times more likely to have learning disabilities at age 19 than children without language impairments.<sup>21</sup> Recent research indicates that children with language impairment differ from typical language children in cognitive development and information processing, including short-term memory and auditory processing.<sup>24,25,26</sup>

## **Problems**

Research on the outcomes of speech and language impairments is incomplete. First, many studies reporting long-term outcomes of speech and language impairments have used clinic-referred rather than community-based samples. These studies do not represent the spectrum of speech and language impairments. Individuals referred for treatment tend to be more severely impaired and/or have more noticeable impairments than those who are not referred. They are also more likely to have associated problems, especially behaviour problems, that attract attention and motivate referral,<sup>27</sup> while those with more subtle problems, often girls, may be overlooked.<sup>27,28</sup> Second, most studies of adult outcomes of childhood speech/language impairment are retrospective, and have had difficulty securing objective data on language history. Third, very few studies of non-referred samples have published outcomes beyond adolescence, into adulthood. Fourth, some studies on the adult outcomes of language-impaired samples have not employed matched control groups, severely limiting inferences that can be made. Fifth, available studies seldom include measurement of outcomes across multiple domains of functioning. This is a crucial shortcoming because problems in other domains of psychosocial function may persist even if speech and language difficulties resolve. Broad assessments can also identify areas of strength, and similarities between language-impaired and typical language individuals. Finally, greater attention to social contexts in relation to outcomes of speech/language impairment is needed.<sup>28,29</sup> For instance, few studies have directly addressed gender in relation to the outcomes of language

impairments; most that have done so focus on young children.<sup>15,30</sup>

## **Research Context**

The Ottawa Language Study (OLS) is the first population study of children with speech/language impairment to be followed into adulthood.<sup>31</sup> A one-in-three random sample of all five-year-old English-speaking children in the Ottawa-Carleton region of Ontario, Canada was administered a speech and language screening procedure by qualified speech pathologists.<sup>32</sup> The procedure resulted in a sample of 142 children with speech and/or language impairments. A control sample of 142 children matched for age and sex and from the same classroom or school as the language-impaired children was recruited simultaneously. Both samples completed assessments of cognitive, developmental, emotional, behavioural and psychiatric functioning.<sup>6</sup> Three follow-up studies of original OLS participants were undertaken when the participants were ages 12, 19, and 25.<sup>2,7,31</sup> The retention rate for each of these follow-up studies exceeded 85% of the original sample. A fourth (age 31/32) follow-up is in progress.

## **Key Research Questions**

Some of the key questions posed by the OLS have been: Do language impairments persist? Are language impairments associated with behavioural problems in childhood, adolescence or adulthood? Do language impairments predict academic achievement, educational attainment or vocational outcomes? Are childhood language impairments associated with greater frequency of psychiatric disorders across the lifespan? Are psychosocial outcomes of language impairment different for girls versus boys?

## **Recent Research Results**

Language impairments often persist into adulthood.<sup>33,34</sup> Pure speech impairment often disappears as do most associated psychosocial problems.<sup>2,33</sup> In the OLS, children and adolescents with childhood language impairments had significantly elevated rates of behaviour problems and psychiatric disorders, especially anxiety, compared with typical language controls, at ages 5, 12 and 19.<sup>2,6,7</sup> Social phobia was more common among the speech/language cohort; communication difficulties may constitute a distinct pathway to social phobia.<sup>35</sup> Externalizing problems, particularly ADHD and delinquency were associated with language impairment in boys but not girls;<sup>11</sup> rates of antisocial personality disorder among males were almost three times higher than for typical

language controls.<sup>2</sup> Girls with language impairment were three times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence than girls without language impairment;<sup>28</sup> this difference was not due to differences in socioeconomic status between the language impaired and typical language groups.

By age 25, rates of psychiatric disorder were lower among language-impaired and typical language participants than at age 19.<sup>36</sup> Further, quality of life, job satisfaction and perceived social support were as high in the language-impaired group as the typical language controls.<sup>31</sup> Participants with language impairment were less likely than controls to participate in or complete postsecondary education; three quarters had completed high school. Young adults with language impairment were just as likely to be employed as were typical language controls, often choosing jobs in trades that likely did not require strong verbal skills. Women with language impairment had children earlier than typical language women; half had children by age 25.<sup>31</sup> Earlier parenting may partly reflect the poorer employment opportunities for women without postsecondary education (excluding jobs traditionally held by men, such as construction).

## **Conclusions**

The OLS has shown that outcomes in childhood and adolescence for children with a history of language impairment are distinctly more negative than outcomes for children with speech impairments only and non-impaired children. Children with language impairments showed prominent concurrent and long-term deficits in the language, cognitive and academic domains relative to peers without early language difficulties, and completed less education. Boys with language impairments were at risk of delinquent and antisocial behaviour; girls with language impairments were more likely to experience sexual abuse<sup>28</sup> and to embark on earlier parenting.<sup>31</sup> However, by age 25, youth with language impairments were equally likely to be employed as were the typical language controls, and the groups did not differ in quality of life or perceived social support.

## **Implications for the Policy and Services Perspective**

Children with language impairments have relatively poor outcomes in childhood through to late adolescence. They are more likely to have anxiety disorders which have a negative impact on the quality of life of affected adults and have substantial economic and health-care costs.<sup>37</sup> Further, childhood language impairments tend to persist, and their impact can be observed from childhood

into young adulthood. Research supports the efficacy of early language intervention.<sup>38</sup> Speech and language professionals should continue to educate the public and other professionals on the importance of early language intervention.

At the same time, increases in well-being from age 19 to age 25, despite continuing language deficits, suggests that differences in social contexts may play an important role in the psychosocial difficulties of language impaired youth. In particular, the demands of school environments may constitute stressors that exacerbate the problems of youth with language impairments. For example, children with language impairment may experience bullying in school,<sup>14</sup> and many youth with language impairment report fear of speaking in front of others.<sup>35</sup> Unlike youth completing compulsory education, adults with language impairment are able to select vocations consistent with their strengths that rely less on verbal skills.<sup>16,31</sup> These results suggest the need for strong support systems for language-impaired youth in school and attention to all aspects of their school environments. Gender also needs to be taken into account in interventions for youth with language impairment. In particular, prevention of victimization needs to be incorporated into work with language-impaired youth, particularly girls. Children with a history of speech and language impairments are more likely to have multiple problems than their non-impaired counterparts, and as such may benefit most from early intervention. This demonstrates the urgency of early identification of language impairments and the development and maintenance of proven treatment programs that address the multiplicity of adversity facing these at-risk children, while supporting their resilience and adaptation.

## References

1. Baker L, Cantwell DP. A prospective psychiatric follow-up of children with speech/language disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 1987;26(4):546-553.
2. Beitchman JH, Wilson B, Johnson CJ, Atkinson L, Young A, Adlaf A, Escobar M, Douglas L. Fourteen-year follow-up of speech/language-impaired and control children: Psychiatric outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 2001;40(1):75-82.
3. Benner GJ, Nelson JR, Epstein MH. Language skills of children with EBD: A literature review. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* 2002;10(1):43-59.
4. Cohen NJ, Davine M, Horodezky N, Lipsett L, Isaacson L. Unsuspected language impairment in psychiatrically disturbed children: Prevalence and language and behavioral characteristics. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 1993;32(3):595-603.
5. Cantwell DP, Baker L. *Psychiatric and developmental disorders in children with communication disorder*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association; 1991.
6. Beitchman JH, Nair R, Clegg M, Ferguson B, Patel PG. Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in children with speech and language disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* 1986;25(4):528-535.

7. Beitchman JH, Brownlie EB, Inglis A, Wild J, Ferguson B, Schachter D, Lancee W, Wilson B, Mathews R. Seven-year follow-up of speech/language impaired and control children: Psychiatric outcome. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 1996;37(8):961-970.
8. Hinshaw SP. Externalizing behavior problems and academic underachievement in childhood and adolescence: Causal relationships and underlying mechanisms. *Psychological Bulletin* 1992;111(1):127-155.
9. Lynam D, Moffitt TE, Stouthamer-Loeber M. Explaining the relation between IQ and delinquency: class, race, test motivation, school failure, or self-control. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 1993;102(2):187-196.
10. Beitchman JH, Wilson B, Brownlie EB, Walters H, Inglis A, Lancee W. Long-term consistency in speech/language profiles: II. Behavioral, emotional, and social outcomes. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 1996;35(6):815-825.
11. Brownlie EB, Beitchman JH, Escobar M, Young A, Atkinson A, Johnson C, Wilson B, Douglas L. Early language impairment and young adult delinquent and aggressive behavior. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2004;32(4):453-467.
12. Conti-Ramsden G, Botting N. Emotional health in adolescents with and without a history of specific language impairment (SLI). *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2008;49(5):516-525.
13. Snowling MJ, Bishop DVM, Stothard SE, Chipchase B, Kaplan C. Psychosocial outcomes at 15 years of children with a preschool history of speech-language impairment. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2006;47(8):759-765.
14. Conti-Ramsden G, Botting N. Social difficulties and victimization in children with SLI at 11 years of age. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2004;47(1):145-161.
15. Bonica C, Arnold DH, Fisher PH, Zeljo A, Yershova K. Relational aggression, relational victimization, and language development in preschoolers. *Social Development* 2003;12(4):551-562.
16. Howlin P, Mawhood L, Rutter M. Autism and developmental receptive language disorder – a follow-up comparison in early adult life. II: Social, behavioural, and psychiatric outcomes. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2000;41(5):561-578.
17. Botting N, Simkin Z, Conti-Ramsden G. Associated reading skills in children with a history of Specific Language Impairment (SLI). *Reading and Writing* 2006;19(1):77-98.
18. Conti-Ramsden G, Durkin K, Simkin Z, Knox E. Specific language impairment and school outcomes. I: Identifying and explaining variability at the end of compulsory education. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2009;44(1):15-35.
19. Whitehouse AJO, Line EA, Watt HJ, Bishop DVM. Qualitative aspects of developmental language impairment relate to language and literacy outcome in adulthood. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2009;44(4):489-510.
20. Beitchman JH, Wilson B, Brownlie EB, Walters H, Lancee W. Long-term consistency in speech/language profiles: I. Developmental and academic outcomes. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 1996;35(6):804-814.
21. Young AR, Beitchman JH, Johnson C, Douglas L, Atkinson L. Young adult academic outcomes in a longitudinal sample of early identified language impaired and control children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2002;43(5):635-645.
22. Catts HW, Fey ME, Tomblin JB, Zhang X. A longitudinal investigation of reading outcomes in children with language impairments. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2002;45:1142-1157.
23. Puranik CS, Petscher Y, Al Otaiba S, Catts HW, Lonigan CJ. Development of oral reading fluency in children with speech or language impairments: A growth curve analysis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 2008;41(6):545-560.
24. Montgomery JW, Evans JL. Complex sentence comprehension and working memory in children with specific language impairment. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2009;52(2):269-288.

