
PREFACE

This book provides students, practicing speech-language pathologists (SLPs), and other language specialists with procedures for analyzing various aspects of children's narrative language. Given an array of procedures, clinicians may then develop assessment protocols for use with children who are suspected of, or are identified as having, language-learning difficulties. Just as conversational language samples offer a valuable source of assessment data and intervention plans, narrative discourse samples also provide clinicians with essential information for planning remediation of language-learning disabilities. Given practice with some of the methods and procedures described in this guidebook, professionals should begin to feel confident in collecting and analyzing data from this discourse genre.

Research and tutorial articles on narrative language have been appearing with increasing frequency in the literature of speech-language pathology and learning disabilities (e.g., Garnett, 1986; Griffith, Ripich, and Dastoli, 1986; Gutierrez-Clellen, Pena, and Quinn, 1995; Hedberg and Stoel-Gammon, 1986; Johnson, 1995; Liles, 1985a; MacLachlan and Chapman, 1988; McCabe and Rollins, 1994; Merritt and Liles, 1989; Paul and Smith, 1993; Ripich and Griffith, 1988; Roth and Spekman, 1986; Scott, 1988a; Silliman, 1989; Spekman, 1984; Westby,

Van Dongen, and Maggart, 1989; Wiig, 1995; Yoshinaga-Itano, 1986). In their review of oral narratives of school-age children, Crais and Lorch (1994) summarize the features that distinguish the narratives of children with language disorders from those produced by children with normal language skills and discuss conflicting results among studies. Previously, speech-language pathologists may have included segments of narrative language within conversational language samples and perhaps calculated a separate mean length of utterance (MLU) for them, but they generally did not examine narrative language skills as a separate kind of language.

More research has become available (Johnson, 1995; McCabe and Peterson, 1991; Moyano and McGillivray, 1988) about how narratives develop in children who are learning language normally, resulting in some clinically useful information for judging the developmental level, or maturity, of narrative language. In addition, research comparing narratives of children developing language normally, with those from children identified as having language deficits, has been highlighting similarities and differences in narrative skills between these populations (Feagans and Short, 1984; Graybeal, 1981; Jordan, Murdoch, and Buttsworth, 1991; Liles, 1985a, 1985b; Liles, Coelho, Duffy, and Zalagens,

1989; Merritt and Liles, 1987; Paul and Smith, 1993; Purcell and Liles, 1992; Roth and Spekman, 1986; Roth and Spekman, 1989; Sleight and Prinz, 1985; Strong and Shaver, 1991; Westby et al., 1989). Hence, more SLPs are recognizing the need for procedures to analyze the narrative language skills of children with language-learning disabilities (LLD) for purposes of assessment. The information provided in this book is intended to guide professionals' decisions about collecting and analyzing narrative language samples and interpreting the results for clinical use.

The three authors of this guide were brought together by the editor in chief of Thinking Publications in November 1994. Each of us had various reasons for collaborating on this project. Diana Hughes's reasons for writing Chapters 1 through 5 were to provide a clear and concise guide for undergraduate and graduate students in speech-language pathology who were learning language analysis methods. Past experience with students had shown that clear and specific rules for transcription and analysis are critical. A presentation of rules should be followed by opportunities to practice skills such as segmenting samples, counting units (e.g., words and clauses), and assigning various units to categories such as story structure level or personal narrative type, with examples that are graded in difficulty. Feedback regarding accuracy of a student's analysis is then necessary, with explanations provided so that future mistakes can be avoided. In this way, students can systematically approach mastery of skills needed for assessment of children's narrative language.

LaRae McGillivray's purpose for writing Chapter 6 was to provide a method for assessing children's language based on elicitation of narrative discourse. LaRae hopes that this information will be useful both to students-in-training and school-based speech-language pathologists.

Usually it is necessary to use quantitative measures to document a need for special services in the schools. McGillivray presents three possible quantitative measures based on results from a local normative study. This general quantitative information, however, is not very useful for program planning or documenting progress, so a qualitative narrative discourse scale and some specific quantitative measures for intrachild comparisons are also described. All measures are meant to be scored from data recorded in one sampling session. For some school-age children with language-learning disabilities, an integrated evaluation of narrative skills is more effective for answering major assessment questions than are other combinations of norm-referenced tests and informal observations of classroom failure.

One of Mark Schmidek's main purposes in creating the *School Language Sample (SLS)* presented in Chapter 7 was to have a means of monitoring patterns of increasing functional language as students passed from elementary school into middle school and through high school. In the late 1970s and early 1980s his caseload included students from preschool through grade 12. He knew that each year at the time of annual reviews, and for as many as 12 subsequent years, he would have to present a specific, objective report to the same parents, teachers, and students. He needed to be able to describe skill acquisition and changes, plateaus, and new strategies that were part of the ongoing development of spoken and written "school" language. The narrative and sentence construction tasks in the *SLS* added important insights to the interpretation of more conventional, standardized language measures. Through the years, parents, teachers, and students became familiar with the 40 or so variables that are monitored by the *SLS*. This awareness heightened the support and reinforcement needed to achieve short-term objectives in the coming school year.