

Introduction

You likely work with young children who have auditory processing disorders, autism spectrum disorders, and developmental delays, or who are deaf/hard-of-hearing. Additionally, like many speech-language pathologists (SLPs), you realize the challenge of finding effective ways to treat the severely delayed receptive and expressive language skills of these populations. The *Functional Language Program for Children* helps young children with language deficits develop increased understanding and use of longer utterances. The children clear the hurdle from the one- to two-word level of language development to the level of multiple-word utterances.

The secret is in the types of word combinations you train the children to say. Each word of each phrase is truly essential to completing the tasks in this program correctly. Some of our most challenging preschool and early elementary-aged children don't respond well to less intensive language stimulation techniques and require intervention that is more intensive. This approach for improving functional language to increase mean length of utterance provides a systematic series of engaging lessons that make language therapy both fun and effective.

► Using Parts of Speech to Build Language

Each semantic-grammatical unit in an utterance, such as "noun + verb + object" or "boy wash dog," is essential for expressing and understanding the phrase. Foster, Giddan, and Stark (1973) introduced the idea of using these words, which they called "critical elements," to build language. Their publication, *Assessment of Children's Language Comprehension (ACLCL)* measured children's understanding of simple, uninflected utterances from the single-word level to the four-word level. The term "critical elements" referred to the semantic units in an utterance, such as "noun + verb" or "noun + verb + object." The authors maintained that a child's syntax skills would improve once he had the underlying receptive and expressive semantic skills in place.

I've been an SLP for 30+ years, working with young children who have severe impairments in listening, processing, and speaking. I've found that the systematic format of Foster, Giddan, and Stark's approach to using parts of speech to build language provides straightforward language training at the underlying semantic level. It gives you an engaging, fun, and measurable means to teach early-developing semantic relationships to young children that is easy for them to put to practical use. I've modified the "critical elements" terminology to "parts of speech" in my program, but the approach to language development is from Foster, Giddan, and Stark's research.

The key to this approach is using natural, functional communication scenarios and carefully-planned materials that require the child to focus on understanding each part of speech in an utterance. This approach also provides an easy way for parents and teachers to incorporate specific receptive and/or expressive language training into everyday activities during a child's daily routine. In this way, language begins to make sense to the child and comes to life for the child who has been struggling to understand and use sequences of words.

I hope you enjoy using the *Functional Language Program for Children* with your most challenging young students and find it a valuable tool to help them increase their understanding and use of longer utterances.

Jennifer

Foster, R., Giddan, J., & Stark, J. (1973). *Assessment of children's language comprehension (ACLCL)*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

► Training Levels

The *Functional Language Program for Children* provides four levels of training using Foster, Giddan, and Stark's (1973) approach to using parts of speech to build language (see Introduction for more information). The four levels include single words, two-word phrases, three-word phrases, and four-word phrases. Various semantic combinations are presented in the last three levels of training.

The framework of the program offers many incremental steps within each level, allowing you maximum flexibility of use. Some children may need additional time to develop skills at a given level, while other children will be ready to move on to the next level without completing every semantic combination in that level. Accelerate or slow down and elaborate on the training at any level to fit the child's needs and interests. You may observe some children demonstrate the "snowball effect," in which they spend considerable time at the one- and two-word levels and then move quickly through the three- and four-word levels. Still other children may spontaneously move from the two-word level to the three-word level and then be ready for a more traditional approach to language stimulation without completing this program.

I have provided activities, examples, or suggestions to show how you, parents, teachers, and other professionals can easily incorporate the idea of using parts of speech to build language into any child's daily routine.

► Picture Cards and Picture Card Activities

The vocabulary I selected for the picture cards (on the CD-ROM) and the picture card activities have proven over the years to be meaningful and engaging for very young children. In addition, many of the vocabulary words work well with any phonological process program or specific speech articulation/phonology programs, such as the Kaufman "successive approximations" approach to oral-motor programming (Kaufman, 1998, 2001).