25. Nickisch A, von Kries R. Short-term memory (STM) constraints in children with specific language impairment (SLI): Are there differences between receptive and expressive SLI? *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2009;52(3):578-595.
26. McArthur G, Atkinson C, Ellis D. Atypical brain responses to sounds in children with specific language and reading impairments. *Developmental Science* 2009;12(5):768-783.
27. Zhang X, Tomblin JB. The association of intervention receipt with speech-language profiles and social-demographic variables. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2000;9(4):345-357.
28. Brownlie EB, Jabbar A, Beitchman J, Vida R, Atkinson L. Language impairment and sexual assault of girls and women: Findings from a community sample. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2007;35(4):618-626.
29. La Paro KM, Justice L, Skibbe LE, Pianta RC. Relations among maternal, child, and demographic factors and the persistence of preschool language impairment. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2004;13(4):291-303.
30. Stowe RM, Arnold DH, Ortiz C. Gender differences in the relationship of language development to disruptive behavior and peer relationships in preschoolers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 1999;20(4):521-536.
31. Johnson, CJ, Beitchman JH, Brownlie EB. Twenty-year follow-up of children with and without speech-language impairments. *American Journal of Speech Language Pathology*. In press.
32. Beitchman JH, Nair R, Clegg M, Patel PG. Prevalence of speech and language disorders in 5-year-old kindergarten-children in the Ottawa-Carleton region. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1986;51(2):98-110.
33. Johnson CJ, Beitchman JH, Young A, Escobar M, Atkinson L, Wilson B, Brownlie EB, Douglas L, Taback N, Lam I, Wang M. Fourteen-year follow-up of children with and without speech language impairments: Speech language stability and outcomes. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 1999;42(3):744-760.
34. Beitchman JH, Jiang H, Koyama E, Johnson C, Escobar M, Atkinson L, Brownlie EB, Vida R. Models and determinants of vocabulary growth from kindergarten to adulthood. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2008;49(6):626-634.
35. Voci SC, Beitchman JH, Brownlie EB, Wilson B. Social anxiety in late adolescence: The importance of early childhood language impairment. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 2006;20(7):915-930.
36. Vida R, Brownlie EB, Beitchman JH, Adlaf E, Atkinson L, Escobar M, Johnson CJ, Jiang H, Koyama E, Bender B. Emerging adult outcomes of adolescent psychiatric and substance use disorders. *Addictive Behaviors* 2009;34(10):800-805.
37. Greenberg PE, Sisitsky T, Kessler RC, Finkelstein SN, Berndt ER, Davidson JRT, Ballenger JC, Fyer AJ. The economic burden of anxiety disorders in the 1990s. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 1999;60(7):427-435.
38. Leonard LB. *Children with specific language impairment*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press; 1998.

---

*The authors' research was supported by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, grants MOP 49512 and MOP 84421.*

# The Impact of Language Development on the Psychosocial and Emotional Development of Young Children

Nancy J. Cohen, PhD

Hincks-Dellcrest Centre, Canada

January 2010, 2e éd.

## Introduction

Language and communicative competence provide critical tools for learning, engaging in social relationships, and behaviour and emotion regulation from infancy onward. This report describes the evolution of language development in the first five years of life and its interrelationship with psychosocial and emotional development and disorder across the life span. Implications for prevention, intervention, education and public policy will also be discussed.

## Subject Relevance

Two domains are considered under the rubric of language: structural language and pragmatic communication. *Structural language* skills encompass the sounds of language (phonology), vocabulary (semantics), grammar (syntax and morphosyntax), narrative discourse, and auditory verbal information processing. *Pragmatic language* skills include behaviours such as conversational or other communicative turn-taking, making good use of gestures and maintaining eye contact. As well as these specific aspects of language and communication, children must be able to both express their thoughts (expressive language) and understand those of others (receptive language) in both social and learning situations.

When children have difficulty understanding others and expressing themselves, it is not surprising that psychosocial and emotional adjustment problems ensue. Conversely, a relatively large proportion of school-aged children who have psychosocial and emotional disorders often have problems with language and communication.<sup>1</sup>

## Problems



It can be difficult to separate psychosocial and emotional problems from problems with language and communication. Language impairments can be subtle and go undetected unless a formal assessment is done.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Kaler and Kopp<sup>3</sup> showed that toddlers' compliance with adult commands was related to how well they understood language. In another study, Evans<sup>4</sup> found that many preschoolers described as shy, reticent or inhibited had language impairments that interfered with forming and maintaining friendships. Children with language impairments had difficulty entering into peer group conversations and were then excluded, giving them less opportunity to learn and practice the social skills they needed for peer interaction. Failure to identify and treat such problems can have serious consequences.

## **Research Context**

Language development and impairment and their association with psychosocial and emotional development and disorder have been examined in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of community and clinic (both speech-language clinic and mental- health clinic) samples ranging from infancy through adolescence. In these studies, aspects of language and skills with which language and communication are associated have been examined.

## **Key Research Questions**

Key research questions include: (1) What is the pattern of development of communication and language in the first five years of life? (2) What is the prevalence of language and communicative impairment in the general population between birth and age five? (3) With which psychosocial and emotional disorders are language impairments associated? (4) Are there other developmental functions associated with language impairment other than psychosocial and emotional disorders? (5) What is the outcome for children with communication and language impairments? (6) What causal factors contribute to an association of language impairment with psychosocial and emotional development? (7) Is there something specific about language as a focus for study? (8) What are the best ways of treating language impairments?

## **Recent Research Results**

In the first five years of life, the evolution of communication can be divided into three periods.<sup>5</sup> The first period begins at birth when infants communicate through their cries, gazes, vocalizations and early gestures. These early communicative behaviours are not intentional, but set the stage for later intentional communication. In the second period, from six to 18 months, infants'

communicative engagement with adults becomes intentional. A major turning point is the appearance of *joint* attention,<sup>6</sup> which involves infants coordinating visual attention with that of another person regarding objects and events.<sup>7</sup> In the third period, from 18 months onward, language overtakes action as children's primary means of learning and communication. For instance, preschoolers can engage in conversations about emotions that take into account another's affective state,<sup>8</sup> can use language for self-control<sup>9</sup> and have the capacity to negotiate verbally.<sup>10</sup>

It is estimated that 8 to 12% of preschool children have some form of language impairment.<sup>11</sup> Most children are not identified until two to three years of age when they fail to speak. Further, approximately half of preschool- and school-aged children referred to mental-health services or placed in special classes have language impairments or language-related learning disabilities.<sup>2</sup> There are no data on the prevalence of preverbal communication problems in infants, although the availability of new screening tools now makes this possible.<sup>12</sup>

A range of psychosocial and emotional disorders has been associated with language impairment. In infants, problems with emotion and behaviour regulation (e.g. difficulty being soothed, eating and sleeping) are most common.<sup>13</sup> Physical and expressive vocabulary are associated with spoken vocabulary as early as 19 months of age.<sup>14</sup> From the preschool years, the most common diagnosis among children with language impairments in the community who are referred to speech-language and mental-health clinics is Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder.<sup>15,16,17</sup> Language impairments do not exist in isolation and from early childhood, language development is also linked with cognition, social cognition and motor skills.<sup>2,17</sup>

Longitudinal studies yield sobering findings for children with language impairments.<sup>18</sup> Language and communication impairments are consistently related to learning and psychosocial and emotional disorder from infancy to adolescence.<sup>16,19,20,21</sup> The prognosis is poorest for children who have difficulties in understanding language or in multiple areas of language that continue beyond the age of five years.<sup>19,22</sup>

Both genetic and environmental factors contribute to language and psychosocial and emotional development.<sup>23</sup> Children who are poor communicators do not send clear messages and therefore may be difficult to read and respond to appropriately. The amount and kind of language stimulation at home<sup>24</sup> and family stresses such as child abuse<sup>25</sup> also contribute to children's language development.

The question still remains as to whether there is something specific about language as a focus for study. On the one hand, language may be just one of a range of developmental functions caused by a common underlying factor.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, language may have a central role to play in the development of psychosocial and emotional disorders in that internalized language and verbally mediated rules play an important role in both self-control and achievement across domains.<sup>27</sup>

## **Conclusions**

From infancy onward, language and psychosocial and emotional development are interrelated. Communication begins in the very first days of life. Potential problems that begin in relationships with parents can ultimately spiral as children enter school and have difficulty learning and getting along with teachers and peers. Even mild language impairments can have an impact on the course of development. Outcomes are worsened by the presence of co-occurring environmental stresses. Because language competence is critical for both school readiness and psychosocial and emotional adjustment, problems with language and communication can set a child on a maladaptive trajectory throughout life.<sup>28</sup> Language problems can be subtle and may be overlooked in learning and therapeutic situations.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, identification and assessment of language disorders, and intervention, are important in the early years, setting the stage for later competence in a broad range of areas.

## **Implications for Policy and Services**

Starting from infancy, routine assessment of language and communication skills and provision of interventions are essential preventive undertakings. This is important because interventions during infancy or the preschool years can have a significant impact on child outcomes.<sup>29</sup> Once identified, creating a comprehensive profile of communication, language, cognitive and psychosocial and emotional abilities is crucial to planning such preventive interventions. There has been a move away from one-to-one clinic-based therapy to a focus on functional language in naturalistic environments.<sup>30</sup> Interministerial and multidisciplinary integration is required because of the implications that undiagnosed language impairments have for health, mental health, child care, education and the youth justice system. Information on the nature of language impairments, and their impact on academic and psychosocial and emotional functioning, should be available to parents and be part of the curriculum for professionals working with children. This includes pediatricians, family practitioners, speech/language pathologists, educators, early childhood

educators and mental-health practitioners.

## References

1. Cohen NJ. *Language impairment and psychopathology in infants, children, and adolescents*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage; 2001.
2. Cohen NJ, Barwick MA, Horodezky NB, Vallance DD, Im N. Language, achievement, and cognitive processing in psychiatrically disturbed children with previously identified and unsuspected language impairments. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 1998;39(6):865-877.
3. Kaler SR, Kopp CB. Compliance and comprehension in very young toddlers. *Child Development* 1990;61(6):1997-2003.
4. Evans MA. Reticent primary grade children and their more talkative peers: Verbal, nonverbal, and self concept characteristics. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 1996;88(4):739-749.
5. Adamson LB, Chance SE. Coordinating attention to people, objects, and language. In: Wetherby AM, Warren SF, Reichle J, eds. *Transitions in prelinguistic communication*. Baltimore, Md: P.H. Brookes Pub.; 1998:15-38.
6. Bakeman R, Adamson LB. Coordinating attention to people and objects in mother-infant and peer-infant interaction. *Child Development* 1984;55(4):1278-1289.
7. Mundy P, Gomes A. Individual differences in joint attention skill development in the second year. *Infant Behavior and Development* 1998;21(3):469-482.
8. Dunn J, Brown J, Slomkowski C, Tesla C, Youngblade L. Young children's understanding of other people's feelings and beliefs: Individual differences and their antecedents. *Child Development* 1991;62(6):1352-1366.
9. Berk LE, Potts MK. Development and functional significance of private speech among attention-deficit hyperactivity disordered and normal boys. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 1991;19(3):357-377.
10. Bloomquist ML, August GJ, Cohen C, Doyle A, Everhart K. Social problem solving in hyperactive-aggressive children: How and what they think in conditions of automatic and controlled processing. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* 1997;26(2):172-180.
11. National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. *National strategic research plan for language and language impairments, balance and balance disorders, and voice and voice disorders*. Bethesda, Md: National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders; 1995. NIH Publication No. 97-3217.
12. Wetherby A, Prizant B. *Communication and symbolic behavior scales developmental profile - preliminary normed edition*. Baltimore, Md: P. H. Brookes Pub.; 2001.
13. Barwick MA, Cohen NJ, Horodezky NB, Lojkasek M. Infant communication and the mother-infant relationship: The importance of level of risk and construct measurement. *Infant Mental Health Journal* 2004;25(3):240-266.
14. Dionne G, Tremblay R, Boivin M, Laplante D, Perusse D. Physical aggression and expressive vocabulary in 19-month-old twins. *Developmental Psychology* 2003;39(2):261-273.
15. Beitchman JH, Nair R, Clegg M, Patel PG. Prevalence of speech and language disorders in 5-year-old kindergarten children in the Ottawa-Carleton region. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1986;51(2):98-110.
16. Cantwell DP, Baker L. *Psychiatric and developmental disorders in children with communication disorder*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association; 1991.
17. Cohen NJ, Menna R, Vallance DD, Barwick MA, Im N, Horodezky NB. Language, social cognitive processing, and behavioral characteristics of psychiatrically disturbed children with previously identified and unsuspected language impairments. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 1998;39(6):853-864.

