Individual Differences & Successful Intervention: Child Language Disorders
Specific Language Impairment

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Focus on Three Child Characteristics
1. Children's individual language maturation trajectories
2. Conversational styles
3. Supportive home environments

Language Maturation
- Children's language knowledge before and during treatment may play an important role in treatment effectiveness.
- For typically developing children, it has been demonstrated that new knowledge builds on the old knowledge they already possess (Brown, 1973; Karmiloff-Smith, 1996; K. A. Nelson, 1996; Piaget, 1954).
- Children's old knowledge does not necessarily need to be within the same domains of language to foster new knowledge in different language domains, as per the linguistic theory of "bootstrapping" (Morgan & Demuth, 1996).
- For example, children's lexical gains closely related to their syntax knowledge; and vice versa, syntax gains associated with children's current lexical knowledge (Bates & Goodman, 1997; Bedore & Leonard, 2000; Dale, Dionne, & Plomin, 2000; Moyle, Ellis Weismer, Evans, & Lindstrom, 2007).

Examples from Intervention Studies
- Fey and Loeb (2004)

Conversational Styles
- One important part of young children's social world is participating in conversations since even very young children begin learning language from others in conversational contexts (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).
- Bi-directional nature of language and socialization is complex.
  - e.g., purpose, topic, participants' ages, familiarity, relative status, language proficiency and frames of mind at a particular point
- Participants' conversational styles based on their relative levels of assertiveness and responsiveness may vary from one individual to the next, or from one conversational dyad to the next.
  - active conversationalists
• passive conversationalists
• inactive communicators
• verbal non-communicators

• Children with SLI are not necessarily all inactive communicators (e.g., Conti-Ramsden & Gunn, 1986; Fey & Leonard, 1984; Leonard, 1986).
• Also, it seems likely that children with SLI may display different types of conversational styles with different conversational partners depending on their language maturation, the severity of the language impairment, and different subtypes of SLI.

Examples
• Weismer, Murray-Branch and Miller (1993)
• Weiss and Nakamura (1992)
• Brinton and Fujiki (1994)

Supportive Home Environment
• Caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness, maternal education and socioeconomic status are associated with children's rate of language acquisition during the preschool years.
• These three factors are interrelated and thus difficult to address separately.
  o Maternal education predicts families' socioeconomic status (e.g., Burchinal, Campbell, Bryant, Wasik, & Ramey, 1997); and both less maternal education and low socioeconomic status have been associated with the less caregiver responsiveness and less frequent language input for children (Hammer, Tomblin, Zhang, & Weiss, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995; Landry, Smith, Swank, & Miller-Loncar, 2000; Stanton-Chapman, Chapman, Bainbridge, & Scott, 2002)

Examples
• Hart and Risley (1995)
• Hammer and Weiss (1999)
• Yoder and Warren (1998, 2001)
• Horton-Ikard and Ellis-Weismer (2007)
• O’Neil-Pirozzi, 2003, 2006

Where do we go from here?
• We need more research, such as case studies and single-subject designs that use alternating treatments with the same child, to provide information on the relationship between children's language-learning characteristics and particular treatment approaches.
• We also need to keep reminding ourselves that effectively assessing and treating preschool children with LI is not a simple, straightforward endeavor.

References


