Language Sampling: History & Guidelines

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SPEC 7107
Why Sample Language?

Nippold, 2010:

• Identification of language deficits in “real world” settings
• Can reveal deficits in the use of complex syntax in difficult speaking tasks
• Pragmatic deficits can be observed, particularly during conversations.
• Results can supplement info gleaned from standardized testing.
• Results can provide direction for intervention.
• Greater relevance & ecological validity than standardized language testing
History of Language Sampling cont.

19th century – Diary studies emerged
(e.g., Taine, 1877)

20th century –
• Formal language sampling began
  (e.g., Smith, 1926)
• Invention of the tape recorder
• Longitudinal samples collected
• Publication of formal language sampling programs
  (e.g., Developmental Sentence Scoring; Lee, 1974)
History of Language Sampling cont.

• Interest in persuasive discourse (e.g., Wood, Weinstein, & Parker, 1967)

• Interest in narrative discourse (e.g., Kernan, 1977)

• Computerized analysis of language sampling emerged (e.g., SALT; Miller & Chapman, 1983)
21st century –

- Digital recorders & microcassettes widely used
- Expanded interest in adolescent language (e.g., Nippold, 2007)
- Expansion of normative databases (e.g., Miller, 2009)
Collection of a Language Sample  
(Retherford, 2007)

- Collect a **representative sample** (Gallagher, 1983) – demonstrates the child’s usual performance

- What affects **sample representativeness**?

Adapted from Miller, 1981:  
**Nature of the interaction** – Obtain samples of the child interacting with various individuals.
Collection of a Language Sample cont.

- Ask minimal questions to allow for spontaneous conversation.
- **Setting** – use more than 1 setting
- **Materials** – Include a variety of age-appropriate materials & encourage the child to use various materials.
- **Sample size** – Collect a minimum of 100 utterances.
Collection of a Language Sample cont.

- **Method of recording** – videotape &
  - Partial on-line transcription
  - Write notes on non-verbal contextual info

- **Specification of context** – interactants’ utterances & the nonverbal & situational context.
Guidelines for Clinician-Child Interaction (Retherford, 2007)

1. Start with parallel play & talk.
   Young child – imitate his/her sounds, use animal & environmental sounds.
   Older than age 2 – use role-playing dialogue as you play

2. Begin interactive conversation.
   To initiate: ask routine questions; invite the child to participate; continue role-playing dialogue.
Guidelines for Clinician-Child Interaction (Retherford, 2007)

3. Follow the child’s lead. – Stay on his/her topic; shift topics when the child shifts; ask for more info on the child’s topic.

4. Minimize questions to 1 question for every 4 speaking turns. – Instead of asking a question, prompt the child – “Tell me about this.”

5. Provide 2 options in planning play activities.

6. Speak in utterances that are slightly longer than the child’s utterances. Use the same # of utterances per speaking turn as the child.
7. Don’t rush to fill pauses in the conversation.

8. Provide a variety of materials, but don’t shift abruptly from one to another.

9. Don’t hesitate to be silly & have fun to engage a young child.