18. Cohen NJ. Developmental language disorders. In: Howlin P, Udwin O, eds. *Outcomes in neurodevelopmental and genetic disorders*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 2002:26-55.
19. Beitchman JH, Wilson B, Johnson CJ, Atkinson L, Young A, Adlaf E, Escobar M, Douglas L. Fourteen-year follow-up of speech/language-impaired and control children: Psychiatric outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 2001;40(1):75-82.
20. Stattin H, Klackenberglarsson I. Early language and intelligence development and their relationship to future criminal behavior. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 1993;102(3):369-378.
21. Williams S, McGee R. Reading in childhood and mental health in early adulthood. In: Beitchman JH, Cohen NJ, Konstantareas MM, Tannock R, eds. *Language, learning, and behavior disorders: Developmental, biological, and clinical perspectives*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 1996:530-554.
22. Whitehurst GJ, Fischel JE. Early developmental language delay: What, if anything, should the clinician do about it? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 1994;35(4):613-648.
23. Rutter M. Commentary: Causal processes leading to antisocial behavior. *Developmental Psychology* 2003;39(2):372-378.
24. Hart B, Risley TR. *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, Md: P.H. Brookes Pub.; 1995.
25. Coster W, Cicchetti D. Research on the communicative development of maltreated children: Clinical implications. *Topics in Language Disorders* 1993;13(4):25-38.
26. Hill EL. Non-specific nature of specific language impairment: A review of the literature with regard to concomitant motor impairments. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 2001;36(2):149-171.
27. Denckla MB. Biological correlates of learning and attention: What is relevant to learning disability and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder? *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 1996;17(2):114-119.
28. Moffitt TE. The neuropsychology of conduct disorder. *Development and psychopathology* 1993;5(1-2):135-151.
29. Halpern R. Early intervention for low-income children and families. In: Shonkoff JP, Meisels SJ, eds. *Handbook of early childhood intervention*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 2000:361-386.
30. McLean LK, Cripe JW. The effectiveness of early intervention for children with communication disorders. In: Guralnick MJ, ed. *The effectiveness of early intervention*. Baltimore, Md: P. H. Brookes Pub.; 1997:349-428.

# Language Development and Literacy: Comments on Beitchman and Cohen

Rosemary Tannock, PhD

The Hospital for Sick Children, Canada

January 2010, 2e éd.

## Introduction

Beitchman and Cohen both address the issues of language development and its impact on academic, psychosocial and emotional development, by focusing on the poor outcomes of children with primary difficulties in speech and language impairments (i.e. problems that cannot be accounted for by any other condition, known as specific language impairments or SLI). Both also focus on impairments in structural aspects of receptive and expressive language skills (phonology, semantics, syntax, morphosyntax, narrative discourse, auditory verbal information processing) and accord little attention to the outcome of impairments in pragmatic aspects (the appropriate use of language within social, situational and communicative contexts). Nonetheless, it is important to understand that speech and language impairments may also occur as secondary difficulties to a primary condition such as autism, hearing impairment, neurological impairment, general developmental difficulties, behavioural or emotional difficulties, psychosocial adversity (e.g. adverse rearing conditions associated with growing up in poverty, orphanages, refugee camps or war zones) or immigration (English language learners).

Beitchman approaches the topic from the research context of his 20-year prospective longitudinal epidemiological study of five-year-old English-speaking children from one geographic region of Canada. By contrast, Cohen situates the topic more broadly, calling upon evidence from national and international studies of clinical and epidemiological populations, using cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. Thus, while Beitchman's study provides a rich source of data on the outcomes of SLI in an English-speaking context for Canadian policy and service perspectives, the results presented by Cohen provide an opportunity to look for independent replication of findings across studies and English-speaking cultures.

## Research Results and Conclusions

Both authors concur that preschool SLI increases the risk for negative sequelae in terms of subsequent language and literacy abilities, poor social and emotional competency in terms of internalizing difficulties (e.g. social isolation, withdrawn social interaction styles or anxiety disorders) and externalizing difficulties (e.g. aggression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], antisocial personality disorder). In addition, recent research highlights the increased risk of victimization (e.g. being teased, ridiculed, threatened, bullied), which in turn may contribute to subsequent antisocial personality disorder.<sup>1</sup> One relatively minor point is the potentially misleading conclusion about mental health outcomes in young adulthood, which are listed by Beitchman as anxiety disorders and antisocial personality disorder. This could be misinterpreted as indicating that the relationship between SLI and ADHD, which is evident in childhood, dissipates by adulthood, whereas the problem is that ADHD and other Axis I and Axis II disorders were not investigated in the 19-year-old follow-up study.

Both Cohen and Beitchman conclude that the risk resides with language impairment (with and without accompanying speech impairments), rather than with speech impairment per se. In contrast, recent evidence indicates that speech impairment may be a risk factor for phonological processing, phonological learning and literacy.<sup>2,3</sup> Not only are persistent speech impairments (beyond age six) associated with poor literacy outcome, but also even children with apparently resolved speech impairments manifest marked problems in spelling despite relatively intact language abilities.<sup>4</sup> One critical distinction that needs to be made is between inaccurate production of speech sounds and difficulties in phonological processing.<sup>5</sup> The latter is a circumscribed component of language that is well established as a risk factor for reading disorder (dyslexia). The problem is that phonological processing skills may be overlooked and not investigated in the presence of severe articulatory problems without concurrent oral language impairments.

Cohen and Beitchman also conclude that preschool SLI is associated with poor academic functioning, but do not specify the nature of this problem. Robust evidence indicates that SLI is a major cause of problems in both reading (particularly reading comprehension) and written language.<sup>3,6,7</sup> Moreover, recent evidence highlights the sensitivity of written language indices to the longer-term outcome of oral language impairments.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, written language deficits are evident even in those children whose earlier language impairments appear to have resolved, including purportedly unaffected monozygotic twins of children with language impairments.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, one index of expressive language (non-word repetition), which has been proposed as an effective marker of the heritable form of language impairments,<sup>8,9</sup> predicted written language impairments.<sup>5</sup>

One critical and non-trivial issue briefly alluded to by Cohen is the extent to which SLI constitutes a specific disorder that is unique from other neurodevelopmental disorders such as dyslexia. This issue, which remains unresolved and controversial,<sup>10</sup> has important implications for policy and service delivery perspectives and requires in-depth investigation.

The primary limitations of both of these summary texts from the point of view of policy and service delivery perspectives are: 1) the absence of prevalence data for the various subtypes of SLI, and at different ages/developmental stages; and 2) the apparent accord of equal weighting to findings from studies that vary in methodological rigour. Moreover, the conclusions are based on a non-systematic review of the literature. Importantly, however, the conclusions are largely consistent with those reported in recent meta-reviews.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

### **Implications for Policy and Services Perspectives**

Both authors argue for the need for routine assessment of language and communication skills, starting from infancy, with the rationale that intervention during infancy or preschool years can have a significant impact on child outcomes. Moreover, both argue the need for professionals to educate parents about the significance of SLI and the need for intervention. In particular, Beitchman accords to speech and language pathologists the responsibility for educating the public and other professionals in this regard.

There are several problems with these broad recommendations. First, a recent review concluded that there is insufficient evidence to warrant universal screening at this point in time.<sup>12</sup> Barriers to be overcome include the development of screening measures with improved sensitivity, consensus on case definition, and a more complete understanding of the prevalence and natural history of the various subgroups of SLI.<sup>12,13</sup> This should not be interpreted as a recommendation against case identification, since early SLI clearly constitutes a major problem in its own right and may flag an increased risk for other problems. Alternate approaches to universal screening might include screening populations at high risk for SLI or screening populations identified by parental concern about possible SLI or related socio-emotional or behavioural problems.<sup>13</sup>

Second, despite Beitchman's claim of demonstrated efficacy of early language intervention, a recent meta-analysis reveals mixed evidence for short-term effects and little or no evidence of the long-term effectiveness of the programs on language abilities per se.<sup>11</sup> For example, there is no robust evidence of effective intervention for receptive language difficulties. Moreover, although there is some support for beneficial effects of intervention on primary caregivers who provide the communicative environment, there are no data on the effects of intervention on amelioration and



prevention of associated problems such as poor literacy and psychopathology (anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, antisocial personality disorder).

Third, making speech and language pathologists responsible for educating the public and other professionals poses major challenges, the least of which is the inadequate supply of this category of professionals. More importantly, enhancing parent recognition of the child's potential problem and the need to seek help are among the primary barriers to accessing the existing services.<sup>14</sup> In today's multicultural and technological society, information about the significance of language impairments and the need for intervention may be most effectively delivered by and accessed through responsible media (multicultural TV, radio, newspapers) backed by government policy and funding.

Finally, additional key issues are missing from these two articles, including the following; 1) consensus statements about the definitions of boundaries around the population(s) in need of service; 2) consensus approach to the operationalization of these boundaries (i.e. standards of assessment and diagnosis), with particular attention to populations for whom English is not the primary language of the family; 3) estimates of prevalence and incidence with reference to regional and ethnic/cultural variations, along with any projected changes in these rates; 4) standards for service providers (particularly for daycare providers, early childhood educators, classroom teachers and pediatric speech-language pathologists); 5) evidence of cost-effective evidence-based intervention approaches and their relative efficacy at various developmental stages; and 6) challenges and solutions to accessibility to services, particularly for inner-city, rural, indigenous and ethnic populations.

## References

1. Conti-Ramsden G, Botting N. Social difficulties and victimization in children with SLI at 11 years of age. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2004;47(1):145-161.
2. Carroll JM, Snowling MJ. Language and phonological skills in children at high risk of reading difficulties. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2004;45(3):631-640.
3. Nation K, Clarke P, Marshall CM, Durand M. Hidden language impairments in children: parallels between poor reading comprehension and specific language impairment? *Journal of Speech Language & Hearing Research* 2004;47(1):199-211.
4. Bird J, Bishop DVM, Freeman NH. Phonological awareness and literacy development in children with expressive phonological impairments. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 1995;38(2):446-462.
5. Bishop DVM, Clarkson B. Written language as a window into residual language deficits: A study of children with persistent and residual speech and language impairments. *Cortex* 2003;39(2):215-237.
6. Nathan L, Stackhouse J, Goulandris N, Snowling MJ. The development of early literacy skills among children with speech difficulties: a test of the "critical age hypothesis". *Journal of Speech Language & Hearing Research* 2004;47(2):377-391.
7. Nathan L, Stackhouse J, Goulandris N, Snowling MJ. Educational consequences of developmental speech disorder: Key Stage I National Curriculum assessment results in English and mathematics. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*

2004;74(2):173-186.

8. Bishop DVM, North T, Donlan C. Nonword repetition as a behavioural marker for inherited language impairment: Evidence from a twin study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 1996;37(4):391-403.
9. Bishop DVM, Adams CV, Norbury CF. Using nonword repetition to distinguish genetic and environmental influences on early literacy development: A study of 6-year-old twins. *American Journal of Medical Genetics Part B-Neuropsychiatric Genetics* 2004;129B(1):94-96.
10. Hill EL. Non-specific nature of specific language impairment: a review of the literature with regard to concomitant motor impairments. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 2001;36(2):149-171.
11. Law J, Garrett Z, Nye C. Speech and language therapy interventions for children with primary speech and language delay or disorder. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2003;(3). CD004110.
12. Law J, Boyle J, Harris F, Harkness A, Nye C. The feasibility of universal screening for primary speech and language delay: findings from a systematic review of the literature. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* 2000;42(3):190-200.
13. Law J, Boyle J, Harris F, Harkness A, Nye C. Prevalence and natural history of primary speech and language delay: findings from a systematic review of the literature. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 2000;35(2):165-188.
14. Pavuluri MN, Luk SL, McGee R. Help-seeking for behavior problems by parents of preschool children: a community study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 1996;35(2):215-222.

Note:

This commentary is part of the international and interdisciplinary project « ADHD: From genes to therapy » (Project leader: Terje Sagvolden) conducted at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) in Oslo, Norway (2004-2005) in which Dr Tannock was Research Fellow.

# Literacy as an Outcome of Language Development and its Impact on Children's Psychosocial and Emotional Development

Dawna Duff,<sup>1</sup> PhD, J. Bruce Tomblin,<sup>2</sup> PhD

<sup>1</sup>University of Pittsburgh, USA, <sup>2</sup>University of Iowa, USA

October 2018, Éd. rév.

