

Adolescents with Developmental Language Disorder

Complex Sentence Assessment and Intervention

Presented by:
Colin A. Macpherson
M.A., CCC-SLP

Hoi Kiu Tong, B.S.
Elona Nicoile, B.S.
Taylor Torongo, B.S.
Alur Orsha, B.S.

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Learner Objectives

- Participants will identify norms and criterion-referenced language measures to use with adolescents with developmental language disorders
- Participants will describe how to use internet resources to develop personally relevant materials for complex sentence intervention
- Participants will describe the metalinguistic procedures and tasks used in complex sentence intervention.

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Why should we bother with complex syntax?

- Adolescents with developmental language disorder (DLD) continue to demonstrate difficulty understanding and using complex syntax throughout childhood.
- Adolescents with DLD need to demonstrate the ability to use complex syntax in academic tasks and literacy events, both spoken and written.
- Narrative and expository text genres pose challenges for adolescents with DLD due to the complexity of the language present in these genres.

Bellizzi & Scott (2015). The place of syntax in school-age language assessment and intervention. T. Ukrainetz (ed.) School-Age Intervention: Evidence-Based Practices. Austin, TX: Pro-ed

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What occurs in Adolescent Language Development (Nippold, 2016)

- Sentences gradually increase in length and complexity
- Increased sentence length is achieved through greater use of subordinate clauses
 - Relative (The team **THAT** wanted to win practiced every day.)
 - Nominal (I think **THAT** you should leave now.)
 - Adverbial (If you don't wash your hands, you might get sick.)
- Use of subordination allows for greater efficiency and precision in talking and writing
- Greater use of cohesive devices within sentences
 - Both subordinate and coordinate conjunctions
- Greater use of low-frequency syntactic structures in narrative and expository genres

Nippold, M. A. *Later Language Development: School-Aged Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults* - Fourth Edition. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.



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Who is a candidate for complex sentence intervention?

- Children with DLD aged 9 through 16
- Children in 3rd grade and beyond with a DLD
- Why 3rd Grade?
 - Introduction of expository texts in regular education curriculum
 - Transition from learning to read to reading to learning
- Children with DLD who have a basic mastery of simple syntax, basic narrative structure, and conversational discourse



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How do I assess the language skills of adolescents with a developmental language disorder?

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What Norm-Referenced Tests should I use?

Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)	Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF5)	Test of Written Language 4th Edition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Awareness • Story Retelling & Delayed Story Retelling • Listening Comprehension & Reading Comprehension • Following Directions • Written Expression Discourse & Sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulated Sentences • Recalling Sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence Combining

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What Criterion-Referenced Measures should I use?

- Evoked Production Tasks
- Sentence Imitation Tasks -
 - Kidd (2007) Elicited Imitation Task – Relative Clauses
 - Diessel & Tomasello (2005) Copular Construction Relative Clause Sentences
- Narrative Language Sampling Tasks -
 - Spoken and/or Written
 - Nippold Tasks
- Expository Language Sampling Tasks -
 - Spoken and/or Written
 - Nippold Tasks

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Criterion-Referenced Measures Cont.

- T-Units: An independent clause and any attached DEPENDENT clause(s)
- When a sentence contains two or more independent clauses, it is divided into two or more T-Units
 - Dogs require less care than many pets while providing excellent companionship, but a dog's love has to be earned.
 - He has a ball and a truck
- Mean length of T-Units
 - Divide the total number of words in the sample by the number of T-units in the sample
 - Compound words and contractions count as two words
- Measure of Syntactic Complexity
 - Clausal Density/Subordination Index → Determine the number of independent and dependent clauses in the sample and divide by the number of T-units in the sample
 - Subordination Ratio → Total number of subordinate clauses divided by the total number of clauses

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Calculating a mean T-Unit Story Example

- The boy and the dog were sitting outside. As the sun went down the dog barked at the moon. Before the boy could get up the dog ran down the street. The boy chased the dog. The boy couldn't catch the dog since he didn't run fast. The boy fell down and he cried. The dog saw the boy and he ran to him. The boy was happy because he found the dog.



