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JUDGMENT OF UTTERANCE APPROPRIATENESS  
IN LANGUAGE-NORMAL AND LANGUAGE-IMPAIRED CHILDREN

A Thesis

by

SUSAN LUANNE PAYNE

Submitted to the Graduate School

Appalachian State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

May 1982

Major Department: Speech Pathology

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IN LANGUAGE-NORMAL AND LANGUAGE-IMPAIRED CHILDREN

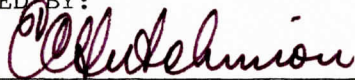
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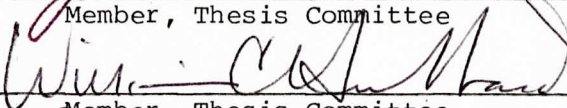
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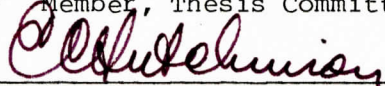
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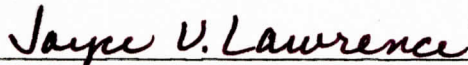
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ABSTRACT

JUDGMENT OF UTTERANCE APPROPRIATENESS

IN LANGUAGE-NORMAL AND LANGUAGE-IMPAIRED CHILDREN (May 1982)

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The purpose of this study was to determine the age at which language-normal and language-impaired children acquire the skill of judging utterance appropriateness.

The participants were thirty language-normal children and thirty language-impaired children, ages four, five and six years. They were administered the Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language and randomly selected to determine eligibility. The normal subjects were enrolled in kindergarten or elementary school and the impaired subjects were enrolled in a language-impaired program at the time of testing. The participants individually viewed a video recording consisting of seventy speech acts. Every speech act involved two or three persons performing a nonlinguistic activity. Each activity was followed by a verbal statement in the format of [You're + Predicate Adjective]. Half of the verbal statements were appropriate to the context in which they appeared and half were inappropriate. The subjects were required to judge whether the statements were appropriate.



The raw scores were analyzed by a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Several t-tests were employed to examine the difference between the performance of the subjects.

The analysis revealed that the overall performance of the language-normal children was better than that of the language-impaired children. The six-year-old language-normal children outperformed the other age groups. The language-normal children showed an increasing ability to judge the appropriateness of an utterance while the language-impaired children showed virtually no improvement in their ability to perform this task.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to extend sincere appreciation to those who contributed much time and expertise in the writing of this thesis. I am especially grateful to Dr. E. C. Hutchinson who not only gave his constant support and advice but also gave me friendship throughout my college years. My gratitude is expressed to the remaining members of my committee. Dr. R. Jane Lieberman deserves special recognition for guiding me to valuable resources, providing helpful criticisms and encouraging me to complete this project. I would like to thank Dr. William C. Hubbard who read this manuscript with careful attention and Dr. Deanna Bowman who offered invaluable statistical assistance.

Appreciation must be extended to the administration, teachers and children who participated, without whom this project would not have been possible.

Finally, my love and heartfelt thanks is expressed to my entire family who supported my efforts faithfully; my mother who has always believed in me and provided me with endless love; my brother, Jeff, who tolerated my moods and understood my emotions; my friends, Jim and Valerie Buice and Geneva Henson, who gave me a "shoulder to cry on;" Lynn Mason who shared this experience with me and whose friendship will never be forgotten; and to all my other friends and family for their continuous support.

In loving memory  
of my father,  
Thomas Wade Payne

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Communication involves the reception, interpretation and expression of language. This circular, social affair provides a means of relating to others and is essential to man. Ideas, attitudes, thoughts and feelings can be expressed through communication (Bryngelson, 1964). Reception and interpretation occur when a person comprehends what is said and is achieved through listening. This aspect of communication involves the extraction of the meaning from a message; interpreting and storing that information; and when necessary, retrieving it for purposes of expression. Storage of inappropriate information serves no useful purpose in the communication process. It is important to determine when a person is able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate information. That information could possibly aid in remediating an impaired language comprehension process.

The ability to judge the appropriateness of an utterance is a basic communication skill. Moravcsik (1969) has stated that "the ability required to produce and interpret successfully . . . is essentially the ability to know and interpret correctly other people's intentions and habits of mind" (p. 407). A child must be able to interpret what others are saying and must be able to judge whether an utterance is consistent with the situation at



hand. If a speaker's responses are totally inappropriate to the situation, the intended message may never be transmitted. The faulty information is of no use to the communicator.

Whitehurst and Zimmerman (1979) have stated that the ability to comprehend language precedes the ability to produce it. Therefore, children acquiring language should not be expected to produce utterances until they have acquired the ability of understanding or interpreting a message. Sklar (1969) has stated that since much emphasis has been placed upon the prevention of language problems, there is a definite need to study the "developmental patterns both normal and deviant of younger children and infants" (p. 6). With this information, intervention and prevention programs could be developed.

Many authors such as Hopper and Naremore (1973) have concentrated their research efforts on linguistic processes of phonology, syntax and semantics. Leonard and Reid (1979) are among the few who have studied pragmatics and children's ability to judge the appropriateness of an utterance in a specific social context. Leonard and Reid (1979) examined "normal" three-, four-, five- and six-year-olds' ability to judge utterance appropriateness in the context of the linguistic frame of You're + Predicate Adjective. These authors found that the three-year-olds performed only at the level of chance. Between the ages of four and five, children used context to verify the appropriateness of an utterance. Also, at the age of four, children tended to judge an utterance as appropriate if an adjective with a positive connotation was used (e.g., pretty). An utterance was often judged as inappropriate if an

adjective with a negative connotation was used (e.g., ugly). By the age of six, that basis diminished considerably and the children performed above the level of chance regardless of context and positive or negative adjectives. The overall ability of judging the appropriateness of utterances was found to develop during the age range of four to six years (Leonard and Reid, 1979). At the present time, little information is known about language-impaired children in regard to their ability to judge the appropriateness of an utterance. Since this is a basic communication skill, an understanding of its development in language-impaired children would aid in designing remediation programs for this population.

#### Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the age at which language-impaired and language-normal children acquire the skill of judging utterance appropriateness. According to Leonard and Reid (1979), the development of judging utterance appropriateness is not precisely uniform in language-normal children. They reported that children of various ages use cues such as adjectives to help them judge whether a sentence is appropriate for a situation. These supporting cues were used less frequently as the children approached the age of six. However, no information was obtained concerning children with language impairments.

#### Hypotheses to be Tested

Ho. 1 There is no significant difference between the performance of language-normal children and language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

1. 1 There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-normal children and four-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

1. 2 There is no significant difference between the performance of five-year-old language-normal children and five-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

1. 3 There is no significant difference between the performance of six-year-old language-normal children and six-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

Ho. 2 There is no significant difference between the performance of children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance as they increase in age.

2. 1 There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-normal children and five-year-old language-normal children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

2. 2 There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-normal children and six-year-old language-normal children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

2. 3 There is no significant difference between the performance of five-year-old language-normal children and six-year-old language-normal children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

2. 4 There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-impaired children and five-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

2. 5 There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-impaired children and six-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

2. 6 There is no significant difference between the performance of five-year-old language-impaired children and six-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

#### Assumptions and Limitations

1. The subjects were randomly selected and matched on chronological age. Therefore, it is not certain that all variables that might influence performance were equal (e.g., mental age, IQ, and socioeconomic status.)

2. Since the pool of subjects may not be uniform, generalizations from the small population age groupings should be made with care.

3. Actual simulations of the illocutionary acts could not be provided. As a result, a video recording and monitor were employed. This may be too abstract for some children. According to Cecilia Von Feilitzen (1976), only children approximately eight years of age can shift between personal views and others' views. Also, not

until age 12 does a child's thinking begin to resemble adult thinking in regard to their ability to think abstractly and solve problems.

#### Definition of Language Impairment

For the purpose of this study, a language impairment is the inability to understand and/or produce any of the various language components: phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The language-impaired children in this study did not evidence any cognitive, emotional, neurological or sensori-neural impairments, and did not experience any language differences due to bilingual or dialectal variations.



## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The processes required for communication are numerous and complex. A survey of related literature concerning the comprehension of language, language acquisition, language functions and the effects of television has been conducted and is reported to help clarify and support the purpose of this study.

#### The Communication Process

Communication has been defined by Denes and Pinson (1963) as any means by which man transmits his experiences, ideas, knowledge, and feelings to his fellow man. Included under this definition are speech, sign language, gesture, writing or any other code which permits messages to be converted or transformed from one set of signs to another (e.g., written signs to speech) (p. 1).

Borden (1971) explains the communication process by saying "a communicator has a message he would like to communicate to the communicatee" (p. 5). In order to complete this transaction, the communicator must select a message and put it into a code which can be transmitted. The coded message is known as a signal and communicators must decipher that code or signal.

Jecker, MacCoby, Breitrose and Rose (1964) report that communicators must constantly assess their conversation processes to ensure

the success of communication. They also stress that it is important for children to learn and use effective communication skills at early ages. Young children have a means of communication that does not employ the use of verbal language. Moerk (1977) makes the statement that nonverbal communication, whether it is gestures, mutual gazing, or facial expressions, does not cease when language has been acquired. It continues to fulfill important functions in communication throughout life.

Borden (1971) offers the following information about the complex communication process:

one phase of the human-communication process involves the collection of information by our sense organs; the transformation of this information into neurological impulses; and the transmission of this information to the brain for storage and processing (p. 46).

In addition to this phenomenon, the brain must be aware of how well the present situation is being conducted (Borden, 1971).

There are many models and definitions of the communication process. Figure 1 illustrates Shannon and Weaver's (1964) symbolic representation of the communication process. It begins with the "information source" encoding a message, and ends with the receiver accepting the signal and sending it to the brain to be decoded into something understood by the "destination" (p. 7). Borden (1971) suggests that the process of communication is a continuous one and cannot be divided into separate acts. However, no matter how complex or simplistic the process, there must be a designated cause for communication.