## Introduction

One of the most striking accomplishments of the preschool years is the child's development of speech and language. As children enter school, they are expected to use these newly developed language skills as tools for learning and social negotiation. The important role of spoken and written communication in school-aged children's lives suggests that individual differences in these skills may entail benefits and risks, in terms of broader academic and psychosocial competence.

## Subject

Spoken language competence involves several systems. Children must master a system for representing meaning, and acquire a facility with the forms of language, ranging from the sound structure of words to the grammatical structure of sentences. This knowledge must be joined with their social competence. Much of this learning is accomplished without formal instruction, and what is known is largely tacit in nature. Preschool children begin to develop some awareness of this knowledge by rhyming words, for example, or taking a word apart into syllables. This ability to think about the sounds in words is called phonological awareness. Early reading development in alphabetic languages such as English depends on the integrity of phonological awareness and other related phonological processing abilities.<sup>1</sup>

Learning to read also requires several skills. It is common to differentiate between two main aspects of reading: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition consists of knowing how a word is pronounced. Early in reading development, children need to recognize letters, be aware of and able to manipulate sounds within words, and use conventions about the relationship between letters and their pronunciation. In addition, the child needs to be able to interpret the meaning of the printed text. The skills involved in this aspect of reading are very similar to those

used in listening comprehension.

Although word recognition and comprehension are often considered separately, they can influence one another over development, in a bidirectional way. For example, vocabulary knowledge contributes directly to growth in word recognition,<sup>2,3</sup> and later in the school years, skill in word recognition predicts the rate of vocabulary growth.<sup>4</sup>

## **Problems**

Children may enter school with poor skills in listening, speaking and/or phonological processing. Children with poor listening and speaking skills are referred to as having a language impairment (LI) or developmental language disorder (DLD): current estimates are that about 10% of children entering schools in the U.S. and Canada have LI.<sup>5-7</sup> There are other children for whom phonological processing skills are poor, and these children are at risk for reading disorder (RD). Estimates of the prevalence of RD among school-aged children typically range between 10 and 18%.<sup>8-10</sup> While LI and RD in the early school years can occur alone, it is very common for a child to be affected by both.

In addition to academic difficulties, several studies have shown elevated rates of behaviour problems among children with LI, including externalizing and internalizing problems, and have an especially strong relationship with ADHD.<sup>5,11-27</sup> Similarly, children with a diagnosis of behavioural or emotional disorder very frequently meet the criteria for LI, as do incarcerated youth.<sup>26,28-30</sup> Language impairments are commonly undiagnosed in these children, possibly because professionals are not sensitive to the manifestations of language impairments in this group.<sup>30</sup> Another concerning social outcome for individuals with language impairment is an elevated risk of victimization, including sexual assault.<sup>31,32</sup>

## **Research Context**

The relationships between spoken language development, reading development and social development have been explored by several researchers in an effort to determine the extent to which these problems are associated with each other and the bases for these relationships.

## **Key Research Questions**

The prominent research questions have been concerned with the extent to which aspects of early language status are predictive of later reading and behaviour problems and what the possible

bases might be for these relationships. Specifically, two hypotheses have figured prominently in the literature. One hypothesis is that the associations between spoken language and later outcomes are causal. Alternatively, the association of language and reading problems with behaviour problems may rest on a common underlying condition such as a neuromaturational delay that results in poor achievement in both domains.

## **Recent Research Results**

It is clear that as a group, children with LI have poorer reading achievement and higher rates of RD.<sup>33-37</sup> In these studies, the prevalence of RD in children with LI ranged from 25%<sup>8</sup> to 90%.<sup>11</sup> The strong relationship between RD and LI has been shown to be attributable to the limitations these children have in both their ability to understand language and their phonological awareness.<sup>13,14,38-41</sup> The phonological-awareness deficits place them at risk for difficulties in learning decoding skills and the comprehension problems place them at risk for reading comprehension problems.

There are several possible causal relationships between language and behavioural disorders: language difficulties might lead to reactive behaviour problems, behaviour problems could lead to fewer opportunities for language learning, or the relationship between language and behavioural difficulties could be bidirectional.<sup>18</sup> During the school years, children with poor language may encounter difficulties with the spoken and written communication demands of the classroom, such that communication failure, especially in the classroom, serves as a stressor, and behaviour problems are maladaptive responses to this stressor. In support of this notion, behaviour problems are reported by the children's teachers to a greater degree than their parents. Furthermore, teacher ratings of behaviour problems correspond more closely than parent ratings to child's language test scores.<sup>17,33,42</sup> Further support for this view arises from data showing that among children with LI, reading disorder further increases the risk of behaviour disorder. This supports the notion that LI in conjunction with RD results in the child facing excessive failure, particularly within the classroom, which in turn results in reactive behaviour problems. These conclusions, however, fail to explain why behaviour problems seem to be reported in preschool children with LI,<sup>22</sup> a finding that could be used to argue for an underlying factor such as neurodevelopmental delay that contributes to all these conditions. Another possibility is a bidirectional relationship between language and behavioural difficulties. This idea is supported by evidence that language difficulties at age three increase the risk of conduct disorders at age five, and vice versa.<sup>23</sup> In particular, children with language impairment are vulnerable to difficulties with self-regulation, which may in turn lead to observed behavioural difficulties.<sup>27,43,44</sup>

## Research Gaps

Further research efforts are needed, focusing on the particular mechanisms that produce this complex of spoken, written and behaviour problems. Several recent studies have addressed the question of whether certain profiles of language weaknesses are associated with different types of behavioural outcomes.<sup>24,25,31,45-49</sup> This approach seems promising, as it could help focus interventions on the communication skills that are most likely to affect important outcomes. There is also a need for classroom-based studies of how children with language difficulties respond to communication demands and failure. Finally, given the risk of adverse outcomes such as incarceration or victimization, there is a need to continue to identify experiences and skills that contribute to resilience in children with early language difficulties.<sup>48-50</sup>

## Conclusions

The existence of a strong relationship between spoken language skills and subsequent reading and behaviour development is generally supported in the literature. The basis of the relationship between early spoken language and later reading development is thought to be causal in nature, such that spoken language skills, especially phonological awareness and listening comprehension, are fundamental precursors to later successful reading. Children with limitations in phonological processing are at risk for early decoding problems, which can then lead to problems of reading comprehension. Children with problems of listening comprehension are at risk for reading comprehension problems even if they can decode words. These skills can also dynamically interact over development.

The basis of the relationship between spoken language and later behaviour problems is less clear, although it seems possible that there are multiple mechanisms that could explain the relationship. In particular, academic difficulties that result from LI may contribute to the increased risk of behavioural disorders.

## Implications

The evidence is compelling that a foundation in spoken language competence is important for the successful achievement of academic and social competence. Children with poor language skills are therefore at risk for reading and psychosocial problems. Language difficulties could be identified efficiently at school entry. This identification process should be an especially high priority for children who already show signs of behavioural difficulties, given the high incidence

and low identification of language difficulties in this group. Interventions are available for promoting language growth, and in particular, numerous programs exist to promote phonological awareness. Additionally, intervention efforts need to focus on approaches that provide supportive educational environments, to reduce the stressors that may result in maladaptive behaviours. Finally, early intervention efforts are warranted, to support the development of language skills prior to school entry. Where successful, such efforts could be expected to reduce a child's risk of important academic and psychosocial difficulties throughout childhood, and into adulthood.

## References

1. Snow CE, Burns MS, Griffin P, eds. *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1998.
2. Oullette G, Beers A. A not-so-simple view of reading: how oral vocabulary and visual-word recognition complicate the story. *Reading and Writing* 2010;23(2):189-208.
3. Cain K. Learning to read: why should we keep things simple? *Reading Research Quarterly* 2015;50:151-169.
4. Duff D, Tomblin JB, Catts H. The Influence of Reading on Vocabulary Growth: A Case for a Matthew Effect. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2015;58(3):853-864.
5. Beitchman JH, Nair R, Clegg M, Patel PG. Prevalence of speech and language disorders in 5-year-old kindergarten children in the Ottawa-Carleton region. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1986;51:98-110.
6. Tomblin JB, Records N, Buckwalter P, Zhang X, Smith E, O'Brien M. Prevalence of Specific Language Impairment in Kindergarten Children. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 1997;40(6):1245-1260.
7. Norbury CF, Gooch D, Wray C, et al. The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2016;57(11):1247-1257.
8. Hulme C, Snowling MJ. Children's Reading Comprehension Difficulties. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2011;20(3):139-142.
9. Shaywitz SE, Shaywitz BA. Unlocking learning disabilities: The neurological basis. In: Cramer SCE, W., ed. *Learning disabilities: Lifelong issues*. Baltimore, MD: P. H. Brooks Publishing; 1996:255-260.
10. Commission on Emotional and Learning Disorders in Children. *One million children: A national study of Canadian children with emotional and learning disorders*. Toronto, Ontario: Leonard Crainford; 1970.
11. Beitchman JH, Hood J, Inglis A. Psychiatric risk in children with speech and language disorders. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 1990;18(3):283-296.
12. Beitchman JH, Hood J, Rochon J, Peterson M. Empirical classification of speech/language impairment in children: II. Behavioral characteristics. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 1989;28(1):118-123.
13. Beitchman J, Tuckett M, Bath S. Language delay and hyperactivity in preschoolers: evidence for a distinct subgroup of hyperactives. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 1987;32(8):683-687.
14. Beitchman JH, Brownlie EB, Wilson B. Linguistic impairment and psychiatric disorder: Pathways to outcome. In: Beitchman JH, Cohen NJ, Konstantareas MM, Tannock R, eds. *Language, learning, and behavior disorders: Developmental, biological, and clinical perspectives*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 1996:493-514.
15. Stevenson J, Richman N, Graham PJ. Behaviour problems and language abilities at three years and behavioural deviance at eight years. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 1985;26(2):215-230.

16. Benasich AA, Curtiss S, Tallal P. Language, learning, and behavioral disturbances in childhood: A longitudinal perspective. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 1993;32(3):585-594.
17. Tomblin JB. Educational and psychosocial outcomes of language impairment in kindergarten. In: Tomblin JB, Nippold MA, eds. *Understanding individual differences in language development across the school years*. New York, NY: Psychology Press; 2014:166-203.
18. Mueller KL, Tomblin JB. Examining the comorbidity of language disorders and ADHD. *Topics in Language Disorders* 2012;32(3):228-246.
19. Wadman R, Botting N, Durkin K, Conti-Ramsden G. Changes in emotional health symptoms in adolescents with specific language impairment. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2011;46(6):641-656.
20. Mok PL, Pickles A, Durkin K, Conti-Ramsden G. Longitudinal trajectories of peer relations in children with specific language impairment. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2014;55(5):516-527.
21. Yew SG, O'Kearney R. Emotional and behavioural outcomes later in childhood and adolescence for children with specific language impairments: meta-analyses of controlled prospective studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2013;54(5):516-524.
22. Conti-Ramsden G, Durkin K, Toseeb U, Botting N, Pickles A. Education and employment outcomes of young adults with a history of developmental language disorder. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2018;53(2):237-255.
23. Girard LC, Pingault JB, Doyle O, Falissard B, Tremblay RE. Developmental Associations Between Conduct Problems and Expressive Language in Early Childhood: A Population-Based Study. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2016;44(6):1033-1043.
24. St Clair MC, Pickles A, Durkin K, Conti-Ramsden G. A longitudinal study of behavioral, emotional and social difficulties in individuals with a history of specific language impairment (SLI). *Journal of Communication Disorders* 2011;44(2):186-199.
25. Pickles A, Durkin K, Mok PLH, Toseeb U, Conti-Ramsden G. Conduct problems co-occur with hyperactivity in children with language impairment: A longitudinal study from childhood to adolescence. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments* 2016;1. doi:10.1177/2396941516645251
26. Islam UA, Poole KL, Schmidt LA, Ford J, Saigal S, Van Lieshout RJ. Childhood language skills and adolescent self-esteem in preterm survivors. *Journal of Child Health Care* 2018;22(1):34-45.
27. Bornstein MH, Hahn CS, Suwalsky JT. Language and internalizing and externalizing behavioral adjustment: developmental pathways from childhood to adolescence. *Development and Psychopathology* 2013;25(3):857-878.
28. Hughes N, Chitsabesan P, Bryan K, Borshmann R, Swain N, Lennox P, Shaw J. Language impairment and comorbid vulnerabilities among young people in custody. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2017;58(10):1106-1113.
29. Moncrieff D, Miller E, Hill E. Screening tests reveal high risk among adjudicated adolescents of auditory processing and language disorders. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2018;61(4):924-935.
30. Chow JC, Hollo A. Language ability of students with emotional disturbance: Discrepancies between teacher ratings and direct assessment. *Assessment for Effective Intervention* 2018;43(2):90-95.
31. Conti-Ramsden G, Botting N. Social difficulties and victimization in children with SLI at 11 years of age. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2004;47:145-161.
32. Brownlie EB, Graham E, Bao L, Koyama E, Beitchman JH. Language disorder and retrospectively reported sexual abuse of girls: severity and disclosure. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2017;58(10):1114-1121.
33. Tomblin JB, Zhang X, Buckwalter P, Catts H. Association of reading disability behavioral disorders and language impairment among second grade children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2000;41(4):473-482.



