Language Development in Post-Institutionalized Children

Lisa Schoenbrodt, Ed.D., CCC-SLP
Department of Speech Pathology/Audiology
Loyola College in Maryland
Purpose

- The current study of children adopted from Eastern European orphanages documented a three year period of data collection on English language acquisition as measured by a standardized language assessment.
The body of literature regarding language development in the population of children adopted from Eastern European countries is sparse, but growing.

As of 2005, as many as 7,414 foreign visas were granted for international adoption.
Rutter evaluated children adopted from Romania and found documented malnutrition, respiratory, intestinal, and skin problems. However, over a 2 year period, physical catch-up was substantial, but developmental catch-up was not complete.
Conditions in the orphanage

- Glennen (2002; 2005) reported that poor health care and nutrition, as well as overall lack of stimulation is common.

- Also common is fetal alcohol syndrome, infectious and parasitic disease (Hepatitis B and C) and tuberculosis.
Parent Report on Conditions

- Romanian orphanages by far are the worst.
- Parents report others to be better in terms of overall stimulation, food, material items, and ratio of children to adults.
Additional problems

- Reported problems in health records and information given to parents at the time of adoption.
- Prenatal health information is questionable.
- Translation of medical terms into English is also questionable.
The current studies on preschoolers in this population by Glennen and Masters indicated that infants and toddlers develop English in the same growth patterns as non-adopted English speaking peers.

The growth curve lags behind proportional to the age at adoption.
Purpose of this study

- Glennen and Masters study indicated a need for longitudinal research.
- The authors also focused on younger children, not those who were adopted at an older age.
- The current study focused on the above variables.
Participants

- Forty eight children participated in the study between 2000 and 2004.
- Criteria for participation included:
  - 1. age between 3 and 16,
  - 2. residence in the USA for at least one year,
  - 3. adopted from and Eastern European orphanage,
Participants

- 4. ability to comprehend and speak English.

- Parents were asked to complete a detailed case history and were recruited from the Baltimore-Washington area.
Demographics

- Of the 28 females, and 20 males, the children were primarily from: Russia (24), Bulgaria (9), Lithuania (2), Siberia (3), Ukraine (3), Romania (4), and Kazakhstan (2).
- All parents reported observing the orphanage from which their child was adopted.
Educational/Health concerns

- Parents reported medical problems of: rickets, bowed leg, hernia, reactive attachment disorder, ADHD, broken bones, brittle bones, asthma, intestinal parasites, ear and sinus infections, pneumonia, nerve damage, dyslexia, cleft lip and palate and heart conditions.
Education concerns

- One third of the parents reported that they had “strong” concerns of speech/language problems and were pursuing services.
- An additional third reported that their child(ren) was receiving special education services at the time of the study.
Instrumentation

- The CASL, an individually and orally administered research-based, theory driven oral language assessment battery for ages 3-21 was used.
- The CASL evaluates four aspects of language.
- The Core Battery was administered to subjects which represented aspects of each language category.
Setting

- All testing was completed at the Loyola College Clinical Centers.
- Children were tested three times over a three year period.
- Testing times varied dependent upon when the child entered the study.
Results and Discussion

- Findings from the ANOVA indicated that there was little developmental change in language scores across time, with the exception of non literal language and pragmatic judgment.
- Children averaged at or near the 50th percentile, which is normal and average, and remained there across time.
Results and Discussion

- What did change were the non-grammatical elements of language.
- Problems with pragmatics or the social use of language may seem obvious.
- The social rules of language can be best taught through immersion in the culture and not just in the classroom.
Findings

- In the current study, children demonstrated an inappropriate response to a pragmatic cue.
- This fact supports other literature suggesting that there are pragmatic features that do not transfer easily across cultures.
- The result is that children may be put at risk for academic and social failure without clinical intervention.
Results and Discussion

- Other findings indicated a 5% gain in composite scores between T1 and T3 which indicates average growth across time.
- This finding supports that of Glennen and Masters that this population has relatively the same growth pattern as non-adopted English speaking peers.
Conclusion

- The results of the study overall support that found by other researchers with the same but younger population.
- The findings that nonliteral language and pragmatic language lags behind indicate the need to carefully evaluate these children for services.
Recommendations

- Not all children need to be “flagged” as soon as they enter the country.
- However, educators need to monitor the child and watch for areas that continue to lag behind and make a referral sooner than later.
- What ASHA states as necessary for identification of LI in ELL learners.
Questions