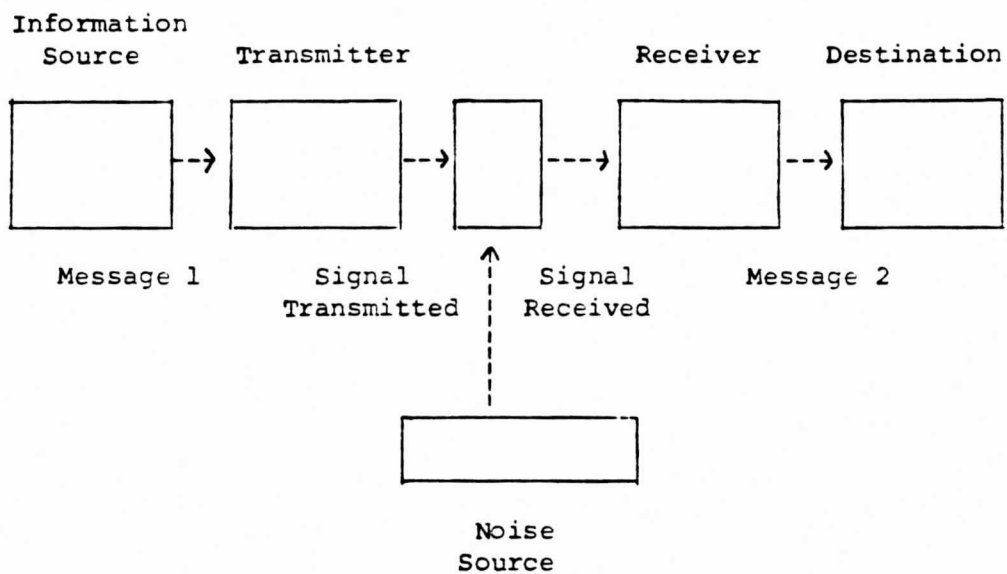


Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver's (1964) Representation of the Communication Process.



Menyuk (1977) has stated:

the description of the speaker-listener's knowledge of language can be immensely simplified by assuming that verbal behavior . . . can best be described in terms of a repertoire of learned responses to internal and external stimulus rather than in terms of presumed underlying knowledge (p. 1).

Menyuk (1977) has also suggested that the order of acquisition of a particular structure is comprehension, imitation and production. Whitehurst and Zimmerman (1979) and Sklar (1969) expressed the view that the ability to comprehend language precedes the ability to produce it. A relatively fine discrimination ability is an intricate part of communication (Moerk, 1977).

Larson, Backlund, Redmond and Barbour (1978) suggested that "communication between people does not take place until reception occurs" (p. 48). Listening is an active event which may take one of several forms: "active/passive, social/serious, critical/discriminating, total listening and inner listening" (p. 50). Active listening involves an intense process where the interest in the conversation is high, while passive listening requires little personal interest in what is said. Social listening is said to be for the purpose of enjoyment while listening seriously implies a desire to learn more about the information given. Critical listening involves the judgment of utterances and discrimination is used when remembering is the intention. The last two types of listening involve understanding the speaker and listening to oneself. Critical

listening is most directly related to this study as it involves concentration on the evaluation or judgment of a particular message.

Listening skills in children develop rapidly between 12 and 24 months. A child is capable of pointing to a specifically named object "because he understands what the adult is asking for" (Sklar, 1969, p. 7). Auditory memory skills are developed by 18 months and the child is able to follow simple instructions (Sklar, 1969).

#### Language Development

Language is a code of arbitrary symbols, auditory or graphic, that represents objects, events and ideas of the real world. The primary purpose of language is communication. This code is systematic and orderly because of standard rules learned through the environment.

Wood (1964) has stated that the "intricate process of language development is dependent upon the organism's abilities to receive, integrate and express linguistic symbols" (p. 7) both visually and auditorily. The more complex aspect of language is the integrative aspect. This involves areas of thought behavior such as "memory, recall, cognition, imagery, and association" (p. 7). In order to develop a language system, "the organism must be able to receive stimuli and classify them by coding, sorting and selecting, organizing and retaining this information" (p. 8). Reception and integration of incoming information, will occur before the expressive aspect of language can follow (Wood, 1964).

In 1979, Bishop reported on a study comparing 71 developmentally language-disordered children, ages six years three months to 13 years one month to 281 children, ages three years nine months to 13 years two months. The majority of the language-disordered children performed below age level on vocabulary and comprehension tests. It was recognized that within the language-disordered group "there was a strong correlation between language comprehension and complexity of expressive speech" (p. 236). This study demonstrated that the majority of language-disordered children, including those classified as expressively impaired, have defective language comprehension. These deficits may only be apparent on formal testings with age-appropriate tasks. Therefore, attempting to perform a differential diagnosis between "receptive" and "expressive" disorders is practically useless according to Bishop (1979). Eisenson (1968) also noted that impaired comprehension resulted in abnormal expressive speech in developmental disorders.

Generally, the area of language development in children has been divided into phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. By the age of four or five, most normally developing children have acquired basic principles of phonology, the study of the sounds of language, and syntax, which is the study of the structure of sentences. However, some complex rules of syntax are not mastered until age twelve. It has been noted on several occasions that linguistic incompetencies do not normally cause vast communication difficulties. The body of the message is the key factor for communication. The acquisition of the semantic aspect, the meaning of words, seems to develop throughout life.

Pragmatics is the fourth area of language development. Moerk (1977) reports that pragmatics refers to the function of communication and includes many features that are conventionally referred to as behavioristic. Pragmatics, the "use" of language, seems to be at the core of language development (Larson et al., 1978). Actual speaking situations teach children what style and manner of language is acceptable in particular environments and circumstances. Once the intent of the message has been established, the particular words and sentence structures needed to convey that intent are selected. According to Moerk (1977) the pragmatic aspect has become a highly fashionable area of study among researchers.

Bates (1976) has stated that pragmatics is best defined as "rules governing the use of language in context" (p. 420). She has also suggested that "all language is pragmatic to begin with. We choose our meanings to fit contexts and build our meaning onto those contexts in such a way that the two are inseparable . . ." (p. 420).

Functional communication "refers to the skills, knowledge and attitudes possessed by an individual" (p. 3) and involves competence and effectiveness of communication (Larson et al., 1978). Communication competence is the ability to "demonstrate knowledge of the communicative behavior which is socially appropriate in a given situation" (p. 21). It encompasses the meeting of "minimal communicative demands of the situation" (p. 21) and the exhibition of socially acceptable behaviors. To meet the functional demands of a verbal situation, one must initiate communicative acts or respond to others while maintaining an appropriate, consistent behavior during those acts. Competent responses indicate the comprehension



of a communicative situation. Since most adults are expected to display communicative competence, the focus of the competency concept is directed toward the young, developing child.

Another feature of functional communication is communicative effectiveness. Larson et al. (1978) report that effectiveness implies the "facilitating of certain outcomes" (p. 3). If a speaker's utterances are understood and accurate information has been perceived, effective communication has taken place. An effective communicator interprets exactly what is intended. Osgood and Miron (1963) also suggest that it is the receiver's job to understand the message and make an appropriate response. Effectiveness means the goal of communication has been achieved.

#### Comprehension

A developmental progression of the three major stages of early receptive development has been identified by McLean and McLean (1978). The general sequential development of these stages includes: Stage 1--"responding to phonemic and paralinguistic features" (p. 89); Stage 2--"responding to lexical-semantic features" (p. 90); Stage 3--"responding to syntactic-grammatical features" (p. 93). By approximately one month, the infant is able to discriminate between phonemes, both vowels and consonants. Morse (1972) has stated that a discrimination between steady and rising pitch of speech can be made by infants of approximately two months. Also included in Stage 1 is the ability to respond differently to paralinguistic features of a voice. Children begin to react differently to a familiar voice at approximately one and a half months and to

different intonational contours at about eight months. At nearly 10 months, children attend to the phonemic patterns of utterances as well as to those features previously mentioned. Therefore, this stage proceeds from birth to about 10 months.

During stage 2, a child begins to respond to familiar words accompanied by gestures, such as "NO! NO!". This usually occurs about eight to 12 months of age. At approximately 19 months, children respond to vocabulary without any paralinguistic cues and this is followed by the ability to follow simple directions. Throughout this stage, the young child demonstrates the ability to comprehend on the semantic level but not on the syntactic level.

Stage 3 usually begins about 30 months and continues until sometime beyond seven years. However, since the emphasis of this study is focused on the young child, the information presented relative to this stage will only proceed to three years. During stage 3, the child adds many more lexical items to the receptive vocabulary and begins to extract meaning from "grammatical features" (p. 94) by responding to function words such as the prepositions "in", "on" and "under." It is also during this period that the child begins to comprehend several morphemic rules as they mark distinctions in "tense, gender, and/or number" (p. 96). Finally, children achieve the ability to comprehend the meaning conveyed by syntax or the word order of a sentence and thus they progress beyond the semantic level of comprehension. Figure 2 summarizes the three stages of receptive linguistic development (McLean & McLean, 1978, p. 88).