34. Aram DM, Ekelman BL, E. NJ. Preschoolers with language disorders: 10 years later. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 1984;27(2):232-244.
35. Bishop DVM, Adams C. A prospective study of the relationship between specific language impairment, phonological disorders and reading retardation. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 1990;31(7):1027-1050.
36. Catts HW, Fey ME, Tomblin JB, Zhang X. A Longitudinal Investigation of Reading Outcomes in Children With Language Impairments. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2002;45(6).
37. Janus M, Labonté C, Kirkpatrick R, Davies S, Duku E. The impact of speech and language problems in kindergarten on academic learning and special education status in grade three. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2017;1-14.
38. Oakhill JV, Cain K. The Precursors of Reading Ability in Young Readers: Evidence From a Four-Year Longitudinal Study. *Scientific Studies of Reading* 2012;16(2):91-121.
39. Suggate S, Schaughency E, McAnally H, Reese E. From infancy to adolescence: The longitudinal links between vocabulary, early literacy skills, oral narrative, and reading comprehension. *Cognitive Development* 2018;47:82-95.
40. Elwer S, Keenan JM, Olson RK, Byrne B, Samuelsson S. Longitudinal stability and predictors of poor oral comprehenders and poor decoders. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 2013;115(3):497-516.
41. Snellings P, van der Leij A, de Jong PF, Blok H. Enhancing the reading fluency and comprehension of children with reading disabilities in an orthographically transparent language. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 2009;42(4).
42. Lindsay G, Dockrell J, Desforges M, Law J, Peacey N. Meeting the needs of children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2010;45(4):448-460.
43. Aro T, Laakso ML, Maatta S, Tolvanen A, Poikkeus AM. Associations between toddler-age communication and kindergarten-age self-regulatory skills. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2014;57(4):1405-1417.
44. Petersen IT, Bates JE, Staples AD. The role of language ability and self-regulation in the development of inattentive-hyperactive behavior problems. *Development and Psychopathology* 2015;27(1):221-237.
45. Durkin K, Toseeb U, Botting N, Pickles A, Conti-Ramsden G. Social Confidence in Early Adulthood Among Young People With and Without a History of Language Impairment. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 2017;60(6):1635-1647.
46. Zadeh ZY, Im-Bolter N, Cohen NJ. Social cognition and externalizing psychopathology: an investigation of the mediating role of language. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2007;35(2):141-152.
47. Lonigan CJ, Spiegel JA, Goodrich JM, et al. Does Preschool Self-Regulation Predict Later Behavior Problems in General or Specific Problem Behaviors? *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2017;45(8):1491-1502.
48. Yew SG, O'Kearney R. Early language impairments and developmental pathways of emotional problems across childhood. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 2015;50(3):358-373.
49. Yew SG, O'Kearney R. The Role of Early Language Difficulties in the Trajectories of Conduct Problems Across Childhood. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2015;43(8):1515-1527.
50. Rhoad-Drogalis A, Sawyer BE, Justice LM, O'Connell AA. Assessing Learning Behaviors in Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms. *Early Education and Development* 2018;29(4):450-466.

# Literacy and its Impact on Child Development: Comments on Tomblin and Sénéchal

Laura M. Justice, PhD

University of Virginia, USA

January 2010, 2e éd.

## Introduction

Only within the last decade has the concept of “literacy” become a central focus in early education. Previously, experts rarely viewed literacy as an essential aspect of healthy growth and development in young children. The current rate of reading problems among school children remains unacceptably high. Estimates show that about 40% of fourth graders struggle with reading at even basic levels and there is a markedly disproportionate representation of children who are poor and who belong to ethnic or racial minorities among those who struggle with reading.<sup>1</sup> The paradigm shift of the last decade, which received a great push forward with the 1998 publication by the United States’ National Research Council titled *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, has increasingly emphasized early education as the context in which solutions to these pressing problems are most likely to have effect. Early education is the time in which young children develop skills, knowledge and interest in the code-based and meaning aspects of written and spoken language. I refer to these abilities and interests here as “pre-literacy” abilities to emphasize their role as precursors to conventional literacy. The current emphasis on pre-literacy as an essential part of early education draws upon two growing bodies of research showing that:

1. Individual differences among children in pre-literacy skills are *meaningful* – early differences contribute significantly to longitudinal outcomes in children’s reading achievement;<sup>2</sup> and
2. The prevalence of reading difficulties is more likely to be influenced through *prevention* rather than *remediation*, since once a particular child shows a reading delay in elementary school, the odds suggest that a return to healthy progress is quite unlikely.<sup>3</sup>

## Research and Conclusions

Experts Tomblin and Sénéchal provide timely and relevant discussions of current literature on pre-literacy development and its short- and long-term relationship to other developmental competencies. My reading of their texts suggests that three important points require further elaboration: decoding precursors, the language-literacy relationship, and the role of temperament and motivation.

First, the current cumulative research literature on early literacy development and its relationship to later reading outcomes identifies three unique predictors of reading competence: phonological processing, print knowledge and oral language.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the first two prepare children most directly for word-level skills (i.e. decoding), the third prepares children to comprehend text with little direct impact on decoding. Tomblin accurately notes that reading competence requires both decoding and comprehension, and Sénéchal emphasizes that children must first “learn to read” before they can “read to learn.” Readers should recognize that the relationship between the two aspects of reading is multiplicative, meaning that both sides of the equation (Decoding X Comprehension = Reading) require some value other than 0 for reading to be functional.<sup>4</sup> Neither Tomblin nor Sénéchal adequately emphasizes the importance of ensuring children’s development of decoding precursors during the years of early education. Children will never be able to read to learn (i.e. comprehend) if they cannot successfully decode. Children who enter beginning reading instruction with inadequate pre-literacy ability will be unable to keep pace in decoding instruction, which undermines the eventual transition to reading for meaning. Early education is the time in which educators can most readily improve children’s odds of becoming a reader by giving them the pre-alphabetic competencies (print knowledge and phonological awareness) that will enable them to profit from decoding instruction.

Second, both Tomblin and Sénéchal emphasize the role of oral language in literacy development yet do not emphasize the relationship of literacy to language development. Scholars increasingly view the integrative relationship between language and literacy as *reciprocal*. Children’s engagement in literacy activities, such as storybook reading or listening to rhymes, requires a metalinguistic focus in which oral or written language is the object of attention. Children’s ongoing engagement in literacy activities and their developing propensity towards considering language as an object of attention become primary routes for language development. Once children begin to read, even at the most basic level, their reading of text becomes the greatest source of novel words and concepts, complex syntax and narrative structures, which then further propel their language development forward. In short, literacy is an essential vehicle for furthering children’s language competencies in both the preschool years and during early and later schooling, and the relationship between language and literacy is more than a “one-way street” – language provides a base from which to explore and experience written language, which in turn further builds

children's language competencies.

Third, the role of temperament and motivation in influencing children's pre-literacy accomplishments and experiences requires further consideration than is provided by Tomblin and Sénéchal. Tomblin notes the overlap among internalizing behaviours (e.g. anxiety and depression) and literacy difficulties, and Sénéchal notes that some children may avoid reading experiences, particularly those who view themselves as poor readers. The role played by early motivation, self concept and temperament in pre-literacy development requires greater attention in general, particularly when we consider how to facilitate other internal competencies (e.g. phonological processing and vocabulary) in prevention programs. Most early educators know that a child's motivation towards literacy is one of the most important contributors to pre-literacy success. By seeking out literacy experiences on their own or in the context of interactions with others, children essentially implement their own pre-literacy interventions! A small yet converging body of research shows that children's motivation towards and engagement in literacy activities varies considerably from child to child and relates uniquely to children's literacy gains from these activities.<sup>5</sup> Some children actively resist pre-literacy experiences, such as storybook reading, and children who have under-developed language skills or who are inexperienced with literacy at home may be more likely to resist literacy activities. The scientific literature has not yet shown why some children resist literacy activities and how this resistance relates more generally to children's temperament. Nonetheless, approaches to supporting young children's engagement in and motivation towards literacy experiences require consideration as one of the more important design characteristics of effective interventions.

### **Implications for the Policy and Services Perspectives**

Current policy and service perspectives are derived from three unequivocal findings in the literature. First, children with an under-developed oral language base will exhibit great vulnerability for achieving reading competence, which in turn inhibits ongoing language development. Second, it is much more difficult to remediate reading problems than it is to prevent them. Third, it is possible to shift the odds towards better literacy outcomes for children with high-quality, intensive, systematic pre-literacy programs delivered to preschoolers and kindergarteners prior to the manifestation of reading problems.

#### *Integrating policy, practice and research*

Significant gaps persist in integrating policy, practice and research and in conducting research that can be readily applied to real-world programs. Tomblin emphasizes the need for future

research on the mechanisms that produce literacy problems for children with language difficulties. The body of research on such mechanisms is one of the more well-developed and well-funded areas of research in the United States, and it has unequivocally shown the importance of oral language, phonological processing and print knowledge as causally linked to a child's ability to learn to read. What is currently needed is an increased focus on how best to facilitate linkages among policy, practice and research to ensure the effectiveness of real-world efforts to improve literacy outcomes for young children, particularly those who arrive in these programs with under-developed literacy and language skills. Sénéchal offers several evidence-based suggestions for promoting pre-literacy skills for young children, such as playing word games and reading books. The extent to which such activities are effective for children with language weaknesses, have a longitudinal positive effect and can be integrated into existing interventions has yet to receive careful examination.

### *Does quality matter?*

Policy-makers, practitioners and researchers have rarely considered how the quality of adult-child interactions focused on literacy might matter, whether playing word games or reading books. Developmental theories of how children develop pre-literacy abilities presume that the quality of interaction matters greatly, with children's skills progressing more quickly and more readily in instructional interactions that are characterized by sensitive, responsive and non-controlling adult input. When provided with systematic, research-based early literacy interventions, the quality of teacher delivery of these interactions can vary immensely, and this variation appears to make great differences in children's literacy outcomes. As we design policies and services for young children that are designed to reduce the risk for reading failure through prevention, we must ensure that the relationships and interactions children have with adults – which provide the context in which children's knowledge, skills and interests will grow – are of the highest quality.

### **References**

1. National Assessment of Education Progress. The Nation's Report Card. Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>. Accessed February 4, 2005.
2. Storch SA, Whitehurst GJ. Oral language and code-related precursors to reading: Evidence from a longitudinal structural model. *Developmental Psychology* 2002;38(6):934-947.
3. Juel C, Griffith PL, Gough PB. Acquisition of literacy: A longitudinal study of children in first and second grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 1986;78(4):243-255.
4. Gough PB, Tunmer WE. Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *RASE: Remedial and Special Education* 1986;7(1):6-10.
5. Justice LM, Chow SM, Capellini C, Flanigan K, Colton S. Emergent literacy intervention for vulnerable preschoolers: Relative effects of two approaches. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2003;12(3):320-332.

