

Understanding Complex Sentences

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Importance of Complex Sentences

- Complex sentences allow children to
 - Sequence events temporally and causally
 - Improve cohesiveness of discourse and narratives
 - Increase the sophistication of oral and written language
- (Haynes & Shulman, 1998; Badzinski, 1988; Paul 2001, Steffani, 2007)
- Children with language disorders
 - Use fewer complex sentences and fewer grammatically appropriate complex sentences than their same-age peers
- (Leonard, 1995; Marinellie, 2004; Schuele & Nicholls, 2000; Steffani, 2007)
- Maltreated children evidence reduced complex sentence use as well
 - Physical and emotional abuse, neglect
- (Eigsti & Cicchetti, 2004)

Type of Sentences (Steffani, 2007)

- Simple
 - Independent clause; complete thought
- Compound
 - coordinating conjunction joins 2 or more independent clauses (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
- Complex
 - 2 dependent clauses or a dependent + independent clauses are joined together by
 - Subordinating Conjunction
 - Because, when, although, while, unless, if,
 - Relative pronouns
 - that, who, whom, whose, which

Compound-complex sentences (Steffani, 2007)

- Contains 2 or more independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction and 1 or more dependent clauses
 - Generally connected to the independent clauses with a subordinating conjunction or relative pronouns
 - When I met him, he was mad because he did not win the competition.
 - The teacher could not believe that she was there, but the principal said she was.

Sentence Function (Steffani, 2007)

- Declarative
 - Positive or negative statements
- Interrogative
 - Yes/no, wh-, or tag questions (won't you?; didn't you?)
- Imperative
 - Command/request
- Exclamatory
 - Expresses strong feelings

Complex Sentences

- Complex sentences “contain more than one verb phrase in embedded or conjoined multclause utterances” (Paul, 2001, p. 427)
- Emerge in children’s speech when they have attained a MLU of 3.0 (Paul, 1981; Lahey, 1988)
- 3-3.5 year olds have 1-10% complex sentences
- 3.5-4.0 have 10-20% complex sentences
- 4+ years – over 20% complex sentences (Paul, 2001)
- By age 5, typically developing children use 6-8 different conjunctions in a 15-min speech sample (Paul, 1981)

Order of Acquisition

- Simple infinitives
 - She wants to stay in the car
- Coordination of clauses with the word [and]
 - I like apples and oranges
- Noun phrase complements (aka propositional complements)
 - I wish I was taller
- Infinitives with the same subject
 - I want to eat a pear
- Indirect questions
 - I wonder how long you waited?
- Infinitives with different subjects
 - I want you to go to bed
- Steffani, 2007; Bloom, 1991; Paul 1981

Order of Acquisition (cont)

- Relative clauses
 - This is the dog that run away
- Conjunction
 - If
- Gerunds
 - I liked being there
- Wh- infinitives
 - I know what to do
- Unmarked infinitives
 - Watch me dance
- Conjunctions
 - When, so
- Steffani, 2007; Bloom, 1991; Paul 1981

Acquisition of Complex Sentences

Tyack & Gottsleben, 1986

- MLU 3.0-3.99 (Ages: 3-+/-3.5)
 - Modals (gonna, wanna, hafta, hasta, want)
 - Infinitives (let's)
 - Infinitives with to obligated (has to; needs to)
 - Infinitives with to not obligated (“It makes it stick on there”)
 - Multi-embedded sentences start to appear
- MLU 4.0-4.99 (Ages: +/- 3.5-4.5)
 - Coordination with and
 - Adverbial because, fragment
 - Indirect question with know
 - Infinitives, Subject present in 2nd sentence
 - Adverbial because (medial)
 - Verb + (that) + Subject with think or thought
 - Adverbial when, initial position

Acquisition of Complex Sentences

Tyack & Gottsleben, 1986

- MLU 4.0-4.99 (Ages: +/- 3.5-4.5)
 - Object-Subject relative, stereotyped
 - Object-Subject relative, that
 - Object-Object relative, that
- MLU 5.0-5.99 (Age: 5+)
 - Indirect questions, verbs other than know
 - Adverbials other than when or because
 - Verb + (that) + Subject, verbs other than think, thought
 - Coordination but
 - Coordination, Sentence 2 deleted subject.

A few explanations

- Coordinating Conjunction
 - And, but, so, or
- Subordinating Conjunction
 - Because, after, therefore
- Indirect questions
 - Is that so?
 - See what I did?
- Comparatives (er)
 - Bigger, smarter
- Multi-embedded sentences
 - Contains more than one embedded clause
 - One verb may be a catenative (3 + verbs)
 - She likes play in the park and he likes ride along the river.

A few explanations (cont)

- Gerund
 - Contains an -ing form that functions as a noun
 - Jogging is fun
- Simple infinitive
 - Contains [to] followed by a verb; subject is the same as the main sentences
 - I need to do this
- Relative clause
 - Contains an embedded phrase that functions as an adjective; modifies an object or subject noun phrase; may be marked by who, which, that
 - The cat who is hissing is angry.
- Steffani, 2007, p. 46

A few explanations: Infinitive subcategories

- Let's/Modals
 - gonna, wanna, hafta, hasta, want
 - They're gonna go there.
 - I wanna do it.
 - Let's stand over there.
 - Let's tell her about it.
- To Obligated
 - It has to be over there
 - He needs that to walk up the stairs
 - Now, its time to go to school.

A few explanations: Infinitive subcategories (cont)

- To Not Obligated
 - I helped this one stand up.
 - It makes it stick on there.
- For and to Obligated
 - It wasn't hard for me to open, is it?
 - It's easy for me to do this one.
- Subject Present in Second Sentence
 - I want her to go over there.
 - The doggie wants the kitty to run.
- Objects of Both Verbs the Same
 - He wants something to eat for lunch.
 - The kids got some toys to play with.
 - Tyack & Gottsleben, 1986, p 163-164

Complex Sentence Collection

- Retelling of Personal or Fictional Narratives
 - Record
 - Transcribe
 - Analyze
- SALT
 - <http://www.saltsoftware.com/>
- Narrative Assessments of Preschool and School Aged Children
 - <http://www.smartspeechtherapy.com/shop/narrative-assessments-of-preschool-and-school-aged-children/>

Tips for Complex Sentences

- Is it a complex sentence or a run-on sentence?
 - Run-on sentences are 2 or more independent clauses joined without appropriate punctuation or conjunction
 - Overuse of conjunction -and
- Not sure if the child's complex sentence usage is adequate?
 - Cross reference with Sentence Formulation Subtest of **CELF-4**

Complex Sentences in a Nutshell

- Given that young children (4-5 years of age) can produce sophisticated complex sentences, SLP's can make reasonable assumptions that if the discourse or narratives of older children (5+) lack complexity and are disorganized that intervention may be warranted

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