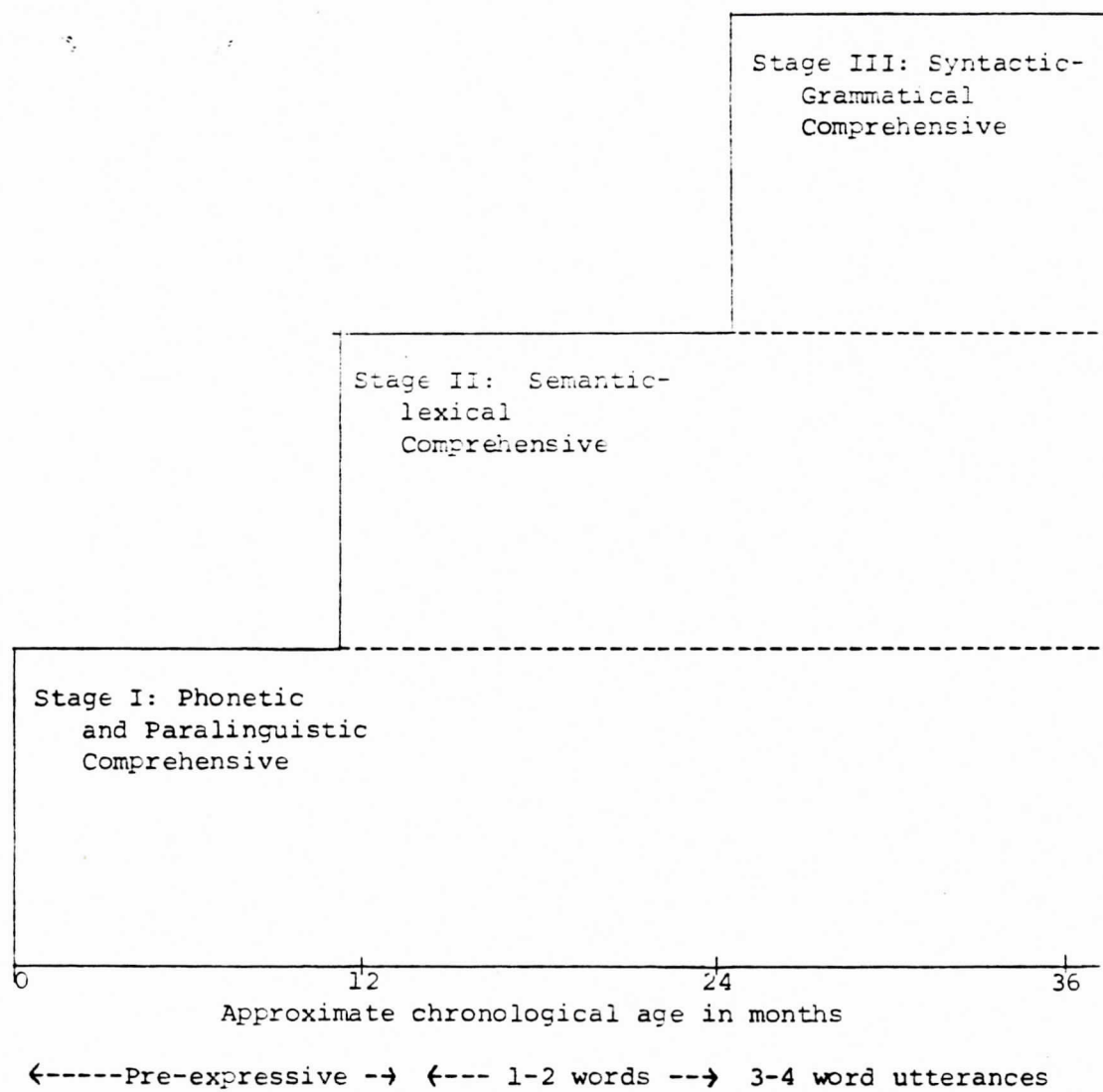


Figure 2. McLean and McLean's (1978) Three stages of Receptive Linguistic Development.

It has been reported that "children hear and comprehend much spoken language before they make their first attempts to talk" (Darley & Spriestersbach, 1978, p. 114). De Villers and De Villers (1979) suggest that children comprehend and respond appropriately to many words before they are capable of producing any. In addition, children imitate many phrases they do not know the meaning of, such as "once upon a time." When testing production of verbal items versus the comprehension of those same items, the supporting cues such as parents pointing to a toy, must be the same in order to compare them appropriately.

Carrow (1968) believes that comprehension of certain lexical items is possibly dependent on the following factors: the frequency with which the items occur in the environment; the concreteness of the referent of the items; and the complexity of the items, such as those with morphological markers.

Children's responses to telegraphic sentences of varying grammatical adequacy was examined by Shipley, Smith and Gleitman (1969). The subjects consisted of 36 children at three stages of telegraphic speech. The main objective was to test the claim that children possessed knowledge of language that was not readily indicated in their expressive speech. The subjects were presented 48 verbal statements and were required to act them out. The authors found that the more telegraphic speakers comprehend word strings representing linguistic structures not appearing in their own speech patterns. This supported the notion that comprehension precedes production skills. This same skill was not evident in the early telegraphic speakers. They simply ignored and even laughed at the



telegraphic commands but performed the well-formed complete commands.

Petretic and Tweney (1977) replicated the Shipley, Smith and Gleitman (1969) study using the same comprehension procedures with necessary modifications. Their results agreed with Shipley et al. (1969) for the late telegraphic speakers but the information on the early telegraphic speakers indicated that responses were similar to those of the linguistically advanced speakers.

Children's judgments of acceptability of nonreversible sentences were examined by Howe and Hillman (1973). In a nonreversible sentence, the subject and object may not be transposed without violating certain selection restrictions (e.g., "John saw the tree," and "the tree saw John.") The subjects, ranging in age from kindergarten through the fourth grade, were read a sentence and asked to describe it. Examples of the typical descriptors that the children used were "silly," "stupid," and "bad." One major conclusion drawn from this study was that the child's ability to judge acceptability of nonreversible sentences increased with age.

Menyuk (1977) cited a study by Gleitman, Gleitman and Shipley (1972) that required the subjects (3 girls, 2½ years of age) to judge whether a sentence was silly and if so, to correct it. The sentences consisted of short imperatives, some correct and some telegraphic, with reversed order. Each child judged well-formed sentences as "good" and the reversed-order sentences more often "silly." Menyuk (1977) stated that studies of children have shown that sentences are "decoded on the basis of contextual situation or imaginal references"

(p. 145) then by the semantic categories involved and later by the syntactical rules (Menyuk, 1977).

Traditionally, measuring auditory comprehension as part of a language assessment has been limited to "testing the understanding of vocabulary" (Carrow, 1973, p. 3). According to Carrow, it has been shown that children as well as adults with comprehension problems have difficulty in areas of language more complex than vocabulary. "In comprehending the meaning of language, two aspects of utterances are involved: the lexicon (vocabulary) and the structure (grammar and syntax)" (Carrow, 1973, p. 3).

The Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language measures the auditory comprehension of language structures. For this reason, it served as the basis for determining which children were eligible to participate in this study. Three pictures were presented at a time. One picture represented the referent for the linguistic form being tested; the alternate pictures represented the referents for the contrasting linguistic forms. Where there was only one contrasting form, the third picture was a decoy. For example, in testing the referent "tall," a picture of a fat boy, a tall boy and a short boy were presented.

According to Carrow (1973), the lexical items used in this test are learned early in normal language development. These items included nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions and morphological markers "er" and "ist" attached to free morphs. A complete list of items appears in Appendix A. The grammatical categories evaluated include number (two), gender (she), tense (She is going shopping), status (It's not black) and voice (The car bumps the

train). Also tested were the syntactic structures of predication, modification, and complementation.

As the pictures were presented, the examiner read prepared verbal stimuli which required the subject to point to the picture most closely related to the stimuli. The TACL assesses oral language comprehension without expressive language. Information concerning the subjects' performance on the TACL as compared to the video recording of "Judging Utterance Appropriateness" appears in Appendix B.

#### Speech Acts

The term "speech act" refers to the interpersonal functions of speech--the intentions, purposes or motives of a message, rather than its syntax or semantics. Speech acts focus on the social uses of communication, not on content (Schachter, 1979). Some authors such as Schachter (1979) and Searle (1969) use "statement," "utterance," "illocutionary act" and "speech act" interchangeably.

Searle (1969) reports that a speech act is a unit of interpersonal communication: a request, a report, a command, a refusal. Also, there are three kinds of acts (a) performing utterance acts, which is uttering words (morphemes and sentences), (b) performing propositional acts, which is referring and predicting, and (c) performing illocutionary acts, which includes stating, questioning and commanding.

The "theory of speech acts" as conceived by Whitehurst and Zimmerman (1979) represents a direct attempt to deal with the actual function of language. They have reported that "the origin

of a speech act is an intention or thought inside the speaker's head" (p. 169).

Bates (1976) supported the idea that all utterances can be analyzed into three categories of speech acts: locutions, illocutions and perlocutions. Locutionary acts refer to content and include all of the acts that are required for the making of speech-constructing propositions and uttering sounds. These are the procedures or acts that underlie the pragmatics or reference. They are the use of a sound to carry out the function of referring in a given context. Austin (1965) has stated "when we perform a locutionary act, we use speech" (p. 99). He also reported that the simple act of saying something is the performance of a locutionary act.

An illocutionary act involves the intent of an act and is defined by Bates (1976) as a conventional social act that takes place when speech is uttered or a command is issued. Searle (1971) reported "to perform illocutionary acts is to engage in a rule-governed form of behavior" (p. 40). An illocutionary act is that kind of speech act wherein the listener is intended to understand the speaker's position towards some propositional act. Searle (1969) suggested that propositional acts "can be common to different illocutionary acts and it is obvious that one can perform an utterance act without performing a propositional or illocutionary act at all" (p. 24). For example, one can utter words without communicating the meaning of the statement.



Illocutionary acts have been classified by Searle (1973) into five categories (a) representatives which are acts that represent a state of affairs (e.g., stating, claiming and predicting). A speaker conveys a belief that a proposition is true, (b) directives are designed to get the addressee to perform an activity (e.g., requesting or commanding), (c) commissives are acts that commit the speaker to do something in the future (e.g., promising and vowing), (d) expressive acts express the speaker's psychological state (e.g., thanking and welcoming), and (e) declarative acts bring about a new state of affairs (e.g., you're fired!).

Perlocutionary acts are the third category of speech acts. Bates (1976) reported that these acts refer to the effect of the utterance on a speaker.

The occurrence of these acts appeared in a study by Bates, Camaioni and Volterra (1975). Three infants who ranged in age from birth to 15 months were video recorded bi-weekly in their homes for eight months. The authors concluded that there were three stages in the development of "performatives" or communication evident prior to speech. In the prelocutionary stage, which occurs from birth to 10 months, the infant is not aware of the communication value of his signals. During the illocutionary stage which occurs from 10 to 12 or 15 months, the infant intentionally uses an object to obtain an adult's attention. Finally, the infants enter a locutionary stage at approximately 12 to 15 months when they use words to name objects being sought (Bates, 1976).

Pratt (1977) has reported that "to make an utterance is to perform an act" (p. 80). A person who performs a speech act does

two things: the person performs a locutionary act which is producing a recognizable grammatical utterance and the person performs an illocutionary act of certain types (e.g., promising or greeting).

The components of a speech act have been described by Searle (1969) as (a) an "illocutionary act" which denotes the interpersonal function or communication intent, (b) the "propositional act" that denotes meaning or semantics, and (c) "utterance act" which denotes the form or syntax.

Children must not only acquire the ability to analyze the listener's perspective and the actual nature of the communication task, but also the ability to analyze the message. The acquisition of this skill is reflected in "developmental changes of children's accuracy in the evaluation or appraisal of message quality," (p. 189) and an increased ability to give feedback and to profit from that feedback (Whitehurst & Zimmerman, 1979).

#### The Use of Television

According to Lyle and Hoffman (1976), the preschool years are crucial to a child's development. They also reported that since television is widely found in homes across America, it contributes to children's developmental experiences. They conducted a study to obtain more information on the television viewing habits of preschool children and confirmed the popularity of television as a communication medium for children. Ninety eight percent of the children involved in the study said they liked to watch television. Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) reported that the "first direct experience with television typically comes at age two" (p. 24).