# Early Identification of Language Delay

Philip S. Dale, PhD, Janet L. Patterson, PhD

Department of Speech & Hearing Sciences, University of New Mexico, USA

February 2017, Éd. rév.

## Introduction

Because language is central to so many aspects of human life – cognition, social interaction, education and vocation – valid identification, prevention, and treatment of language disorders is a high priority for the therapeutic professions. Delay and/or difficulty in beginning to use language is one of the most common causes of parental concern for young children brought to pediatricians and other professionals. Delay may indicate specific difficulty with language, or it may be an early indicator of a broader problem such as developmental delay or autism.

## Subject

In this article, we summarize current knowledge about the assessment of young children's language below age 3, particularly in the range of 24 to 30 months (for which we have the most extensive information), in order to identify early language delay and/or risk for persistent language impairment. The goal of this screening process is to guide decisions concerning the need for further evaluation and treatment, in order to prevent the development of more significant problems. Language sampling and analysis have substantial time and expertise requirements.

## Problems

Early identification of language delay must resolve two fundamental problems. The first is the problem of obtaining valid information at an age when children are often not sufficiently compliant for direct testing, especially those with limited communication skills who are the primary focus. Furthermore, the assessment technique must be cost-effective with respect to professional time, and broadly applicable across a range of social classes and language backgrounds, including bilingualism. Language sampling and analysis have substantial time and expertise requirements.

The second problem is one of interpretation. Many children whose language is delayed at 24 or 30 months will catch up over the next few years, and do not warrant intervention.<sup>1</sup> The challenge is to

identify and use other relevant information to improve decisions about individual children.

## **Research Context**

The solution to the first problem above has been the revival of an older, but neglected technique: parent report.<sup>2,3</sup> Parents have much more experience with their children than professionals, and their experience is more representative of their child's experiences and interests. Vocabulary checklists and related questions for parents have proven to be highly valid measures of early language development.<sup>4,5,6,7,8,9,10</sup>

Solving the second problem has required two programs of research: first, large-scale norming studies to provide a basis for judgment of the relative status of a child's language (delayed or not)<sup>3</sup> and second, longitudinal studies of outcome of early delay to identify predictors of "spontaneous recovery" or continued delay.<sup>1</sup>

## **Key Research Questions**

Five questions are central to early identification of language delay:

1. What is a valid criterion for defining early language delay?
2. How much variability in outcome is there for early delay?
3. What other factors can add to prediction of outcome, and how should they be integrated?
4. How do differences related to social class, gender, and ethnicity affect the identification process?
5. How should the process be modified for children acquiring two or more languages?

## **Recent Research Results**

Toddlers who have not attained the expressive language skills exhibited by most children the same age can be identified as having slow expressive language development (SELD). Among English-speaking children, studies suggest that 90% of 24-month-olds have an expressive vocabulary of at least 40-50 words and about 85% are combining words.<sup>6</sup> Based on these findings, two criteria for identifying SELD among 24-month-olds are commonly used: 1) small expressive vocabulary (less than 40-50 words, or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile, depending on the tool used) and/or 2) no word combinations.<sup>6,8</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> percentile criterion can be extended to other ages.

Children with SELD at age 2 are at 2 to 5 times higher risk for language impairment persisting into the late preschool to elementary school years than children without SELD.<sup>1,11</sup> Even though at least half of the two-year-olds with SELD will have language skills that are within the normal range by school age,<sup>9,10</sup> early expressive language delays should not be ignored, given the elevated risk of persisting language impairment.

Longitudinal studies of two-year-olds with SELD have examined a variety of potential predictor variables for persisting difficulties. Those variables which most regularly are found to make some prediction include parent concern about possible problems with the child's speech/language development or hearing, family history of language impairment or dyslexia (especially first degree relatives: parents, full siblings), receptive language delays, frequent ear infections, limited vocalizations, and delayed pretend play.<sup>12,13,14</sup> Although none of these is a highly accurate predictor by itself, parental concern has been the most consistently associated with language impairment.<sup>1,10</sup> Combining predictors has improved accuracy of predictions, but the optimal combination of predictors is not yet known.

For monolingual children who speak languages other than English, there are adaptations of the widely used *MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories (CDI)*<sup>a</sup> and the *Language Development Survey (LDS)*<sup>8,16,17</sup> in a number of languages. There is considerable consistency across languages in children's early expressive language development. For example, word combinations are reported for about 85% of Spanish-speaking and over 90% of French-speaking 24 to 26-month-olds children.<sup>15,18</sup>

Bilingual children's development of expressive vocabulary is comparable to monolingual children when parent reports for both languages are obtained and combined. There are two methods for combining vocabulary scores: "Total conceptual vocabulary (TCV)," in which words with similar meanings (e.g., English "cat" and Spanish "gato") are counted only once,<sup>19</sup> and "Total vocabulary (TV)" which includes all words in each language, regardless of possible overlap in meaning. For young children, TV (Language A + Language B) is recommended because it is simple to calculate and it yields vocabulary size scores and growth rates for young bilingual children that are similar to those for monolingual children's vocabulary.<sup>20</sup> Age of onset of word combinations also is similar for bilingual and monolingual children if bilingual children are credited with combining words if they do so in either language.<sup>16,21,22,23</sup>



Although pairs of monolingual forms can be used, there are also some bilingual adaptations of vocabulary checklists available, including Spanish-English<sup>22</sup> and German-English<sup>16</sup> adaptations of the *Language Development Survey* and a bilingual Spanish-English scoring adaptation of the *CDI*.<sup>21</sup>

## **Research Gaps**

Variation in findings across social groups and gender differences indicates that parent report tools and/or criteria for early identification may need adjustment for different populations. The rate of identification of SELD using parent report tools is much higher for children from lower SES families; cut-offs that yield about 10% of middle class children identify two to three times as many children from lower SES backgrounds.<sup>24</sup> Although children from low SES backgrounds are at somewhat higher risk for language impairment, these major differences in rate of identification raise concerns about over-identifying SELD among children from lower SES backgrounds. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds had lower average scores when SES was controlled for in one study, raising similar questions about the validity of parent report tools in culturally diverse populations.<sup>24</sup> Finally, when uniform expressive vocabulary and word combination criteria are used, more 2-year-old boys are identified with SELD,<sup>1,11,25</sup> raising a question of whether different criteria may be appropriate for boys and girls. Research comparing outcomes for boys and girls with SELD is needed to address this question.

## **Conclusions**

Young children with expressive language skills that are approximately below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile are at much higher risk than peers for persisting language or even broader developmental problems, even though there is a wide range of outcomes and many children with SELD at two years of age are in the average range by four years of age. A variety of additional variables are associated with persisting delays, and parental concern about possible speech-language problems is a key predictor of risk for language impairment.

## **Implications**

Early childhood educators, health care providers and other professionals can identify risk for language impairment in young children based on parent-reported information. Immediate referral to a speech-language pathologist is recommended for children with slow expressive language development if the parents are concerned that the child has possible speech-language problems

or when there are additional risk factors. On the other hand, if the parents are *not* concerned about the child’s speech-language development and there are no additional risk factors, monitoring (“watchful waiting”) is recommended for children who are not combining words or who have a small expressive vocabulary (under 40 words) at 24 months.

Monolingual children who speak languages other than English should be referred for evaluation if they are delayed in expressive vocabulary and onset of word combinations in their native language. Because expressive language development is comparable among monolingual and bilingual children when bilingual children’s development in both languages is taken into account, bilingual two-year-olds who are not combining and/or have small total expressive vocabularies should be monitored and/or referred for further evaluation.

Collaborative efforts between practitioners and researchers on large scale screening programs that combine screenings with follow-up evaluations are needed to refine and validate models for predicting persisting language impairment for children with parent-reported SELD, using other information about the child and family. These efforts should also include work to adapt, implement and validate measures for children from homes in which languages other than English are spoken, and for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

## References

1. Dale PS, Price TS, Bishop DVM, Plomin R. Outcomes of early language delay: I. Predicting persistent and transient language difficulties at 3 and 4 years. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2003;46(3):544-560.
2. Dale PS. Parent report assessment of language and communication. In: Cole KN, Dale PS, Thal DJ, eds. *Assessment of communication and language*. Baltimore, MD: P.H. Brookes;1996:161-182.
3. Fenson L, Dale PS, Reznick JS, Bates E, Thal DJ, Pethick SJ, eds. Variability in early communicative development. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 1994;59(5):1-173. Theme issue.
4. Dale PS. The validity of a parent report measure of vocabulary and syntax at 24 months. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 1991;34(3):565-571.
5. Dale PS, Bates E, Reznick JS, Morisset C. The validity of a parent report instrument of child language at twenty months. *Journal of Child Language* 1989;16(2):239-249.
6. Fenson L, Marchman VA, Thal DJ, Dale PS, Reznick JS, Bates E. *MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories: User’s guide and technical manual*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Baltimore, Md.:Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co;2007.
7. Feldman HM, Dale PS, Campbell TF, Colborn DK, Kurs-Lasky M, Rockette HE, Paradise JC. Concurrent and predictive validity of parent reports of child language at ages 2 and 3 years. *Child Development* 2005;76(4):856-868.
8. Rescorla L. The language development survey: A screening tool for delayed language in toddlers. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 1989;54(4):587-599.

9. Guiberson, M., Rodriguez, B. L., & Dale, P. S. Classification accuracy of brief parental report measures of language development in Spanish-speaking toddlers. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* 2011;42, 536-549.
10. Klee T, Pearce K, Carson DK. Improving the positive predictive value of screening for developmental language disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2000;43(4):821-833.
11. Rice ML, Taylor CL, Zubrick SP. Language outcomes of 7-year-old children with or without a history of late language emergence at 24 months. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2008;51(2):394-407.
12. Ellis E, Thal D. Early language delay and risk for language impairment. *Perspectives on Language Learning and Education* 2008;15(3):93-100.
13. Olswang L, Rodríguez B, Timler G. Recommending intervention for toddlers with specific language learning difficulties: We may not have all the answers, but we know a lot. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 1998;7:23-32.
14. Lyytinen P, Eklund K, Lyytinen H. Language development and literacy skills in late-talking toddlers with and without familial risk for dyslexia. *Annals of Dyslexia* 2005;55(2):166-192.
15. Jackson-Maldonado D, Bates E, Thal D. *MacArthur Inventarios del Desarrollo de Habilidades Comunicativas: User's guide and technical manual*. Baltimore, MD: P.H. Brookes;2003.
16. Junker D, Stockman I. Expressive vocabulary of German-English bilingual toddlers. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2002;11(4):381-394.
17. Papaeliou, C. & Rescorla, L. Vocabulary development in Greek children: A cross-linguistic comparison using the Language Development Survey. *Journal of Child Language* 2011;38, 861-877.
18. Trudeau, N. & Sutton, A. Expressive vocabulary and early grammar of 16- to 30-month-old children acquiring Quebec French. *First Language* 2011;31, 480-507.
19. Pearson B, Fernández S, Oller K. Lexical development in bilingual infants and toddlers: Comparison to monolingual norms. *Language Learning* 1993;43(1):93-120.
20. Core, C., Hoff, E., Rumiche, R., & Señor, M. Total and conceptual vocabulary in Spanish-English bilinguals from 22 to 30 months: Implications for assessment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2013;56, 1637-1649.
21. Marchman V, Martínez-Sussman C. Concurrent validity of caregiver/parent report measures of language for children who are learning both English and Spanish. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2002;45(5):283-997.
22. Patterson JL. Expressive vocabulary development and word combinations of Spanish-English bilingual toddlers. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 1998;7:46-56.
23. Hoff, E., Core, C., Place, S., Rumiche, R., Señor, M., & Parra, M. Dual language exposure and early bilingual development. *Journal of Child Language* 2012;39, 1-27.
24. Rescorla L, Achenbach T. Use of the Language Development Survey (LDS) in a national probability sample of children 18 to 35 months old. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2002;45(4):733-743.
25. Rescorla L, Alley A. Validation of the Language Development Survey (LDS): A parent report tool for identifying language delay in toddlers. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2001;44(2):434-444.

