

Understanding Complex Sentences

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Overview

This presentation is aimed at improving the learners' knowledge regarding development of complex sentences in young children.

Learning Objectives:

- After the completion of this presentation participants will be able to
 - Discuss the importance of complex sentences
 - Review complex sentence milestones
 - Describe the order of acquisition of complex sentences

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 multiclausal 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

Conclusion : 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

Helpful Resource Bundles

[The Checklists Bundle](#)

[General Assessment and Treatment Start Up Bundle](#)

[Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Assessment and Treatment Bundle](#)

[Multicultural Assessment Bundle](#)

[Narrative Assessment and Treatment Bundle](#)

[Introduction to Prevalent Disorders Bundle](#)

[Social Pragmatic Assessment and Treatment Bundle](#)

[Psychiatric Disorders Bundle](#)

Helpful Resources

[Assessment Checklist for Preschool Aged Children](#)

[Assessment Checklist for School Aged Children](#)

[Speech Language Assessment Checklist for Adolescents](#)

[Differential Diagnosis of ADHD in Speech Language Pathology](#)

[Creating Functional Therapy Plan](#)

[Selecting Clinical Materials for Pediatric Therapy](#)

[Social Pragmatic Deficits Checklist for Preschool Children](#)

[Social Pragmatic Deficits Checklist for School Aged Children](#)

[Auditory Processing Deficits Checklist for School Aged Children](#)

More Helpful Resources

[Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder An Overview of Deficits](#)

[Speech Language Assessment and Treatment of Children with Alcohol Related Disorders](#)

[The Role of Frontal Lobe in Speech and Language Functions](#)

[Executive Function Impairments and At Risk Pediatric Populations](#)

[Behavior Management Strategies for Speech Language Pathologists](#)

[Narrative Assessment of Preschool and School Aged Children](#)

[Treatment of Social Pragmatic Deficits in School Aged Children](#)

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