They also stated that by the age of three, children are able to ask for their own preference of shows.

The "communications media are potential agencies of socialization because they . . . direct information towards the child and present him with examples of behavior" (Lyle & Hoffman, 1976, p. 20). Because television has "easily interpreted, naturalistic, verbal and visual images which command so much of the child's attention, it is likely to be the most influential of mass media" (p. 20).

When comparing the use of television with the use of the other media, Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) found that television was used more often. At the age of three, the average viewing time was found to be approximately 45 minutes a day. During the preschool years, the use of television exceeded the total of other media time. The study conducted by Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) in Rocky Mountain City revealed that eight out of 10 children were well-acquainted with television before they began to sound out the words of any print. Even at the end of 10 years, television was the only media used day after day.

Lyle and Hoffman (1976) reported that most of the mothers of the children in their study felt there was "school readiness" (p. 59) learning presented through the television media. The mothers felt their children "were stimulated by commercials to ask for food and toy items featured in television commercials" (p. 59).

Approximately 74 percent of the children's mothers said their children sang some type of commercial jingle learned from the television. Another 62 percent said it began around two years of age

and 31 percent said it occurred by three years of age (Lyle & Hoffman, 1976).

To test whether children had any concept of the people on television as "real," children were asked how people get to be on television. Only 22 percent showed signs of real comprehension about the nature of television. The major increase in comprehension was between three and four. However, even the older children did not "grasp the nature of television pictures" (Lyle & Hoffman, 1976, p. 53).

Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) reported that "the effectiveness of television as a tool for classroom teaching has been well demonstrated" (p. 90). If motivation can be kept up, "a child can learn as much from television as from a face-to-face lesson" (p. 90).

A recent study making use of judgment tasks and the television technique was conducted by Leonard and Reid (1979). The purpose of their study was to examine the "bases on which children judge the appropriateness of utterances" (p. 501) produced in various situations. Forty children, ages three, four, five and six years served as subjects. They all attended preschool or elementary school and performed above the 25th percentile on the Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language (Carrow, 1973). The subjects viewed a video recording that consisted of 56 illocutionary acts. Each activity was followed by an utterance which was of the syntactic construction "You're + Predicate Adjective" (such as You're nice). Half (28) of the utterances were appropriate for the



activity represented. The remaining 28 utterances were inappropriate for the activity in which they appeared.

The results indicated that the six-year-olds performed better than the five-, four- and three-year-olds. The four-, five- and six-year-olds performed better than the chance level. However, the three-year-olds performed only at the chance level, overall.

Leonard and Reid (1979) reported that the four-year-olds correctly judged an appropriate utterance if the context verified the utterance. The six-year-olds performed above the level of chance regardless of the contextual clues. The use of a positive or negative adjective influenced the four- and five-year-olds' performance of judging utterance appropriateness. An utterance was more often judged appropriate if a positive adjective was used. They concluded that there were several bases children relied on when making judgments of appropriateness including the specific illocutionary act, the context, as well as the presence of a positive or negative adjective. The use of such bases was primarily limited to children below the age of six years. From these data, it appeared that the development of the ability to judge appropriateness of utterances was not uniform as "children acquired the ability to judge certain types of utterances before others" (p. 509) such as the illocutionary act thank before assert.

The television technique has also been used in a study by Leonard, Wilcox, Fulmer and Davis (1978). They reported that children must acquire many skills before being able to understand language spoken around them. One skill involved is the ability

to distinguish between what is said literally and what is intended or implied. Two experiments were conducted involving 60 subjects, ages four, five and six, to determine their understanding of indirect requests. Indirect requests "serve the pragmatic function of making a request" (p. 528).

The stimulus material consisted of 40 video recorded interactions per experiment. In each interaction, one adult (speaker) made an indirect request of another (listener), while the listener was engaged in some activity such as reading a book. The syntactical construction Modal + You + Verb + Article + Noun was used in both experiments. The stimuli consisted of indirect requests of the interrogative form can/will and indirect requests of the interrogative form with a negative element can't/won't. For example, "Can you move the ashtray?", and "Won't you leave the room?" The child was required to judge all items as to their appropriateness (Leonard et al., 1978).

Several conclusions were drawn from the information received. Children older than four years of age did not respond simply on the basis of whether the listener performed the action. Instead, they based their judgments on "their knowledge of the conveyed meanings of indirect requests" (p. 537). Only when children had reached the age of six did they know that certain (negative-constructions) indirect requests required "a modification of the behavior specified in the predicate" (p. 537).

An investigation of the educable mentally handicapped (EMH) child's ability to comprehend indirect requests was conducted by

Grigg (1980). She replicated the study by Leonard et al. (1978) but included 46 EMH children from kindergarten and elementary school with Mental Ages (MA) of four, five and six. The procedures and experimental stimuli were similar to those used by Leonard et al. (1978).

The results suggested a significant difference in comprehension of indirect requests between children with MA of four, five and six. The four-year-olds showed a depressed performance as compared to the five- and six-year-olds. When required to judge the appropriateness of a listener's response to indirect requests, many did not respond on the basis of whether or not the listener performed an action, but they appeared to base their judgments on their knowledge of the conveyed meanings of the indirect requests. However, the EMH children did not seem to have any more problems than normal children functioning at the same mental age level. So, retardation does not appear to have any significant effect on EMH children's comprehension (Grigg, 1980).

Cairns and Hsu (1978) employed the television technique in their investigation of the comprehension of "wh-questions." The subjects were 50 children between the ages of three years and five years, six months. They were required to view five brief videotaped segments and then answer six types of "wh-questions:" "who-subject," "who-object progressive," "who-object + do," "why," "when," and "how." The results showed that the ability to comprehend and correctly answer various types of questions increased with age. The "who" questions were relatively easy to answer for even the

younger children. The "why" questions were slightly more difficult followed by the "when" questions. Finally, the "how" questions were demonstrated to be the most difficult of all the question types examined (Cairns & Hsu, 1978).

From this review of related literature, it is obvious that there are many aspects of comprehension abilities yet to be examined. Several authors (Cairns & Hsu, 1978; Leonard & Reid, 1979; and Leonard et al., 1979) have explored the developments of the "normal" population while few studies, such as Grigg (1980), have focused their experiments on the "handicapped" population although recently, there has been an emphasis in that area. One technique employed to evaluate specific abilities was the use of video recordings and television instead of actual simulations of communication activities. By carefully investigating those studies that have utilized the television technique, it is apparent that the ability of judging utterance appropriateness can be examined through this mode.



## Chapter 3

### PROCEDURES

#### Participants

There were three age groups, each consisting of 10 language-normal children and 10 language-impaired children ages four, five and six years (plus or minus six months). Criteria for subject selection were (a) enrollment in a language-impaired program, if identified as language-impaired, and kindergarten or elementary school if identified as language-normal, (b) a score above the 25th percentile on the Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language (Carrow, 1973) for the language-normal group and a score at or below the 25th percentile for the language-impaired group, (c) absence of any mental handicap, hearing, visual, or neurological impairments or any other disorder that could interfere with performance in this study. Parental permission was obtained for each subject by means of a letter sent to the parents.

#### Methodology

All subjects were administered the Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language (Carrow, 1973) to determine eligibility. Children selected for the normal group scored above the 25th percentile and those children selected for the language-impaired group scored at or below the 25th percentile. From these eligible children, 10 were randomly selected to form each age group. Tables

1, 3 and 5 present a descriptive summary of the characteristics for the language-normal groups. Tables 2, 4 and 6 provide the characteristics of the language-impaired groups. Figure 3 is a summary of the TACL performance of the three age groups. These children then individually viewed a video recording entitled "Judging Utterance Appropriateness" prepared by the investigator.

The video recording consisted of 70 speech acts, each varying from five to 15 seconds in duration. Every speech act involved two or three persons performing a nonlinguistic activity according to prepared scripts. Some examples of nonlinguistic activities used in this study were: a girl combing her hair in front of a mirror, two people lifting weights, two people in a drawing contest, and three people playing a game. Each activity was followed by a verbal statement in the format "You're + Predicate Adjective." Half (35) of the verbal statements were appropriate to the context in which they appeared. For example, in the video recording of two people lifting weights, one person cannot lift the weights and says to the second person, "you're strong." The remaining 35 verbal statements were inappropriate to the context in which they appeared. For example, in the sequence of two people reading books, the first person laughs and the second person says, "you're sad." Neither a verbal nor a nonverbal reaction to the statements appeared on the recording. A complete list of the nonlinguistic activities and the statements appears in Appendix C.

The activities employed in the present study were constructed to represent seven illocutionary acts described by Searle (1969):



TABLE 1  
 Characteristics of the  
 Four-Year-Old Language-Normal (LN)  
 Participants

Subject Number	Age in Months	Sex	<u>TACL</u> Scores	<u>TACL</u> %ils
48	54	Male	79	92
49	50	Male	65	44
50	52	Female	85	97
51	54	Male	65	44
52	54	Male	72	64
53	52	Male	65	44
54	54	Male	82	94
55	53	Female	84	96
56	54	Male	72	64
57	54	Female	73	65
<hr/>				
Range	50-54		65-85	44-97
Mean	53.1		74.2	70.4
Median	54		72.50	64.50

TACL = Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language

TABLE 2  
 Characteristics of the  
 Four-Year-Old Language-Impaired (LI)  
 Participants

Subject Number	Age in Months	Sex	<u>TACL</u> Scores	<u>TACL</u> File
1	54	Male	59	18
2	54	Female	52	5
3	48	Male	50	7
6	53	Male	52	7
7	53	Female	56	10
8	48	Female	54	7
9	46	Female	48	5
10	54	Male	53	6
13	44	Male	48	5
58	47	Female	48	5
Range	44-54		48-59	5-18
Mean	50.1		52	7.5
Median	50.50		52	6.50

TACL = Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language

TABLE 3  
 Characteristics of the  
 Five-Year-Old Language-Normal (LN)  
 Participants

Subject Number	Age in Months	Sex	<u>TACL</u> Scores	<u>TACL</u> File
4	64	Male	71	42
5	63	Female	72	43
11	62	Male	83	87
12	56	Male	66	42
14	66	Male	89	86
15	66	Male	94	98
20	64	Female	73	99
23	66	Female	78	44
24	65	Male	72	43
44	63	Female	68	38
Range	56-66		66-94	38-99
Mean	63.5		76.6	62.2
Median	64		72.50	43.50