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Example Story Calculation for mean T-Units

Story Breakdown

- The boy and the dog were sitting outside/
- As the sun went down the dog barked at the moon/
- The dog ran down the street before the boy got up/
- The boy chased the dog/
- The boy couldn't catch the dog since he didn't run fast/
- The boy fell down/
- and he cried/
- The dog saw the boy /
- and he ran to him/
- The boy was happy because he found the dog

Calculation

- 10 T-units
- 75 Words (contractions and compounds count as 2)
- Average T-unit length -> 7,5 words



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Example Story Calculation for Clausal Density

Clauses Breakdown

- 1 Independent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause, 1 Dependent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause, 1 Dependent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause, 1 Dependent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause
- 1 Independent Clause, 1 Dependent Clause

Calculation

- Total Independent Clauses = 10
- Total Dependent Clauses = 4
- Total Clauses divided by Total T-Units =
 - 14/10
- Clausal Density = 1.4




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What are the components of Complex Sentence Intervention?

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Complex Sentence Intervention Tasks 


- Structural Priming
 - Client hears multiple examples of the target linguistic structure
 - Priming studies
- Sentence Deconstruction
 - Client identifies the main ideas in a complex sentence and writes out each idea as a separate sentence
- Sentence Combining
 - Client is given a set of two or more simple sentences and a target subordinate conjunction and combines the simple sentence into a complex sentence



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Priming Task Examples

Relative Clauses	Adverbial Clauses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the boy that the girl teased at school yesterday • This is the boy that you saw at the shop on Saturday • This is the man that saw the boy at football practice • This is the pen that ran out of ink at school today. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The boy always eats his breakfast after he has dressed. • The girl will go to school before she goes to volleyball practice. • The woman ate her lunch after she completed her work.



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Sentence Deconstruction Task Examples

- As she thought about her friends in West Virginia Dani became homesick
- Because there were reports of snakes on the trail Dani walked in a cautious manner
- The large snake on the trail was a faker since it was a bull snake.
- Dani was concerned about wild animals because she was new to Colorado
- Dani felt very happy since she had met new friends on the hike.



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Sentence Combining Task Examples

- Dani thought about her friends in West Virginia. Dani became homesick
- There were reports of snakes on the trail. Dani walked in a cautious manner
- The large snake on the trail was a faker. The large snake was a bull snake.
- Dani was concerned about wild animals. Dani was new to Colorado
- Dani met new friends on the hike. Dani felt very happy.



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Empirical Basis for Complex Sentence Intervention

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Is there Research Support for Complex Sentence Intervention Components?

- Can we improve the written sentence construction skills of less and more skilled young writers?
- Authors explored the use of sentence-combining instruction
 - Students were taught how to construct complex sentences by combining two or more simple sentences
 - Peer assisted Learning Strategies were also utilized
- Intervention Implementation -
 - Instructor explained and modeled how to use a specific sentence combining strategy
 - Student pair practiced the strategy with instructor guidance

Saddler & Graham (2005) The Effects of Peer-Assisted Sentence-Combining Instruction on the Writing Performance of More and Less Skilled Young Writers. Journal of Educational Psychology, 97, 1, 43-54

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Research Support – Saddler & Graham, 2005

- Participants 4th-grade students from 3 classrooms in Washington D.C.
- Test of Written Language Sentence Combining Subtest
 - More skilled writers at or above the mean
 - Less skilled writers fell one standard deviation or more below the mean
- Sentence combining and grammar instruction groups
- Instruction was the Writers' Workshop groups
 - Plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish written works
 - 30, 25-minute sessions across 10 weeks
- Intervention consisted of sentence combining tasks with both coordinate and subordinate conjunctions

Saddler & Graham (2005) The Effects of Peer-Assisted Sentence-Combining Instruction on the Writing Performance of More and Less Skilled Young Writers. Journal of Educational Psychology, 97, 1, 43-54

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Research Support – Saddler & Graham, 2005

- Intervention was provided at the sentence and paragraph levels
- Participants in the treatment group had significantly greater scores on the Sentence Combining subtest of the TOWL than participants in the control group
- Treatment group differences were greatest for less skilled readers than more skilled readers.

