Elaborative Noun Phrase Use in Narratives by School Age Children

Aubrey Passey, Becca Polson, Kennedi Eggertsen (UG Researchers)  
Sarai Holbrook (Graduate Researcher)  
Sandra Gillam (Faculty Mentor)  
Department of Communicative Disorders, College of Education

Background

- Elaborated Noun Phrases (ENPs) can be used as an indicator of literate language development.
- Previous studies have shown that as children grow, they use more and more complex forms of ENPs until they reach about age 11, at which point their use of ENPs plateaus as curriculum emphasis changes from narrative to expository discourse.
- The present study extended the research to younger children and expands the normative data upon which clinicians can draw to make intervention decisions.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyze and help us better understand the use of Elaborative Noun Phrases (ENP) in typically developing children between the ages of four and seven.

Methodology

- In this study the narratives of 42, 4 year olds, 57, 5 year olds, 66, 6 year olds and 94, 7 year olds who participated in the normative sample for the Test of Narrative Language (TNL-2; Gillam & Pearson, 2018) were used.
- Originally, the children were asked to produce stories in three different settings, a story retell after a clinician model, a story based on a picture sequence, and a story based on a picture.
- The stories elicited from the single scene prompt (Alien story) were used in this project.
- These stories were transcribed using a language analysis program called Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT).
- Transcription reliability was 90% or greater.
- They were then coded for elaborative noun phrases by research assistants, who were blinded to the purpose of the project.

Results

NDW

- Six and seven year olds told stories that contained more diverse vocabulary than the younger four and five year olds.
- The seven year olds used more diverse vocabulary than all of the other groups.

MLU

- Six and seven year olds told stories that contained more morphemes per utterance than the younger four and five year olds.
- The seven year olds included more morphemes in their utterances than all of the other groups.
- Children between the ages of 4 and 6 told stories that were similar in length. It was not until 7 that children’s stories became significantly longer.

ENP

- The six and seven year olds used more Pre1 noun phrase elaboration in their stories than the four year olds.
- The seven year olds used more Pre1 noun phrase elaborations than the six year olds.
- The only significant difference for Pre2 noun phrase elaborations was that they were produced more by the seven year olds than the four year olds.
- There were no significant differences between the groups in their use of Pre3 noun phrase modifications.
- For post modified noun phrases, the seven year olds outperformed the four and five year olds but not the six year olds, although that comparison approached significance (p = .054).

Discussion - Implications

- The findings of the current project are counter to prior research that suggests that children do not begin to use post modification until age 11.
- In this study, children were shown to begin to use this form of noun phrase elaboration as early as age 4 with steady increases in use over the age ranges studied.
- This is important clinically because it suggests that it is an appropriate target for children to engage in during therapy sessions.
- There is no reason to wait to work with students.
- As seen in the table below, Pre1, Pre2 and Pre3 are most highly correlated with language productivity (TNU) while Post modification is most highly correlated with language diversity (NDW).
- Thus, length is important for noun phrase elaborations and vocabulary knowledge is most important for the use of Post modification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRE1</th>
<th>PRE2</th>
<th>PRE3</th>
<th>POST</th>
<th>TNU</th>
<th>NDW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRE1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDW</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All comparisons significant at .001