TACL = Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language

TABLE 4  
 Characteristics of the  
 Five-Year-Old Language-Impaired (LI)  
 Participants

Subject Number	Age in Months	Sex	<u>TACL</u> Scores	<u>TACL</u> %ile
19	66	Male	72	22
39	66	Female	68	14
41	64	Male	61	17
42	65	Female	59	13
45	60	Male	60	14
46	58	Male	56	9
47	58	Female	52	5
59	64	Female	59	13
60	66	Male	68	14
61	63	Male	61	17
Range	58-66		52-72	5-22
Mean	63		61.6	13.8
Median	64		60.50	14

TACL = Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language

TABLE 5  
 Characteristics of the  
 Six-Year-Old Language-Normal (LN)  
 Participants

Subject Number	Age in Months	Sex	<u>TACL</u> Scores	<u>TACL</u> File
16	75	Male	91	78
17	73	Female	95	97
18	70	Female	96	99
21	68	Male	76	38
22	68	Male	96	99
25	76	Female	94	94
26	68	Female	91	90
27	78	Male	96	90
28	78	Male	97	95
29	72	Female	95	97
Range	68-78		76-97	38-99
Mean	72.6		92.7	87.7
Median	72.50		95	94.50

TACL = Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language

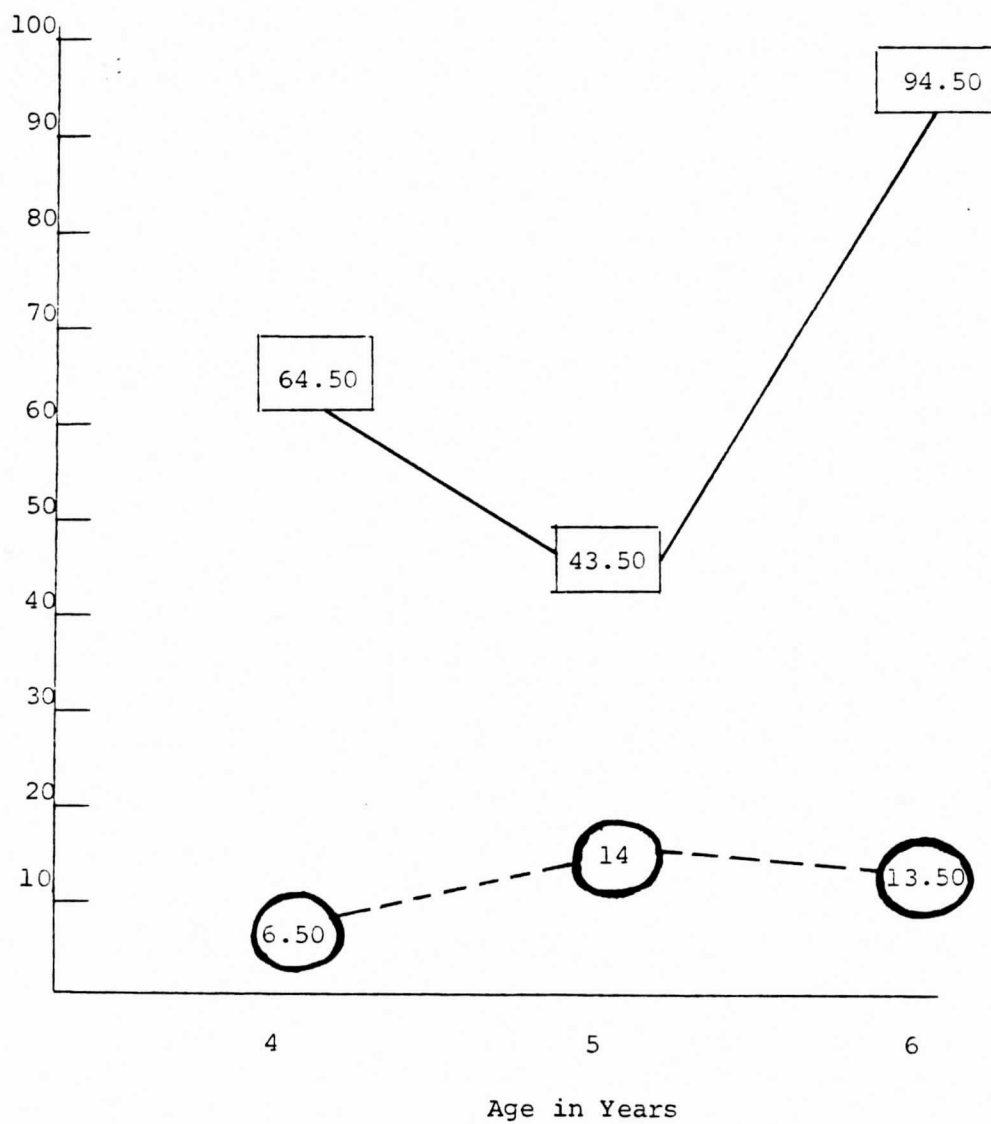


TABLE 6  
 Characteristics of the  
 Six-Year-Old Language-Impaired (LI)  
 Participants

Subject Number	Age in Months	Sex	<u>TACL</u> Scores	<u>TACL</u> %ile
31	68	Female	71	19
32	69	Male	69	16
33	68	Male	67	13
34	68	Male	52	4
35	72	Male	55	4
36	73	Male	64	5
37	74	Female	71	14
38	74	Male	73	16
40	73	Female	66	6
43	71	Male	70	17
Range	68-74		52-73	4-19
Mean	71		65.8	11.4
Median	71.50		68	13.50

TACL = Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language

Percentile



Language - Impaired



Language - Normal

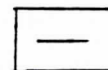


Figure 3. Median scores for subjects on the Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language (Carrow, 1973).

assert, question, thank, request, warn, congratulate and argue. These particular illocutionary acts were chosen because they could be expressed using the same syntactical construction and produced visually through video recording. The conditions that were necessary for each act, such as information about the speaker and listener, appear in Appendix D. The specific sequences and utterances utilized were similar to those used by Leonard and Reid (1979).

#### Procedures

The procedures used in this study were similar to those used by Leonard and Reid (1979). The participants were seated to the left of the investigator and individually viewed the video recording on a television monitor. The entire vocabulary used in the predicate adjectives was discussed before testing to ensure that the subjects' performance was not influenced by unfamiliarity with the vocabulary. The following instructions were given:

Today we are going to see some people on this television. They're going to be doing some things. Then one person will say something. I want you to listen carefully and tell me if it made sense to say that.

The subject viewed two practice sequences to ensure that the directions were understood. These were discussed if necessary. The practice sequences were of the same syntactical structure but the vocabulary differed from that used in the test items. Then, the actual 70 experimental test items were presented. The recording was stopped after every item for no longer than 30 seconds to provide time for the subject to respond. The investigator was

allowed to repeat the verbal stimulus once if the child was not attentive or did not understand the verbal statement. A two minute intermission occurred after the 35th item that allowed the subject to rest. The investigator recorded the total number of correct responses, yielding one point, and incorrect responses, receiving no points. The subjects were assigned numbers so that none could be identified and an example of the response form on which that number and the responses were recorded appears in Appendix E.

#### Reliability and Validity

To increase the validity of the present study, procedures, activities and utterances similar to those of Leonard and Reid's (1979) were selected. Few changes were made from the previous study. A language-impaired group, ages four, five and six years, was added to determine if the acquisition of the skill under test is consistent among normal and impaired children. Also, the three-year-old population was excluded from the present study because their performance in Leonard and Reid's (1979) study did not yield any significant information. The skill of judging utterance appropriateness does not seem to develop in normal children until the age of four. Therefore, little valuable information was obtained through testing the three-year-olds. It is not believed that these changes will significantly affect the outcomes of this study.

The content validity of the present study was established by the use of a pilot study. The initial video recording was submitted to a group of 10 adults for independent evaluation as to

whether the speaker's utterances were appropriate for the activity they represented. If the majority of the adult group did not agree with the investigator, the activity or utterance was modified.

The investigator was careful to be consistent in the administration of the test. Exact directions and explanations of the video recording were read to each subject to increase the reliability. In addition, 14 of the sequences appearing on the video recording were randomly selected and presented a second time.



Chapter 4  
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS  
OF THE DATA

Results

The participants viewed video recorded sequences and then judged whether the verbal statements that accompanied them were appropriate or inappropriate. A point was awarded for every correct response and no points were awarded for incorrect responses. The maximum possible score was 70.

The language-normal subjects' performance on this task is illustrated in Table 7. The scores ranged from 36 to 64, with a mean level of performance for the language-normal group of 52.5. The mean scores for the normal four-, five- and six-year-olds were 44.1, 55.6 and 57.9, respectively.

The language-impaired subjects' performance is presented in Table 8. The scores for this group ranged from 27 to 46, with an overall mean score of 37.2. The mean scores for the impaired four-, five- and six-year-olds were 36.3, 37.5 and 37.8, respectively. Figure 4 graphically displays the participants' scores.

Information on how the various age groups performed on each illocutionary act involved in this task is located in Table 9. All of the age groups scored higher on the appropriate items than on the inappropriate items. A summary of the correct responses for all of the subjects appears in Table 10.