Saddler & Graham (2005) The Effects of Peer-Assisted Sentence-Combining Instruction on the Writing Performance of More and Less Skilled Young Writers. Journal of Educational Psychology, 97, 43-54

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Research Support – Walter et al., 2021

- Walter, Dockrell, and Conneley research struggling writers
 - 71 struggling writers, aged 7 through 10
- Norm-referenced oral language, reading, and writing measures
 - Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) – sentence combining task
- Curriculum-based measures of writing

Walter, Dockrell, & Connelly (2021). A sentence-combining intervention for struggling writers: response to intervention. *Reading and Writing*, 34, 1825-1850.



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Research Support – Walter et al., 2021

- Participants matched across three intervention groups based on reading and oral language profiles
- Sentence Combining Intervention –
 - Sentence-Level tasks
 - Practice combining two sentences
 - Practice combining three or more sentences
 - No text-level tasks
- Sentence combining group performed significantly better on sentence-combining tasks than the other two intervention groups
 - Showed listening comprehension and sentence-combining prediction gains

Walter, Dockrell, & Connelly (2021). A sentence-combining intervention for struggling writers: response to intervention. *Reading and Writing*, 34, 1825-1850.



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Research Support – Hirschman, 2000

- Did a study with children with SLI/DLD who have difficulty with the use of complex sentences
- Reduced number and length of subordinate clauses discriminate between children with SLI/DLD
- Participants attended state schools for children with learning disabilities and SLI/DLD and were in 3rd or 4th grade
 - Focused on metalinguistic awareness of complex sentence use
 - Written and oral pre-and post-test for experimental (2) and control (20) groups
 - Oral Samples:
 - Renfrew (1991) The Bus Story; Aesop's Fox and Crow Fable
 - Written Samples:
 - Six pictures depicting "The Winner"

Hirschman (2000). Language repair via metalinguistic means. *International Journal of Communication Disorders*, vol 35, no 2, 251-268



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Research Support – Hirschman, 2000

- Clause Types:
 - Adverbial, relative, nominal
- Subordination Ratio → Total number of subordinate clauses divided by the total number of clauses
- Participants received = 55, half-hour intervention sessions
 - Sessions occurred in the classroom
- Metalinguistic Intervention included grammatical category and relationship identification; subordinate conjunctions (i.e., joining words); sentence combining tasks with conjunctions used in sentence medial and initial positions
- Goal was for participants to write as many complex sentences as possible during fable retelling tasks.
 - Three to six hours were spent on each fable.

Hirschman (2000). Language repair via metalinguistic means. *International Journal of Communication Disorders*, vol. 35, no. 2, 251-268

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Research Support – Hirschman, 2000

- Treatment versus control group differences:
 - Participants in the treatment group used significantly more complex sentences in both oral and written samples than control group participants
 - Group differences were most apparent in the subordination ratio.
 - Participants with the lowest pre-treatment syntactic complexity scores made more progress than participants with higher scores

Hirschman (2000). Language repair via metalinguistic means. *International Journal of Communication Disorders*, vol. 35, no. 2, 251-268

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Research Support – Balthazar & Scott, 2018

- Balthazar & Scott (2018) examined the effects of complex sentence intervention on 30 children with DLD
- Participants received intervention once or twice weekly on adverbial, object, complement, and relative clause targets taught in a sequence
 - Treatment occurred for 9 weeks, 40-60 minutes, once or twice weekly
- Complex Sentence Intervention
 - Materials presented in both oral and written form via computer-based applications
 - Metalinguistic intervention tasks included sentence repetition, sentence identification, sentence deconstruction, sentence combining, and sentence generation
 - Complex sentence stimuli were drawn from a pool of sentences the authors created for this study.