**Note:**

<sup>a</sup> See also the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories website. Available at: <http://mb-cdi.stanford.edu/>. Accessed February 15, 2017.

# Programs Supporting Young Children's Language Development

Kathy Thiemann-Bourque, PhD, Steven F. Warren, PhD

University of Kansas, USA

September 2018, 2e éd. rév.

## Introduction

Very young children with severe language delays, secondary to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other developmental disabilities (DD) will require effective early interventions to develop optimal language and social communication skills. Even very young children can acquire a means to communicate their needs, intentions and feelings. A number of well conducted early language intervention studies have increased our knowledge of approaches that enhance optimal language development for young children. There are also new technologies available to augment communication and to collect outcome data.

## Subject

Early intervention is essential for young children with language delays to increase the rate of language development and reduce the risk of social, emotional and behavioural problems.<sup>1,2</sup> A variety of teaching procedures can be used to target imitation, turn-taking and joint attention as well as communication and language skills more directly.<sup>3,4</sup>

Prelinguistic milieu teaching (PMT) techniques help children who are not yet speaking transition from preintentional to intentional communication.<sup>5,6</sup> The adult uses questions or commands to initiate a teaching episode (e.g., a ball is on a shelf and the adult says, “What do you want?”), thus requiring a specific response from the child. Alternatively, the adult can wait for the child to initiate and then prompt a more complex response (e.g., the child reaches for the ball, and the adult says, “Can you say ball?”). As the child transitions to short sentences, recasting facilitates acquisition of new words and more complex grammar (e.g., the child says “ball” and the adult says “It’s a big ball”).<sup>7</sup>

Responsive teaching (RT) techniques include teaching caregivers to be highly responsive to the child’s communication attempts by following the child’s attentional lead, waiting for the child to

initiate, responding by commenting on actions or toys of interest and modeling language.

Direct teaching is characterized by imitation based approaches that may include prompting, reinforcing, and immediate feedback on grammatical or vocabulary targets in structured sessions.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) refers to non-speech modes of communicating (e.g., sign language, speech-generating devices, or picture exchange systems) used to enhance children's language, vocabulary, communicative turns and functions, and oral speech.<sup>8</sup>

## **Problems**

Over 70% of children ages 3–5 years identified with a disability have delayed communication and language development,<sup>9</sup> and this is the single most common reason for special education referral.<sup>10</sup> The majority of preschool children with ASD are preverbal; although approximately 70% will learn to use spoken language by the start of kindergarten, 30% will remain nonverbal or minimally verbal.<sup>11,12</sup> Research to develop and test new early intervention approaches, with implementation at a young age, is key to improving long-term outcomes for these children.

## **Research Context**

When a parent brings a child for therapy, the long-term goal is likely to be speech communication. In this time frame, the success of therapy can be observed in distal (far-reaching) measures such as broadly generalized increases in communication, language, or prosocial skills in non-treatment settings.<sup>13</sup> In the short term, the success of therapy can be observed in proximal measures (treatment targets) such as increased initiations, length of communicative turns, as well as comprehension and productive use of words expressed using speech or with AAC.<sup>13,14,15,16</sup> When the child initiates communication and takes turns more often, a transactional model would suggest that communication partners may respond in ways that provide additional opportunities for practice and development.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, effective therapy can change the child and the language environment at the same time supporting generalization and ongoing learning in the home and school environment.<sup>17,18</sup> Yoder and colleagues<sup>19</sup> suggested that if interventions lead to significant growth in both proximal and distal outcomes, one could be more confident in the efficacy of the intervention to impact social communication development in general.

## Key Research Questions

Which treatment approaches are effective for children with DDs and/or ASD? Which child and family characteristics predict a treatment response? Do new technologies help minimally verbal children acquire intentional communication?

## Recent Research Results

Over the years, a few general themes have emerged from milieu research. First, there is much research to support the significant role that parental responsivity plays in improving early communication and language development.<sup>20,21,22</sup> Specifically, children with highly responsive and more educated mothers benefited the most from PMT whereas children with less responsive, less educated mothers benefited more from a focus on RT techniques in one study.<sup>22</sup> However, a higher level of responsivity is by itself not adequate to substantially improve the communication of young children with developmental disabilities because the modest impacts on social communication observed post-treatment may not be maintained.<sup>23,24,25</sup> Second, parents can be coached to be more responsive, but more research is needed to determine how to increase generalization and maintenance of responsivity.<sup>26</sup> Third, child characteristics may predict individual differences in response to early communication intervention.<sup>23</sup> In various studies and depending upon the treatment procedure or parameter, response to treatment has been associated with certain child characteristics such as diagnosis, level of play skills or amount of joint attention at intake.

Many single case studies have supported the effectiveness of early AAC interventions to improve communication and language development in young children with ASD.<sup>8</sup> Clear improvements have been reported in vocabulary, requesting behaviours, initiations and responses, social engagement, and for some, spoken communication.<sup>27,28,29,30,31</sup> Evidence is building on the benefits of embedding AAC interventions within milieu teaching techniques.<sup>32,33</sup> Promising innovations include the use of speech-generating devices<sup>17,34</sup> and the inclusion of peer-mediated approaches.<sup>17,30,31</sup> Benefits include improvements in communication, social engagement and reciprocal peer interactions, with generalization to routine preschool settings, and maintenance of gains.

Another use of technology is to automatically estimate child and adult communication patterns in naturalistic environments using automatic speech detection and analysis devices such as the Language Environment Analysis (LENA) system.<sup>35,36</sup> LENA research has revealed complex

differences in the verbal interactions between parents and their children with Down syndrome<sup>37</sup> or ASD,<sup>38</sup> when compared to verbal interactions between parents and typically developing children. For example, vocal behaviours of children with Down syndrome remained low while increasing for typically developing children after 2 years of age,<sup>37</sup> and children with ASD produced fewer vocalizations and turns with their parents.<sup>38</sup> These data may inform the design of intervention programs. These outcomes along with other studies<sup>39,40</sup> demonstrate how this new technology can be used as a proximal outcome measure, and as a method to provide parent and caregiver feedback on enriching the child's language environment.

## **Research Gaps**

Collectively, future research should:

1. conduct additional longitudinal, comparative analyses of the relative efficacy of different treatments in relation to specific treatment and learner characteristics, treatment goals and instructional contexts;
2. identify the optimum treatment intensity necessary to enhance communication and language development;
3. expand AAC intervention research to include different populations of children and teach a broader range of functional communication skills with a variety of partners.

## **Conclusions**

Research has demonstrated that many variables influence treatment outcomes. Most importantly, child characteristics such as the cause of the language delay, level of play skills or joint attention, and other aspects of their cognitive profile may predict which teaching procedures are most appropriate and the intensity of intervention that may be required. Parent education and responsivity also play a role in the effectiveness of certain treatment procedures. It is necessary to train early interventionists to tailor treatment programs based on these factors. It is also important to attend to proximal and distal outcomes when selecting and measuring treatment goals and to document meaningful change across a broad range of communication and language skills. For children struggling to speak, interventions that ensure communication partners have the skills to support functional communication through AAC will enhance their opportunities for social participation and friendship development.<sup>41</sup> Early interventionists and speech-language pathologists need to stay current with emerging research in order to effectively tailor intervention

components to the needs of specific children and their families.

## Implications

Parents should be able to access effective early interventions that are individualized to meet their child's needs and that fully involve the family. Language intervention programs require interactive situations and contexts that set the stage for language learning within child-caregiver dyads, and that support maintenance, generalization and extension of new skills.<sup>42</sup>

Over the past 10 years, there has been an explosion of mobile technologies and multi-function devices such as touch screen phones and iPads with a variety of apps designed to support communication of individuals with IDD, including ASD. These new technologies should increase the accessibility and effectiveness of technology assisted communication given the growing body of research on optimum design and implementation.

## References

1. Redmond SM, Rice ML. Stability of behavioral ratings of children with SLI. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2002;45(1):190-201.
2. Tomblin JB, Zhang XY, Buckwalter P, Catts H. The association of reading disability, behavioral disorders, and language impairment among second-grade children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 2000;41(4):473-482.
3. Stone WL, Yoder PJ. Predicting spoken language level in children with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism* 2001;5(4):341-61. doi:10.1177/1362361301005004002
4. Kasari C, Gulsrud A, Freeman S, Paparella T, Helleman G. Longitudinal follow-up of children with autism receiving targeted interventions on joint attention and play. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 2012;51(5):487-95.
5. Yoder PJ, Warren SF. Maternal responsivity predicts the prelinguistic communication intervention that facilitates generalized intentional communication. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 1998;41(5):1207-1219.
6. Hancock TB, Kaiser AP. Enhanced Milieu Teaching. In: McCauley R, Fey M, eds. *Treatment of language disorders in children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing; 2006:203-236.
7. Warren SF, Walker D. Fostering early communication and language development. In: Teti DM, ed. *Handbook of research methods in developmental psychology*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers; 2005:249-270.
8. Ronski M, Sevcik R, Barton-Hulsey A, Whitmore A. Early intervention and AAC: What a difference 30 years makes. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 2015;31(3):181-202.
9. Wetherby AM, Prizant BM. Profiling young children's communicative competence. In: Warren SF, Reichle JE, eds. *Causes and effects in communication and language intervention*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing. 1992;217-253. *Communication and Language Intervention Series*; vol. 1.
10. Casby MW. National data concerning communication disorders and special education. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* 1989;20(1):22-30.



11. Anderson DK, Lord C, Risi S, DiLavore PS, Shulman C, Thurm A, Welch K, Pickles A. Patterns of growth in verbal abilities among children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 2007;75(4):594-604.
12. Tager-Flusberg H, Kasari C. Minimally verbal school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder: the neglected end of the spectrum. *Autism Research* 2013;6(6):468-478.
13. Yoder PJ, Bottema-Beutel K, Woynaroski T, Chandrasekhar R, Sandbank M. Social communication intervention effects vary by dependent variable type in preschoolers with autism spectrum disorders. *Evidence-Based Communication Assessment and Intervention* 2013;7(4):150-174.
14. Kasari C, Kaiser A, Goods K, Nietfeld J, Mathy P, Landa R, Murphy S, Almirall D. Communication interventions for minimally verbal children with autism: A sequential multiple assignment randomized trial. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 2014;53(6):635-646. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.01.019
15. DiStefano C, Shih W, Kaiser A, Landa R, Kasari C. Communication growth in minimally verbal children with ASD: The importance of interaction. *Autism Research* 2016;9(10):1093-102.
16. Yoder PJ, Stone W. A randomized comparison of the effect of two prelinguistic communication interventions on the acquisition of spoken communication in preschoolers with ASD. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2006;49(4):698-711.
17. Woynaroski T, Yoder PJ, Fey ME, Warren SF. A transactional model of spoken vocabulary variation in toddlers with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2014;57(5):1754-1763.
18. Thiemann-Bourque K, Feldmiller S, Hoffman L, Johner S. Incorporating a peer-mediated approach into speech generating device intervention: Effects on communication of preschool children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2018;61:2045-2061.
19. Yoder PJ, Bottema-Beutel K, Woynaroski T, Chandrasekhar R, Sandbank M. Social communication intervention effects vary by dependent variable type in preschoolers with autism spectrum disorders. *Evidence-Based Communication Assessment and Intervention* 2013;7(4):150-174.
20. Yoder PJ, Warren SF. Maternal responsivity predicts the prelinguistic communication intervention that facilitates generalized intentional communication. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 1998;41(5):1207-1219.
21. Yoder P, Warren SF. Maternal responsivity mediates the relationship between prelinguistic intentional communication and later language. *Journal of Early Intervention* 1999;22(2):126-136.
22. Yoder PJ, Warren SF. Relative treatment effects of two prelinguistic communication interventions on language development in toddlers with developmental delays vary by maternal characteristics. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2001;44(1):224-237.
23. Yoder PJ, Warren SF. Effects of prelinguistic milieu teaching and parent responsivity education on dyads involving children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2002;45(6):297-1310.
24. Fey ME, Warren SF, Brady N, Finestack LH, Bredin-Oja SL, Fairchild M, Sokol S, Yoder PJ. Early effects of responsivity education/prelinguistic milieu teaching for children with developmental delays and their parents. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2006;49(3):526-547.
25. Warren SF, Fey ME, Finestack LH, Brady NC, Bredin-Oja SL, Fleming KK. A randomized trial of longitudinal effects of low-intensity responsivity education/prelinguistic milieu teaching. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2008;51(2):451-470.
26. Kaiser AP, Roberts MY. Parent-implemented enhanced milieu teaching with preschool children who have intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2013;56:295-309.
27. Bock SJ, Stoner JB, Beck AR, Hanley L, Prochnow J. Increasing functional communication in non-speaking preschool children: Comparison of PECS and VOCA. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities* 2005;40(3):264-78.