Use the picture cards to train students individually or in small groups, using your judgment to decide at which level to begin training. You may target receptive/expressive comprehension at each level or provide expressive language practice to help students expand the length of their utterances. Use simple semantic-based utterances (e.g., telegraphic), such as "Boy feed dog," or target additional syntax, such as "The boy feeds the dog" or "He is feeding the dog." For a list of the core vocabulary targets used for the picture cards and picture card activities, see page 54. For a list of the pictures included on the CD-ROM, see pages 55-57.

► Functional Training, Classroom Training, and Natural Environment Activities

These activities provide further practice with all four levels of the program using common toys and objects that are easy to obtain, such as a small ball, a toy car, plastic animals and figures (boy/girl/dog/cat), an empty milk carton or juice box, etc.

► Articulation/Phonology

The vocabulary words and repetitive phrases used throughout this program provide opportunities for additional practice of speech sounds, oral motor speech patterns, or phonological rules that children may already be learning. Alter the labels for nouns and verbs to fit a child's articulation or phonological targets, such as using "puppy" instead of "dog" to target bilabial consonants or the CVCV motor speech pattern in a two-syllable word. Assign the characters names that correspond to speech sound targets, such as "Mimi" and "Bobby" to target bilabial consonants, "Elly" and "Emma" to target VCV motor speech patterns, or "Juan" and "Megan" to target final consonants.

Overview

This program also provides excellent opportunities for practice in repetitive utterances of increasing length and complexity, such as the following:

“kitty running, kitty eating, kitty drinking, kitty sleeping, kitty washing”

“kitty riding wagon, kitty pushing wagon, kitty washing wagon”

“kitty in dirty car, kitty in wet car, kitty under wet car, kitty under dirty car”

For additional information, see the Articulation/Phonology Suggestions on pages 48-49.

► **Auditory Training**

For children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing (HOH) and deaf children with cochlear implants, each level of this program provides an opportunity for auditory training/speech discrimination. Use the receptive language tasks to help the child learn to attend to targeted auditory/verbal input. Present the words in sets that emphasize certain auditory/visual features. For an even higher level of difficulty, use a mouth screen to cover the lower portion of your face or sit beside the student to eliminate facial/lip reading cues. For additional information, see the Auditory Training Suggestions on pages 50-51.

► **Storybook Adaptations**

Many times, children who have difficulty with auditory-verbal comprehension also have difficulty attending to storybook activities. This program provides an effective way to increase the young child's attention to these activities by systematically building his comprehension, one word at a time. You, teachers, and caregivers can also use this technique to provide practice with expressive language by modeling repetitive phrases for the child to imitate during story time. In this section, there are several suggestions for using story time to provide practice with any level of the *Functional Language Program for Children*. For additional information, see the Storybook Adaptation Suggestions on pages 52-53.

► **Receptive/Expressive Goals**

I have included sample Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals for every level of the *Functional Language Program for Children* to help school-based professionals demonstrate how they will address children's needs in educational and therapy programs. These sample goals are in the areas of receptive and expressive language, articulation/phonology/oral motor planning, and auditory training.

► **Picture Library of Manual Signs**

Many children who have specialized needs respond well to using additional visual cues, such as manual signs. A picture library of manual signs for the 28 vocabulary words in the *Functional Language Program for Children* is on pages 58-62. These manual signs are also included on the CD-ROM for you to print out and share with caregivers and other professionals who are working with the child.

Foster, R., Giddan, J., & Stark, J. (1973). *Assessment of children's language comprehension (ACLCL)*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

Kaufman, Nancy (1998). *Kaufman speech praxis treatment for children, basic level*. Gaylord, MI: Northern Speech Services.

Kaufman, Nancy (2001). *Kaufman speech praxis treatment for children, advanced level*. Gaylord, MI: Northern Speech Services.