Balthazar & Scott (2018). Targeting complex sentences in older school children with specific language impairment: Results from an early-phase treatment study. *JSLHR*, 61, 713-728

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Research Support – Balthazar & Scott, 2018

- Outcome Measures and Assessments Provided:
 - Complex sentence probes:
 - Written sentence combining task to sample adverbial, object complement, and relative clause sentences.
 - Participants wrote, typed, or dictated their responses
 - CELF5 Formulated Sentences, Recalling Sentences, Concepts, and Following Directions subtests
 - CASL Sentence Comprehension, Grey Oral Reading Tests, Story Construction from Test of Written Language
 - Mean length of T-units in words and subordination index

Balthazar & Scott (2018). Targeting complex sentences in older school children with specific language impairment: Results from an early-phase treatment study. JSLHR, 61, 713-728

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Research Support – Balthazar & Scott, 2018

- Results:
 - Significant intervention gains were evident for all target complex sentence structures
 - Greater performance on adverbial and relative clause sentences than object complements
 - No difference between once-weekly and twice-weekly intervention
 - Norm Referenced Outcome Measures:
 - 9.6-point Improvement in CELF4 Core score; CFD (1.6) RS (0.3), FS (3.1), WC (1.3)

Balthazar & Scott (2018). Targeting complex sentences in older school children with specific language impairment: Results from an early-phase treatment study. JSLHR, 61, 713-728

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Complex Sentence Implementation


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CSI Target Clauses & Goal Attack Strategy 


1 Adverbial Clauses	2 Nominal Clauses
3 Object Complement Clauses	4 Relative Clauses 


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Materials Development for Complex Sentence Intervention 

- Gather information on client interests, conduct interest survey
- Identify a written story related to student interests
 - Ensure the story is below the student's current reading level
 - Google search for target narrative or expository texts
- Select the target clause structure and conjunctions
- Review the story for the presence of the target clause and conjunctions
- Prepare 20 non-intervention sentences containing the target clause and conjunctions for Priming
- Prepare 10 sentences containing the target clause and conjunctions for use in the Sentence Deconstruction and Sentence Combining tasks 

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Materials and Sentences Example 

- Adverbial clauses = time
- Conjunctions = until & while
- Sentence Deconstruction Sentence Examples:
 - She grudgingly admitted she liked Colorado while she was hiking the mountain.
 - While she waited for the rattling noise to stop, she stood still on the trail.
 - Dani waited on the side of the trail while the girl and her dog passed her.
- Sentence Combining Sentence Examples:
 - Dani Grudgingly admitted she Liked Colorado. Dani was hiking the mountain.
 - Dani halted on the mountain path. The rattling noise stopped.
 - Dani waited on the side of the trail. The girl and her dog walked past. 

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Complex Sentence Intervention Instruction Sequence Example Format

- 1 Written Expression Probe
- 2 Priming Task
- 3 Sentence deconstruction task
- 4 Sentence combining task
- 5 Paragraph identification task
- 6 Edit written expression probe to include target clause structure and conjunctions
- 7 All tasks are conducted using word processing

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Case Studies

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Complex Sentence Interventions Case Study 1

Client #1
Female, 16 years old, Developmental Language Disorder
Graduate Student Clinician: Hoi Kiu Tong, B.S

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Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS) Results

Subtests	Standard Scores
Vocabulary Awareness (VA)	4
Story Retell (SR)	8
Listening Comprehension (LC)	5
Reading Comprehension (RC)	6
Following Directions (FD)	4
Written Expression – Sentence (WS)	8

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January 25th, 2023, Written Expression Probes Statistics

Samples: Measurement	Pre-Treatment	Post-Treatment
	Data	Data
Written Expression Average T-Units	9.5	17.8
Written Expression Clausal Density	1.3	2.125
Number of Independent Clauses	10	8
Number of Dependent Clauses	3	7
Total Words	95	143

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February 22nd, 2023, Written Expression Probes Statistics



Samples: Measurement	Pre-Treatment	Post-Treatment
	Data	Data
Written Expression Average T-Units	14.43	16.14
Written Expression Clausal Density	2.66	2.57
Number of Independent Clauses	6	7
Number of Dependent Clauses	11	11
Total Words	101	113

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Transcription from January 25th, 2023, Post-Treatment Written Expression Probe

Prompt: "The soccer player tried to kick the ball toward the goal but instead the ball sailed high overhead and..."