TABLE 7  
 Language-Normal Subjects' Performance on  
 "Judging Utterance Appropriateness"  
 Raw Scores

4-year-old LN		5-year-old LN		6-year-old LN	
No.	Score	No.	Score	No.	Score
48	44	4	41	16	64
49	48	5	51	17	64
50	41	11	56	18	54
51	41	12	55	21	43
52	36	14	50	22	64
53	55	15	61	25	61
54	36	20	63	26	53
55	52	23	60	27	63
56	45	24	58	28	51
57	43	44	61	29	62
Range		36-55		41-63	
Mean		44.1		57.9	
Median		44.50		61.50	

LN = Language Normal

TABLE 8  
 Language-Impaired Subjects' Performance on  
 "Judging Utterance Appropriateness"

## Raw Scores

4-year-old LI		5-year-old LI		6-year-old LI	
No.	Score	No.	Score	No.	Score
1	38	19	46	31	40
2	42	39	34	32	35
3	34	41	35	33	42
6	38	42	44	34	36
7	27	45	36	35	36
8	36	46	36	36	36
9	36	47	36	37	46
10	39	59	36	38	33
13	37	60	36	40	38
58	36	61	36	43	36
Range	27-42		34-46		33-46
Mean	36.3		37.5		37.8
Median	36.50		36.00		36.00

LI = Language-Impaired

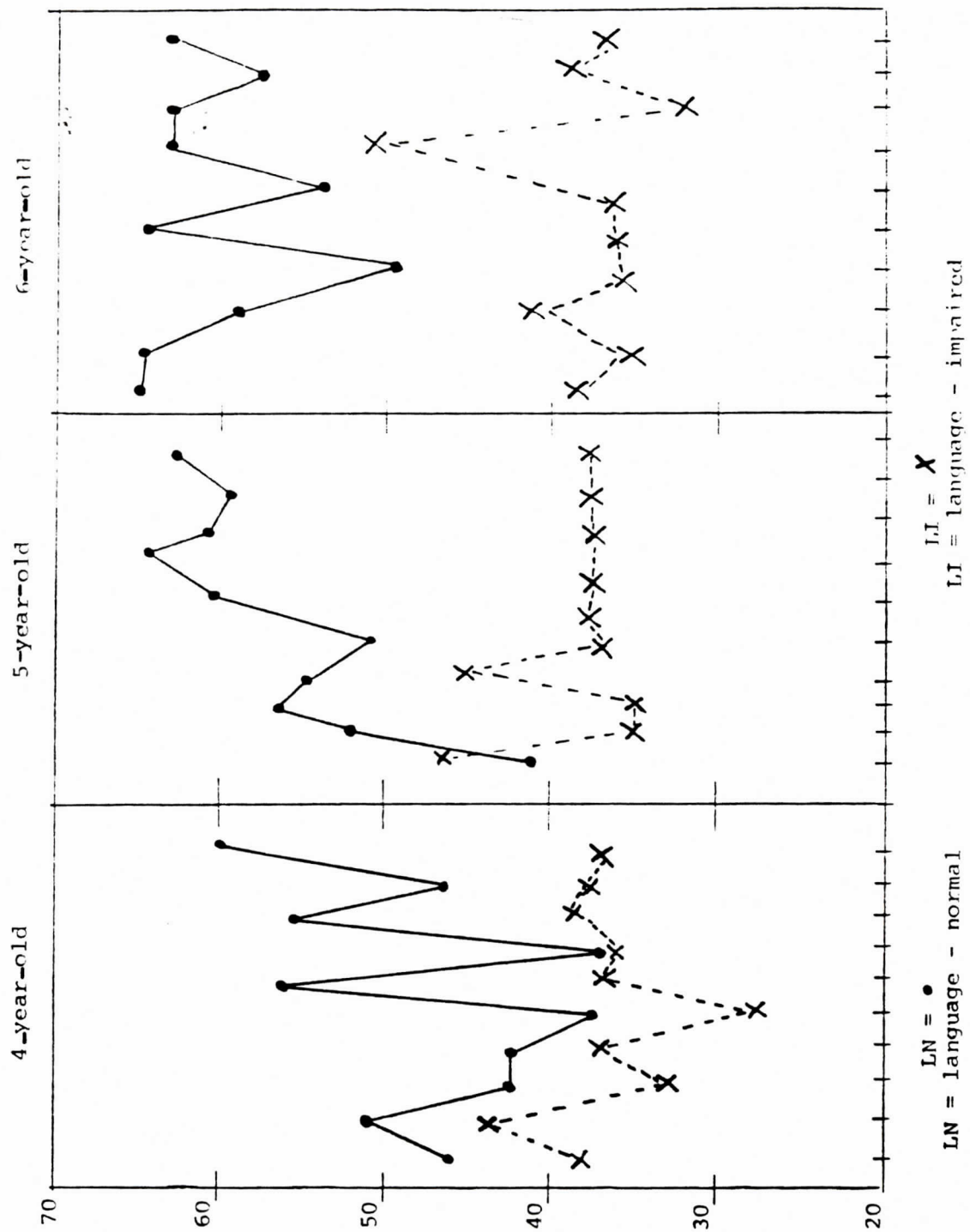


Figure 4. Subjects' performance on "Judging Utterance Appropriateness."

TABLE 9  
Performance of All Subjects on  
the Illocutionary Acts

Illocutionary Acts	Q#	Age in Years					
		4		5		6	
Thank		LN	LI	LN	LI	LN	LI
	1	10	8	10	10	10	9
	34	9	8	9	9	8	10
Appropriate	39	9	7	10	8	10	8
	52	9	7	7	7	10	8
	18	3	2	7	1	6	1
	25	2	2	7	0	8	1
Inappropriate	29	7	6	9	2	10	3
	37	3	5	8	2	9	3
Question	6	8	8	10	9	10	7
	27	9	6	0	0	10	8
Appropriate	33	8	8	10	8	10	9
	48	9	8	7	8	9	7
	10	6	1	8	2	9	4
	30	5	5	5	1	5	1
Inappropriate	46	3	2	7	3	9	3
	52	3	5	7	3	9	4
Congratulate	5	9	8	10	10	10	10
	14	9	8	10	10	9	7
Appropriate	23	9	8	9	8	9	9
	44	8	8	10	10	10	9
	13	2	2	3	1	2	1
	16	3	3	5	1	8	1
Inappropriate	45	3	2	9	2	7	2
	56	5	5	9	1	10	3

LN = Language Normal

LI = Language Impaired



Illocutionary Act		Age in Years					
		4		5		6	
	Q#	LN	LI	LN	LI	LN	LI
Assert	3	10	8	10	10	10	9
	22	7	6	7	7	10	9
	32	8	6	9	9	9	10
	51	8	6	7	8	10	8
Appropriate	4	6	2	6	1	8	6
	24	4	2	7	1	8	3
	43	4	5	5	1	7	3
	54	4	4	10	3	10	3
Warn	2	9	7	10	10	10	6
	11	9	8	9	8	4	9
	28	8	6	10	8	9	9
	47	8	6	8	8	10	9
Appropriate	7	2	3	6	2	8	1
	15	1	2	3	2	7	1
	26	4	2	7	1	9	2
	35	3	4	6	1	7	2
Inappropriate	9	9	7	9	8	7	7
	12	10	8	8	9	9	9
	21	9	8	8	9	6	8
	38	9	8	9	8	8	9
Indirect Request	19	3	2	9	2	7	4
	31	6	2	7	1	9	2
	42	4	2	5	0	7	1
	50	6	3	10	1	8	4
Appropriate	9	6	6	9	9	5	4
	17	8	8	8	10	9	8
	20	8	7	8	6	7	5
	40	6	6	7	9	9	9
Argue	36	3	4	8	3	4	3
	41	1	2	8	2	7	2
	49	5	3	9	3	7	3
	55	5	4	10	3	7	1
Inappropriate							
Total		344	289	448	288	462	297

TABLE 10  
 Summary of Correct Responses  
 on All of the Utterances

Illocutionary Act	Age in Years		
	4	5	6
Thank	52	67	71
Question	51	63	71
Congratulate	48	65	65
Assert	51	61	72
Warn	44	59	64
Indirect Request	56	66	62
Argue	42	67	55

### Analysis of the Data

The data were analyzed by a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and where appropriate, a series of  $t$ -tests.

#### Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the performance of language-normal children and language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

As a result of the ANOVA ( $F = 74.373$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.00001$ ) this hypothesis has been rejected.

#### Null Subhypothesis 1.1

There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-normal children and four-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

According to the results ( $t = 3.667$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p < .05$ ), null subhypothesis 1.1 has been rejected.

#### Null Subhypothesis 1.2

There is no significant difference between the performance of five-year-old language-normal children and five-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

According to the results ( $t = 7.3$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p < .05$ ), this null subhypothesis was rejected.

### Null Subhypothesis 1.3

There is no significant difference between the performance of six-year-old language-normal children and six-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

The results ( $t = 8.17$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p < .05$ ) indicated that this null subhypothesis was rejected.

### Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the performance of children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance as they increase in age.

According to the ANOVA ( $F = 3.407$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p = 0.0400$ ), this null hypothesis was rejected.

### Null Subhypothesis 2.1

There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-normal children and five-year-old language-normal children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

According to the results ( $t = 3.02$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p < .05$ ), null subhypothesis 2.1 has been rejected.

### Null Subhypothesis 2.2

There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-normal children

and six-year-old language-normal children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

The results ( $t = 3.718$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p < .05$ ) showed that this null subhypothesis was rejected.

#### Null Subhypothesis 2.3

There is no significant difference between the performance of five-year-old language-normal children and six-year-old language-normal children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

According to the results ( $t = 0.76$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p > .05$ ), null subhypothesis 2.3 has not been rejected.

#### Null Subhypothesis 2.4

There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-impaired children and five-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

This null subhypothesis has not been rejected according to the results ( $t = .078$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p > .05$ ).

#### Null Subhypothesis 2.5

There is no significant difference between the performance of four-year-old language-impaired children and six-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.



According to the results ( $t = 1.009$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p > .05$ ), null subhypothesis 2.5 has not been rejected.

#### Null Subhypothesis 2.6

There is no significant difference between the performance of five-year-old language-impaired children and six-year-old language-impaired children on the task of judging the appropriateness of an utterance.

According to the results ( $t = 0.017$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p > .05$ ), this null subhypothesis has not been rejected.

Using the Kuder-Richardson Formula, a reliability coefficient of .7893 was found in the present study. This indicates that these findings are reasonably consistent.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the age at which language-normal and language-impaired children acquire the skill of judging the appropriateness of an utterance. The participants were 30 language-normal children and 30 language-impaired children ages four, five and six years. They watched a video recording and judged accompanying verbal statements as appropriate or inappropriate for the situations in which they occurred. The data were analyzed by a one-way analysis of variance and t-tests.

The analysis revealed that the language-normal children performed better than the language-impaired children. It appears that the six-year-old language-normal children performed slightly better than the five-year-old language-normal children and significantly better than any of the other groups. The Duncan's Multiple Range Test (Glass & Stanley, 1970) showed that the population was divided into three subgroups. The first subgroup included all of the language-impaired children. There was found to be no significant difference in their performance. The second subgroup included the four-year-old language-normal children only. The third subgroup included the five- and six-year-old language-normal children. No significant difference in the performance of these

latter two groups was observed. The language-normal children showed an increasing ability to judge the appropriateness of an utterance while the language-impaired children showed virtually no improvement in their ability to perform this task.