28. Flippin M, Reszka S, Watson LR. Effectiveness of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) on communication and speech for children with autism spectrum disorders: A meta-analysis. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2010;19(2):178-195.
29. Ganz JB, Simpson RL, Corbin-Newsome J. The impact of the Picture Exchange Communication System on requesting and speech development in preschoolers with autism spectrum disorders and similar characteristics. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* 2008;2(1):157-169.
30. Thiemann-Bourque K, Brady N, McGuff S, Stump K, Naylor A. PECS and PALS: A peer-mediated AAC intervention for minimally verbal preschoolers with autism. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research* 2016;59(5):1133-1145.
31. Thiemann-Bourque K, McGuff S, Goldstein H. Training peer partners to use a speech-generating device with classmates with ASD: Exploring communication outcomes across preschool contexts. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2017;60(9):2648-2662.
32. Yoder PJ, Stone W. Randomized comparison of two communication interventions for preschoolers with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 2006;74(3):426-435.
33. Schepis MM, Reid DH, Behrmann, MM, Sutton, KA. Increasing communicative interactions of young children with autism using a voice output communication aid and naturalistic teaching. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 1998;31(4):561-578.
34. Ronski M, Sevcik RA, Adamson LB, Cheslock M, Smith A, Barker RM, Bakeman R. Randomized comparison of augmented and nonaugmented language interventions for toddlers with developmental delays and their parents. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 2010;53(2):350-364.
35. Xu D, Yapanel U, Gray S. *Reliability of the LENA Language Environment Analysis system in young children's natural home environment*. Boulder, CO: The LENA Foundation; 2009.
36. Greenwood CR, Schnitz AG, Irvin D, Tsai SF, Carta JJ. Automated Language Environment Analysis: A Research Synthesis. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 2018;27(2):853-867.
37. Thiemann-Bourque K, Warren S, Brady N, Gilkerson J, Richards J. Vocal interaction between children with Down syndrome and their parents. *American Journal of Speech Language Pathology* 2014;23:474-485.
38. Warren SF, Gilkerson J, Richards JA, Oller DK, Xu D, Yapanel U, Gray S. What automated vocal analysis reveals about the vocal production and language learning environment of young children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 2010;40(5):555-569.
39. Ota CL, Austin AM. Training and mentoring: Family child care providers' use of linguistic inputs in conversations with children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 2013;28(4):972-983.
40. Suskind D, Leffel KR, Hernandez MW, Sapolich SG, Suskind E, Kirkham E, Meehan P. An exploratory study of "Quantitative Linguistic Feedback" effect of LENA feedback on adult language production. *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 2013;34(4):199-209.
41. McNaughton D, Light J. The iPad and mobile technology revolution: Benefits and challenges for individuals who require augmentative and alternative communication. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 2013;19:107-116.
42. Warren SF, Yoder PJ, Leew SV. Promoting social-communicative development in infants and toddlers. In: Goldstein H, Kaczmarek LA, English K, eds. Promoting social communication: Children with developmental disabilities from birth to adolescence. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing; 2002:121-149. *Communication and Language Intervention Series*; vol. 10.

# Services and Programs Supporting Young Children's Language Development: Comments on Girolametto, and Thiemann and Warren

Patricia L. Cleave, PhD

Dalhousie University, School of Human Communication Disorders, Canada

January 2010, 2e éd.

## Introduction

Language delays and disorders are an important issue in child development. Beyond the number of young children with language disorders, the long-term impact of such disorders increases the importance of programs to support young children's language acquisition. Children with early language disorders are at risk for social and behavioural problems as well as academic failure, including literacy difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, most school-aged children diagnosed with learning disabilities have language as a component of their learning disability.<sup>2</sup> In broader societal terms, estimates have been made of the economic impacts of low language and literacy achievement.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the topic of these two texts is an important one for children and their families, and for society at large. Girolametto, Thiemann and Warren are among the most influential researchers in the area of treatment programs for language disorders in young children. In these papers, Thiemann and Warren conduct a broad review of the evidence for early language intervention while Girolametto specifically focuses his review on research into parent training programs.

## Research and Conclusions

Thiemann and Warren highlight the social consequences of a language disorder and then proceed to discuss evidence of effective language intervention. They briefly summarize four different language-teaching strategies that have been demonstrated to improve children's language abilities. Their discussion of the area is particularly useful because they provide a model of language intervention that accommodates these various approaches. Thiemann and Warren argue that effective intervention requires the provision of ideal language-learning situations, which involve providing communication opportunities, following the interests of the child and building predictable, familiar routines. Within an enabling context, the adult can use specific techniques from any of the four language-teaching strategies. Thiemann and Warren review evidence

showing some factors that may determine which approach is most effective, including developmental level and parent responsiveness.

Girolametto's review of parent-administered language intervention programs identifies the same basic principles and range of language teaching strategies as Thiemann and Warren, although different terminology is sometimes used (e.g. focused stimulation rather than responsive interaction). He reports on literature showing the effectiveness of parent-administered intervention for children with language delays/disorders with and without additional intellectual disabilities. Girolametto notes that programs that involved a focus on specific language targets resulted in greater gains in language than those that did not have such targets. He reports that there is evidence that, as a group, children involved in parent-administered programs make equivalent gains to those in clinician-administered ones. However, these gains may be less consistent on an individual level and influenced by the nature of the child's language profile. Thus, he concludes, while parent-administered programming is a viable, cost-efficient approach to providing services, the child's progress must be carefully monitored.

Not only do the two articles present a similar fundamental approach to language intervention, they also identify similar limitations in current research and areas for future research. As the authors note, a "one size fits all" approach to language intervention will not work. While there are fundamental components that are central to all the early language intervention programs reviewed, there are many child and parent variables that will affect a program's effectiveness. In the papers, the authors discuss some of the factors (e.g. developmental profile, language targets, responsiveness of parents, linguistic and cultural background), but there are other likely factors, such as child temperament and intervention context, that also need to be explored.

Girolametto's review explicitly discusses one intervention context – parent training. Although Thiemann and Warren's review cites studies that used a variety of intervention contexts, they do not discuss this variable in explicit terms. There are at least four general contexts in which language intervention can be provided: individual, small group, classroom and caregiver training. All of these are viable contexts, but much remains to be learned about which is the best approach for which children and families at any point in time. For example, for many "at-risk" children, providing a high-quality preschool with a language-focused curriculum may be sufficient, but some children may require more focused individual or group programming. These contexts can also be combined. Girolametto makes the distinction between parent-administered intervention and parent involvement, in which the parents play a secondary, supporting role in clinician-

administered intervention. This is an important distinction, as we should not assume that observing therapy or getting general language facilitation suggestions will be sufficient to enable parents to modify their interactions in facilitative ways. However, a parent-training program could be offered in conjunction with direct services. This may well be the most effective and efficient combination for some children. In order to identify which intervention context or combination of contexts are effective for particular children, additional research is needed.

Both papers note that most of the evidence available speaks only to short-term effects and that there is a need for longitudinal research to document treatment effects over the long term. One long-term effect that is briefly alluded to in the papers but needs closer examination is the ability of early language intervention programs to prepare children with language disorders to meet the language challenges of school, particularly the development of literacy. Thus, preschool language intervention needs to be concerned with and evaluated on its effects in areas such as phonological awareness, narrative abilities and emergent literacy skills, which are all foundations for literacy acquisition.

Finally, the authors call for additional work on the transfer of research findings into practice and policy. This is a critical step that requires specific attention. As Girolametto notes, the parents involved in efficacy research are generally not representative of the population. Similarly, the children and settings involved in a research study are often not typical, or at least are not representative of the full range of children with developmental language disorders and intervention contexts. Once an approach has been shown to be effective in a controlled research study, it is necessary to determine that similar effects can be achieved in average treatment settings.

### **Implications for the Development of Policy**

Given the social, educational and economic impacts of developmental language disorders, it is clear that services for children with such disorders need to be a priority. As noted in both papers, research has shown that we can impact child outcomes. The research reviewed by these authors demonstrates that within a responsive environment, a variety of specific intervention techniques can be effectively used by clinicians, preschool teachers and parents. If we are to provide the support children and their families need, it is vital that adequate funding of the full range of intervention contexts – individual, small group, parent training and preschool-based – be provided. Further, appropriate preservice training and continuing education need to be provided to

everyone who works with the children and their families. This includes speech-language pathologists, early interventionists, early childhood educators and child-care providers.

In developing intervention programs, we need to be concerned about effectiveness and efficiency. As Girolametto notes, parent-administered intervention has been shown to be an effective intervention option that is cost-effective. However, he notes that there is evidence that the gains made by children may be more variable than those made by children receiving clinician-directed intervention and that little is known about the effects of this type of intervention with families from diverse cultures. Thus, more research is needed to establish for which children and families this cost-effective approach is the best option. Girolametto calls for the content of parent-administered interventions to be made widely available for those who cannot participate in a formal program. Such initiatives can be useful and it is important to provide all parents with information on language facilitation. However, it is not known what effect the provision of information alone will have, and it is unrealistic to assume that this will meet the needs of a child with a language disorder. Evidence that programs with specific language targets are more effective than programs with a more general facilitation approach, and findings that parent responsiveness is a factor in program outcomes suggest that the provision of information will not be sufficient. Thus, for parents who are unable to participate in a formal parent program, alternative intervention options should be available.

Although our current knowledge allows the development of effective interventions, there is still much to be determined if we are to develop programs that enable children to achieve full potential. Therefore, it is important that there be sufficient support for programmatic efficacy research. Efficacy research is difficult and expensive to conduct, but only by gathering more evidence-based data will we be able to determine the best match between child, family and intervention program. As additional evidence is gathered, it is essential that the knowledge transfer occurs, ensuring that research findings are incorporated into practice. This will necessitate support for the integration of findings across multiple studies in a manner that makes the research accessible. Coordinated efforts among researchers, service-providers and policy-makers are crucial if we are to develop effective and efficient early language intervention programs.

## References

1. Fey ME, Catts HW, Larrivee LS. Preparing preschoolers for the academic and social challenges of school. In: Fey ME, Windsor J, Warren SF, eds. *Language intervention: Preschool through the elementary years*. Baltimore, Md: Paul H. Brookes Publishing; 1995:3-37. *Communication and language intervention series*; vol. 5.

2. Paul R. *Language disorders from infancy through adolescence: assessment & intervention*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. St. Louis, Mo: Mosby; 2001.
3. McCain MN, Mustard JF. *The early years study three years later*. Toronto, Ontario: The Founders Network; 2002. Available at: <http://www.peeearlyyears.com/pdf/Research/Early%20Years/The%20Early%20Years%20Study.pdf>. Accessed June 16, 2016.