How specific is specific language impairment? On problems of delineation and classification

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The main purpose of the project was to investigate language impairment in Swedish preschool children with a focus on language comprehension and pragmatics (language use). Studies investigating aspects of language processing in a variety of tasks: repetition of nonwords, narration, understanding of idioms, picture naming and referential communication were undertaken.

The stress pattern of words and nonwords was found to affect the participants¹ repetition performance. Furthermore, nonword repetition skills were linked to expressive language, particularly phonological development.

Different types of genres, that is conversation and narration, led to differences in aspects of language production such as fluency and grammatical structure. Furthermore, the relative level of language comprehension was found to be important for the ability to provide a story with several content units and for the ability to only include aspects considered relevant for the listener and the task.

Preschool children with LI did not interpret idioms literally but they showed difficulties defining them. Idiom understanding was correlated to
performance on a theory of mind task, measures of semantic-lexical skills as well as receptive grammar.

A sentence prime significantly increased naming speed. Naming speed did not correlate to any nonverbal measures, including those involving a speed component, but correlated to some of the verbal measures.

Finally, children with LI performed at the level of their non-impaired peers on a referential communication task. No link was found between performance on the task and nonverbal IQ or level of language comprehension respectively.

In an ongoing interactional study, we are analyzing the role of language comprehension in a subgroup of the children while participating in a play task with two different conversational partners (adult versus child). Another ongoing study analyzes prosody in different repetition tasks.

References:


Reuterskiöld Wagner, C., Nettelbladt, U., Sahlén, B. Giving the crucial information: Performance on a referential communication task in Swedish children with LI. Accepted for publication in International Journal of Language and Communication Disorder.