#### Discussion

The subjects showed a steady progression in performance on all of the illocutionary acts with the exception of indirect request and argue. For example, the five-year-olds performed better than the four-year-olds and the six-year-olds performed even better on the illocutionary act thank. This implies that this act is well established by the age of six. The six-year-olds outperformed the four- and five-year-old children on question, assert and warn. These results were in agreement with the conclusions of Leonard and Reid (1979). The six-year-olds performed better than the four-year-olds and the same as the five-year-olds on congratulate. This information suggests that the acquisition of this illocutionary act plateaus at approximately five or six years. Since data were not collected on older children, no further conclusions can be stated. The six-year-old children performed better than the four-year-olds but not as well as the five-year-olds on indirect request and argue. However, differences between the scores of the five- and six-year-old children probably were not significant. It is possible that the sequences used for each of these illocutionary acts, indirect request and argue, may have been particularly difficult. Some of the activities portrayed may be completely unfamiliar to the children such as the activities used for congratulate: winning

a drawing contest or telling someone congratulations for graduating from high school.

The rank order of the illocutionary acts for all of the subjects is presented in Figure 5. Although there appears to be only minimal differences in the frequency of occurrence of all the acts, the most frequently understood illocutionary act for the four-year-olds was indirect request. The performance of the five- and six-year-olds, however, was different. The next most frequently understood act by the four-year-olds was thank. The six-year-olds performed similar but the five-year-old children achieved slightly higher scores on this act. Question and assert were ranked third for the four-year-olds but not for the five-year-old children. The six-year-olds' performance in understanding these acts exceeded that of the other age groups. Assert appeared the most frequently and question second most frequently for the six-year-olds. The performance of the four-year-olds showed that congratulate occurred next in the rank order while the five- and six-year-olds understood this act at an earlier time. It was ranked third for these age groups. Another finding was that warn appeared fifth in the rank order of the four-year-old children. However, the five-year-olds evidenced this act at a lower rank position whereas the six-year-olds understood warn most frequently. Finally, argue received the lowest possible rank in the four- and six-year-old group but the highest possible rank in the five-year-old group.

Another interesting finding was the correlation between the subjects' scores on the TACL and "Judging Utterance Appropriateness."

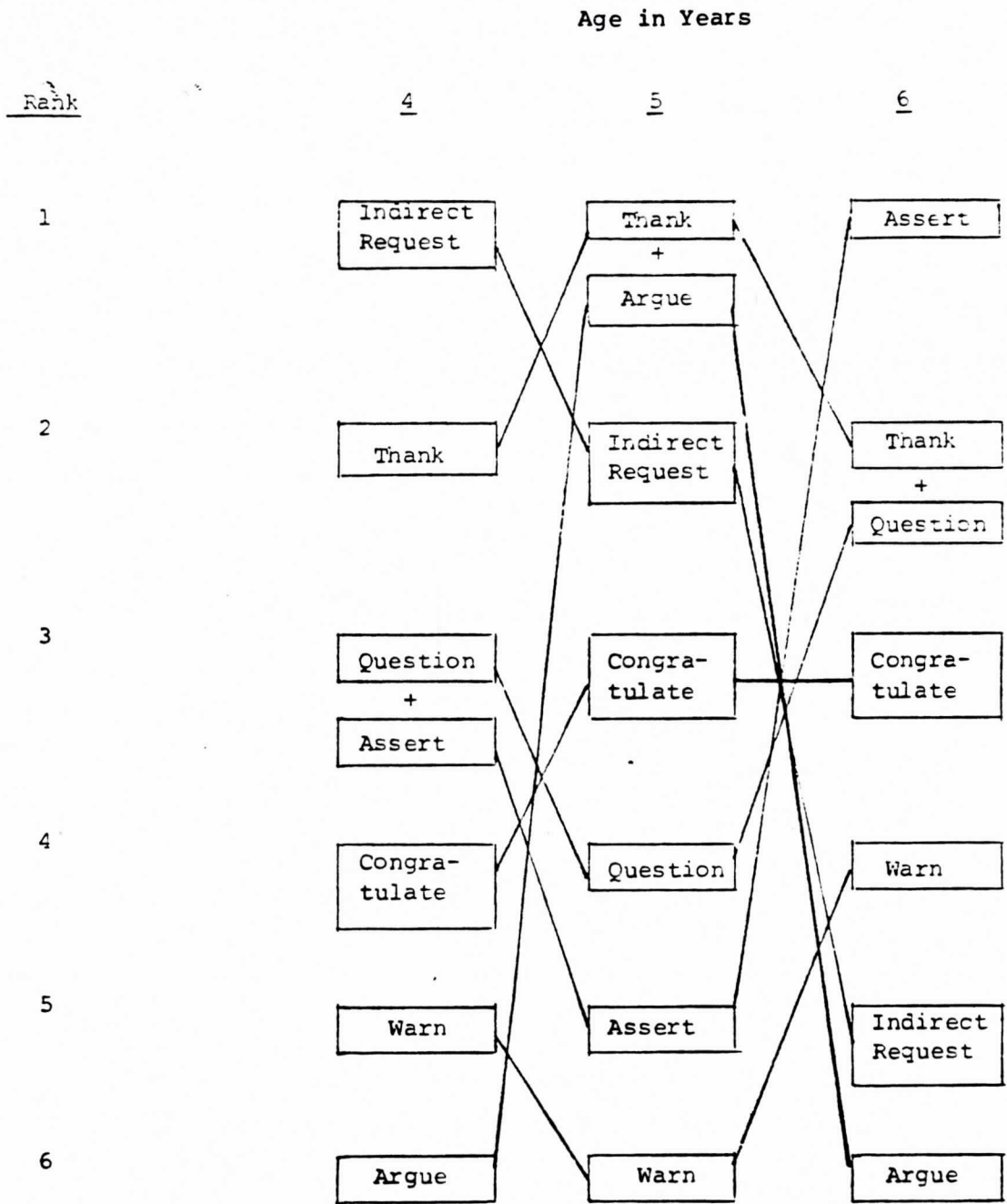


Figure 5. Rank Order of Illocutionary Acts.



A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation revealed that there was a significant correlation ( $r = .7549$ ;  $p = .00001$ ) between the subjects' performance. This indicates that both of these tests seem to be equal predictors of auditory comprehension of language. It is possible to account for 55% of the variance on one measure by knowing the performances on the other.

A previous study by Leonard and Reid (1979) indicated that at approximately age four, the children seemed to base their decision of whether an utterance was appropriate on the positive or negative connotations of the adjective used in the statement. By the age of six, that basis seemed to diminish. This information was not supported by the results of the present study. A difference was not evident between positive or negative adjectives.

The subjects in the present study responded correctly more often to the appropriate statements than to the inappropriate statements. For example, on the illocutionary act thank, the children's performance on the appropriate items was practically twice as great as their performance on the inappropriate items. Wood (1976) suggested that the agreement of body language with our verbal language is a critical factor regarding how communication is interpreted. Also, she reported that in general, body language either "reinforces or contradicts the feelings and information conveyed" (p. 185) through the verbal channel. Children are unable to resolve a conflicting message, "in which vocal, verbal and visual channels are in disagreement" (p. 214) until approximately age 12 years or older. This accounts for the poor performance of the children on the inappropriate items.



Several conclusions may be made concerning the performance of all the subjects. These conclusions may be useful when preparing programmed lessons for the language-impaired children. In general, it appeared that the development of the ability to judge the appropriateness of a speaker's utterance was not uniform. Children seemed to acquire the ability to judge certain types of utterances before others. For example, the illocutionary act thank appeared relatively high in the rank order of all age groups. One possible explanation for this result is that thanking a person is a ritualistic act which parents build into their children early in life. A model is frequently provided by parents with the insistence that children repeat it. This may account for the early acquisition of this act. Congratulate appeared in a median position and warn was located very low in the rank order. Therefore, when remediation programs are developed, consideration should be given to the selection of which acts appeared early in the development of language. In addition, language therapy for children below the age of six should focus on improving auditory comprehension skills rather than on production.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

The following suggestions are made as a result of the present study:

1. A study similar to the present one should be conducted using a larger age range because this study failed to show the age at which language-impaired children fully acquire the skill of judging utterance appropriateness. Also, the information collected

on the language-normal children showed that the task has begun to develop, but the age at which the skill plateaus remains unknown.

2. The present study matched the subjects on chronological age and auditory comprehension ability. Since there was such a wide range of linguistic abilities among children of the same chronological age, the subjects should be matched on expressive linguistic ability if this study is replicated.

3. A hierarchy of illocutionary acts should be developed to aid in programming therapy for the language-impaired population. If information gathered, revealed that some illocutionary acts are too difficult for some children, clinicians would know not to include them in sessions for language-impaired subjects.

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APPENDIX A

Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language Items

## Appendix A

Items included in the  
Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language  
(Carrow, 1973)

1. Bicycle
2. Bird
3. Girl
4. Cat
5. Farm
6. Sheep
7. Hand
8. Man
9. Paint
10. Pair
11. Red
12. Black
13. Yellow
14. Big
15. Fast
16. Little
17. Soft
18. Tall
19. Show me the two that are alike
20. These two are different.
21. Two
22. Some
23. Many
24. Find the middle car.
25. More
26. Four
27. A few
28. Second
29. Half
30. Here is a star. Now point to the bottle on the left.
31. Eating
32. Jump
33. Running
34. Coming
35. Going
36. Hitting
37. Catching
38. Giving
39. Up
40. Easily

41. Gently
42. That
43. These
44. On the table.
45. Under the table.
46. In the box.
47. The boy is at the side of the car.
48. The cat is between the cars.
49. The dog is in front of the car.
50. Farmer
51. Painter
52. Hitter
53. Fisherman
54. Smaller
55. Taller
56. Fattest
57. Bicyclist
58. Pianist
59. They
60. He
61. She
62. Mother gave the ball to her.
63. His puppy is black and white.
64. She is going shopping.
65. We're eating apples.
66. Chairs
67. Balls
68. Coats
69. Table
70. The sheep is eating.
71. The fish are eating.
72. The girl is sewing.
73. The girl is jumping.
74. The man painted the house.
75. The lion has eaten.
76. He will hit the ball.
77. The man has been cutting trees.
78. The boy pushes the girl.
79. The car bumps the train.
80. The donkey is carried by the man.
81. The boy is chased by the dog.
82. Who is by the table?
83. When do you sleep?
84. What do we eat?
85. The girl is drawing.
86. It's not black.
87. The girl isn't running.
88. Neither the boy nor the girl is jumping.
89. Go!
90. Don't cross!
91. Sleeps

92. Has ice cream
93. Find the car that is on the street.
94. Find the cat with no eyes.
95. She shows the girl the boy.
96. A large blue ball.
97. A small red car.
98. The girl is not swimming.
99. If you're the teacher, point to the dog; if not, point to the bear.
100. Find the one that is neither the ball nor the table.
101. Look at the third picture, then point to the baby of this animal.