- Just slightly missed the goal
- The ball went straight into the audience
- And hit a boy smack in the face
- Everyone in the whole arena gasped
- All the players and the refs ran straight to the boy
- To see if he was okay
- The boy was sitting in the chair passed out
- One of the refs picked him up
- And brought him to the doctor that was on the field
- Who was there for if one of the soccer players got hurt
- When the ref finally got there
- He laid down the boy on the bed
- And started checking up on his face
- The boy's face looked so bad
- That it looked like there were a million bruises on his face all at once
- Once the doctor finished checking him up
- He told the ref that he had a slight concussion






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Transcription from February 22nd, 2023, Pre-Treatment Written Expression Probe

Prompt: "The astronomer was looking through the telescope at the moon when she noticed that..."

- There was a new looking planet that she seemed to have found
- It was red and had pink looking dots all over it
- She kept the telescope
- So that it could be focused on the new planet
- As days went by
- She had confirmed that this was a new planet
- She has went to the top astronomer
- To tell him that she had found a new planet
- The lead astronomer went to go look at it
- And thought (that) it looked a little funny
- They had later found out that
- The planet was actually a piece of Chozizo
- (That) was stuck to the telescope






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Transcription from February 22nd, 2023, Post-Treatment Written Expression Probe

Prompt: "The astronomer was looking through the telescope at the moon when she noticed that..."

- There was an orange tiny figure moving
- She zoomed in the telescope
- And saw it was a man with a bowl cut (that was) doing a little dance
- The astronomer called the lead astronomer
- To see what she should do about the little tiny orange man
- The lead astronomer
- Who had called for a rocket to fly over
- and go get the orange man
- Decided to cancel the flight
- She learned that the little orange man had stolen the moon
- And was punished to live up there for the rest of his life
- Everyone in the lab felt bad leaving him up there
- But they had to leave him up there after what he did

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Complex Sentence Interventions Case Study 2

Client #2
Male, 12 years, Developmental Language Disorder
Graduate Student Clinician: Elena Nicolai, B.S.

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Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS) Results

Subtests	Standard Scores
Vocabulary Awareness (VA)	0
Story Retell (SR)	7
Listening Comprehension (LC)	5
Following Directions (FD)	0
Written Expression – Sentence (WS)	8

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Written Expression Probes Statistics

Dates:	December 22 nd	January 22 nd	February 22 nd
Measurement	Data	Data	Data
Written Expression Average T-Units	7.2	4.8	6.05
Written Expression Clausal Density	1.0	1.1	1.5
Number of Independent Clauses	7	30	36
Number of Dependent Clauses	0	3	18
Total Words	51	144	218

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Transcription from December 22nd, 2022, Written Expression Probe – TILLS Summarizing Story

- Our school closed for a week
- It closed because there were two skunks in the cafeteria
- They were eating all the cookies
- The janitor called animal control
- They came as fast as they took them
- They put them in the woods
- It took a week to get the smell to leave






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Transcription from January 22nd, 2023, Written Expression Probe

Prompt: "Last week, a dog wandered into my school and..."

- I got lost
- It got lost
- It had to eat from the garbage
- I was so cold
- It slept by the heater
- He ate leftovers
- He did not like what he ate
- I gave him some of my food
- He ate my hamburger
- He ate my meat
- He loved me
- He would always come to me
- at lunch
- And he made friends
- And there was another dog
- We be so good with him
- We made friends with the dog
- His name was Mario
- He loved meatballs
- He loves his playing with balls
- He loves to play
- They all became friends
- And he went to the nurse
- He got a band-aid
- He got better
- He went back to recess
- And then they went to class
- They went to P.E.
- They had math then English
- Then they went to history
- Then he went home.






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Transcription from February 22nd, 2023, Written Expression Probe

Prompt: "Here's my plan for taking over the world with my dragon best friend..."

