

Current Research Projects

Treating Complex Sentences in Children with Developmental Language Disorders

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It is well established that school-age children with DLD have unusual difficulties comprehending and producing complex sentences. However, there is very little treatment research that focuses on the best approaches for helping children with DLD comprehend or produce complex sentences. Passives and Object Relative Clauses are especially difficult because the first noun in the sentence is not the subject. These sentences appear often in written language.



Passive form: The man in the blue shirt was scolded by the lady.

Object relative form: The man that the lady scolded was wearing a blue shirt.

This study was designed to compare two kinds of treatment. In the explicit treatment condition, we show children a picture and ask questions like, “Who was scolding? And “Who was being scolded?” If children respond incorrectly, we explain the rule for determining which noun is the subject and which noun is the object.

In the implicit treatment condition, we show children two pictures (e.g, a car being driven by a man and a car being driven by a woman). Using a technique known as syntactic priming, the clinician uses a target sentence (a passive or an object relative form) to

describe the first picture. Then, we ask the child to describe the second picture using a sentence just like the one the clinician used. If the child sentence is incorrect, we use a strategy called growth relevant recasting to demonstrate the right construction using the same words that the child used.

To qualify for the study, children must have a Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and they must have difficulties comprehending and producing passive and/or object relative sentences. We give children the *Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills* to determine whether they have DLD. Then we give them a number of other tasks that are designed to assess their ability to comprehend and produce passive and object relative forms, their memory skills, and their speech perception abilities.

If children qualify, they will be randomized to either implicit or explicit treatment conditions. Some children will receive treatment immediately after qualifying; other children will have to wait for 10 weeks to get the treatment. All children in the study receive \$10 Amazon gift cards for every session they attend (a total of \$260 for the entire study), and their parents receive reports of their performance.

We are currently enrolling children in this study. If you are interested in having your child participate, please contact Emma Jones at 435-797-4044 or at e.jones@usu.edu.