APPENDIX B

Comparison of Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language and  
"Judging Utterance Appropriateness"

## Appendix B

Subjects' Performance on the  
Test For Auditory Comprehension of Language and  
"Judging Utterance Appropriateness"

<u>Subject Number</u>	<u>"JUA"</u>	<u>TACL</u>
1.	38	59
2.	42	52
3.	34	50
4.	41	71
5.	51	72
6.	38	52
7.	27	56
8.	36	54
9.	36	48
10.	39	53
11.	56	83
12.	55	66
13.	37	48
14.	50	89
15.	61	94
16.	64	91
17.	64	95
18.	54	96
19.	46	72
20.	63	93
21.	43	76
22.	64	96
23.	60	78
24.	58	72
25.	53	94
26.	53	91
27.	63	96
28.	51	97
29.	62	95
31.	40	71
32.	35	69
33.	42	67
34.	36	52
35.	36	55
36.	36	64



<u>Subject Number</u>	<u>"JUA"</u>	<u>TACL</u>
37.	46	71
38.	33	73
39.	34	68
40.	38	66
41.	35	61
42.	44	59
43.	36	70
44.	61	68
45.	36	60
46.	36	56
47.	36	52
48.	44	79
49.	48	65
50.	41	85
51.	41	65
52.	36	72
53.	55	65
54.	36	82
55.	52	84
56.	45	72
57.	43	73
58.	36	48
59.	36	59
60.	36	68
61.	36	61

APPENDIX C

Illocutionary Acts and Verbal Statements

## Appendix C

Activities and Verbal Statements  
Employed in This StudyAppropriate Statements

## Assert

1. A person is seated in front of a mirror combing her hair. Another person comes into the room and says, "You're pretty."
2. A short person and a tall person stand talking. The tall person says, "You're short."
3. A person laughs while reading a book. Another person seated nearby says, "You're happy."
4. A person is seated in a chair, reading a book. Another person enters the room and sits in the first person's lap. The first person says, "You're heavy."

## Question

5. A person drops a book on her foot, frowns and jumps around holding the foot. Another person seated nearby says, "You're hurt?"
6. A person reading a book, closes the book and gets up to leave. Another person seated nearby says, "You're finished?"
7. A person is standing with keys, books and a coat on. The person at the next table says, "You're ready?"
8. A person is sitting in a chair about to fall asleep. Another person nearby says, "You're sleepy?"

## Thank

9. A person offers another person a stick of gum. The second person says, "You're nice."
10. A person is cleaning up the dishes. Another person enters the room and says, "You're great."

11. A person gives another person a gift. The second person says, "You're sweet."
12. Two people sitting, reading books. The first person drops the book. The second person picks it up. The first person says, "You're great."

#### Argue

13. Two people talking loudly (unintelligibly). The first person is holding a book. The second person reaches for the book again and says, "You're crazy."
14. A person is eating. Another person extends her hand as if asking for something to eat. The first person shakes her head "no." The second person says, "You're mean."
15. Two people comparing test papers. The first person points to the second person's paper and says, "You're wrong."
16. Two people are waiting in a line. The last person in line moves from side to side and looks at her watch several times, then tries to get in front of the line. The other person says, "You're next."

#### Indirect Request

17. Three people are playing a game. One person looks away. The next person taps the third person on the shoulder and says, "You're next."
18. Two people are sitting drinking sodas. The first person finishes her drink. The second person only takes one swallow and puts the cup down. The first person says, "You're full?"
19. One person is seated behind a desk as if waiting on those in line. The first person in line is not paying attention. The lady behind the desk says, "You're next."
20. Two people are standing, talking. The first person has on a sleeveless shirt, shivers and folds arms, appearing to be cold. The second person has a sweater on, then takes it off. The first person says, "You're hot?"

#### Congratulate

21. A person in a graduation cap and gown. Another person enters the room, shakes the first person's hand and says, "You're smart."
22. Two people lifting weights. The first person lifts all the weights but the second person cannot lift any of them. The second person says, "You're strong."

23. Two people walking. The first person finds an envelope with money in it. The second person says, "You're lucky."
24. Two persons in a drawing contest. The first person finishes and holds up the paper. The referee gives the first person a blue ribbon and says, "You're first."

## Warn

25. A person is lying down on a couch with a thermometer in his mouth. Another person enters the room, feels of the first person's forehead and says, "You're hot."
26. Two people are riding in a car. The driver appears sleepy. The second person shakes the first person and says, "You're sleepy."
27. Two people are arguing. A third person enters the room, steps between the two people and says, "You're mad."
28. The first person coughs loudly. The second person says, "You're sick."

The inappropriate statements also match the activities presented with the appropriate statements. The inappropriate statements appear below.

## Assert

1. "You're sick."
2. "You're busy."
3. "You're sad."
4. "You're hot."

## Question

5. "You're happy?"
6. "You're full?"
7. "You're busy?"
8. "You're short?"

## Thank

9. "You're hungry."
10. "You're dirty."
11. "You're crazy."
12. "You're sleepy."

## Argue

13. "You're dirty."
14. "You're tall."
15. "You're late."
16. "You're hot."

## Indirect Request

17. "You're clean."
18. "You're late."
19. "You're red."
20. "You're busy."

## Congratulate

21. "You're clean."
22. "You're silly."
23. "You're skinny."
24. "You're cold."

## Warn

25. "You're dirty."
26. "You're hungry."
27. "You're clean."
28. "You're nice."



APPENDIX D

Conditions Necessary For Illocutionary Acts

## Appendix D

Conditions Necessary For Searle's (1969)  
Illocutionary Acts

<u>Illocutionary Act</u>	<u>Condition</u>
Assert	The speaker believes some proposition and the listener believes the proposition to be true.
Question	The speaker does not know if the proposition is true and believes that the listener may be able to provide the information without being asked.
Thank	The speaker is appreciative to the listener for some act that has benefited the speaker.
Indirect Request	The speaker believes the listener will perform an act but may not perform the act in the normal course of events of his own accord.
Warn	The speaker has reason to believe that some event will occur which is not in the listener's interest. It is not obvious to the listener that the event will occur.
Congratulate	Some event which is related to the listener has taken place. The speaker believes the event is in the listener's interest.
Argue	The speaker believes some proposition and wants the proposition to be believed by the listener. However, the listener does not seem to know that the proposition is true.

APPENDIX E

Response Form

Appendix E  
Response Form

SUBJECT \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. I A NR DK 2T EX	24. I A NR DK 2T EX	47. I A NR DK 2T EX
2. I A NR DK 2T EX	25. I A NR DK 2T EX	48. I A NR DK 2T EX
3. I A NR DK 2T EX	26. I A NR DK 2T EX	49. I A NR DK 2T EX
4. I A NR DK 2T EX	27. I A NR DK 2T EX	50. I A NR DK 2T EX
5. I A NR DK 2T EX	28. I A NR DK 2T EX	51. I A NR DK 2T EX
6. I A NR DK 2T EX	29. I A NR DK 2T EX	52. I A NR DK 2T EX
7. I A NR DK 2T EX	30. I A NR DK 2T EX	53. I A NR DK 2T EX
8. I A NR DK 2T EX	31. I A NR DK 2T EX	54. I A NR DK 2T EX
9. I A NR DK 2T EX	32. I A NR DK 2T EX	55. I A NR DK 2T EX
10. I A NR DK 2T EX	33. I A NR DK 2T EX	56. I A NR DK 2T EX
11. I A NR DK 2T EX	34. I A NR DK 2T EX	57. I A NR DK 2T EX
12. I A NR DK 2T EX	35. I A NR DK 2T EX	58. I A NR DK 2T EX
13. I A NR DK 2T EX	36. I A NR DK 2T EX	59. I A NR DK 2T EX
14. I A NR DK 2T EX	37. I A NR DK 2T EX	60. I A NR DK 2T EX
15. I A NR DK 2T EX	38. I A NR DK 2T EX	61. I A NR DK 2T EX
16. I A NR DK 2T EX	39. I A NR DK 2T EX	62. I A NR DK 2T EX
17. I A NR DK 2T EX	40. I A NR DK 2T EX	63. I A NR DK 2T EX
18. I A NR DK 2T EX	41. I A NR DK 2T EX	64. I A NR DK 2T EX
19. I A NR DK 2T EX	42. I A NR DK 2T EX	65. I A NR DK 2T EX
20. I A NR DK 2T EX	43. I A NR DK 2T EX	66. I A NR DK 2T EX
21. I A NR DK 2T EX	44. I A NR DK 2T EX	67. I A NR DK 2T EX
22. I A NR DK 2T EX	45. I A NR DK 2T EX	68. I A NR DK 2T EX
23. I A NR DK 2T EX	46. I A NR DK 2T EX	69. I A NR DK 2T EX
		70. I A NR DK 2T EX

I = Inappropriate  
A = Appropriate  
NR = No Response

DK = Don't Know  
2T = Two Trials  
EX = Expansion

## VITA

Susan Luanne Payne was born on March 8, 1959 in Greensboro, North Carolina. She attended elementary school there and was graduated from Eastern Guilford High School in June 1977. She entered Appalachian State University the following August and in December 1980 received a bachelor of science degree in Speech Pathology. She returned to Appalachian State University in January to begin study toward a Master's degree. She received a graduate assistantship during this time and served as a student clinician at various internship sites. These sites involved working at: Blowing Rock Extended Care Facility; Boone United Methodist Day Care Center; Watauga Child Development Center; Hardin Park Elementary School; and the Appalachian State University Speech and Hearing Clinic. She was awarded the degree in May 1982 in the field of Speech Pathology.

She is a member of Kappa Delta Phi, the National Student Speech, Language, and Hearing Association as well as the local organization.

Her parents are Mrs. Lucille Payne and the late Mr. T. Wade Payne of McLeansville, North Carolina. Susan's address is P.O. Box 88, McLeansville, North Carolina.