- A boy found an egg bigger than a table
- I took it home
- I put blankets around it
- I went to my bed because it was getting late
- I went to bed
- When I woke up it hatched
- It was a big dragon
- He called me dad
- I said I wasn't his dad
- I said that we were going to find his parents
- We went tomorrow because we went to get breakfast
- We went to find his family
- Then my dragon is eating up people
- He turned black and white
- He started to become mean
- He started shooting fireballs at the villagers
- And I got on it too
- He did a lot of stuff
- He bit me
- And I became a dragon
- He started to take over the world
- He started trying to find his parents
- He ate a person
- He ate a lot of different people
- He said I was sorry because he did something bad
- He did something no one knows
- He flies away
- He started to help people
- He had food
- He came back for me
- He said to me he wants to find his parents
- I said okay
- I helped him
- That I found his parents
- I said that he was okay
- His parents said that he can come over

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Complex Sentence Interventions Case Study

Client #3
Male, 12 years, Developmental Language Disorder
Graduate Student Clinicians: Taylor Torongo, B.S., & Aitor Orahá, B.S.

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Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS) Results

Testing Dates:	December 2021	May 2022
Subtests	Standard Scores	Standard Scores
Vocabulary Awareness (VA)	0	9
Story Retell (SR)	2	6
Learning Comprehension (LC)	5	7
Following Directions (FD)	12	10
Delay Story Retell	5	6

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Written Expression Probes Statistics



Dates:	February 22, 2022	May 22 nd , 2022
Measurement	Data	Data
Written Expression Average T-Units	7.0	9.3
Written Expression Clause Density	1.3	1.85
Number of Independent Clauses	10	13
Number of Dependent Clauses	3	11
Total Words	76	123

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Transcription from December 21st, 2021, Written Expression Probe

Prompt: "...When they woke up..."

- One of the farmers said it drifted off to the trenches of the deep ocean
- The little brother said I can speak to sharks,
- Mom said how I been practicing
- He yelled out into the ocean
- He did some crazy moves too
- The sharks went to the boat
- They have a tasting dinner too






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Transcription from April 22nd, 2022, Written Expression Probe

Prompt: "...When they woke up..."

- The boat drifted in the deep ocean
- They all said "but wait tommy is on the boat"
- So they're yelling to Tommy to get up
- It was too late
- The boat drifted into the distance
- When Tommy woke up he said "mom, dad, toby, guys."
- But he has the boat to himself of yay
- Soon he waws thirsty so he went looking for some water
- He went down to the boat
- And he found something to drink "Beer" he said
- He open it and drank and drank until he found a red gun
- Bang he fell to the ground
- Later he at home in his bed
- Man that is one crazy dream I had last night



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CSI Final Thoughts

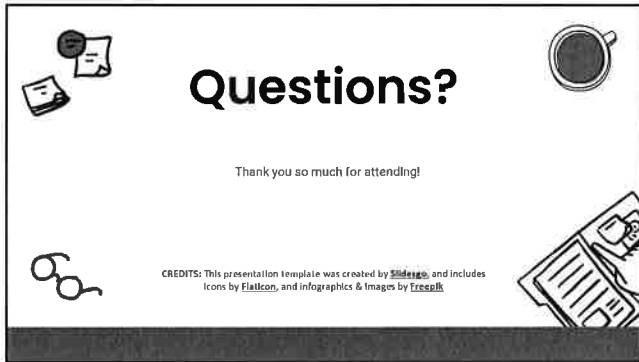
- Individual versus group interventions?
- Oral versus written language instruction?
- Do we improve *verbal* complex sentence use?
- Do we improve *written* complex sentence use?
- Is knowledge of language structure related to the use of those structures?

"Every time a speaker uses a grammatical pattern it reinforces its mental representation, which in turn facilitates the activation of this structure in language use."

H. Dösel (2004) *The Acquisition of Complex Sentences*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

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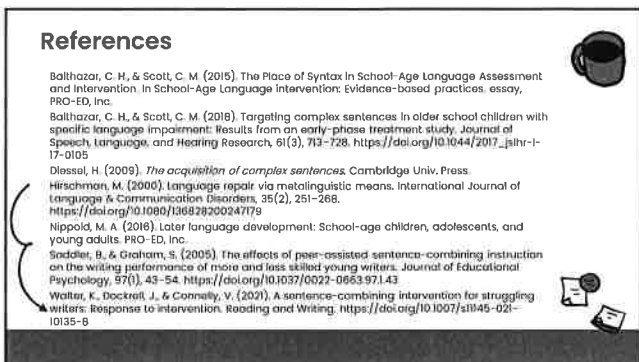


Questions?

Thank you so much for attending!

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