Implications of Higher Level Language

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WHY?

Why create the DELV?

• African American students are over-represented in Special Education.
  • 14.8% of the general population
  • 20.2% of the special ed population
• African American children are the most over-represented in every special education category;
  This occurs in nearly every state (Parrish, 2002).

WHO?

Who Funded the DELV?

• National Institutes of Health (NIDCD) contract N01-DC-8-2104 for the “Development and Validation of a Language Test For Children Speaking Non-Standard English: A Study of Children Who Speak Black English”
• Principal Investigator: Harry N. Seymour, with colleagues Thomas W. Roeppe, Jill de Villiers, and Peter A. de Villiers; Manager, Barbara Z. Pearson; HAI Liaison, Lois Ciolli.
• Contract Award: Spring, 1998-2004, extension to 2005

Joint partnership between Harcourt Assessment, Inc., University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Smith College
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Why Harcourt Assessment, Inc.?

Harcourt’s

• commitment to equitable testing practices for all children
• respect for the reputations of the authors in their respective fields
• tradition for innovation in testing
• resources and knowledge in the field of test development

What is UNIQUE about the DELV?

• Based on deep linguistic principles (Chomsky, Gleitman, Roeppe & de Villiers)
• Avoids areas of surface level contrast between dialects
• Separates the identification of language variation from diagnosis of risk.
• Works as well for MAE speakers as it does for AAE speakers.

DELV is “dialect neutral”

It is not easier
It is DIFFERENT
It includes tasks that tell you that the successful child has higher order knowledge.
Case Study 1

Child ZG (5;2, male, AA, from South, parents have more than a high school education; receiving services for Language and Articulation disorders)

- **PLS Score = 71**
- **DELV Screener indicated**
  - Strong difference from MAE
  - high risk for disorder
- **DELV Criterion Referenced: SS 89**

What did he miss on DELV-Screener?

(Part 2: Diagnostic Section)

- Past tense copula/aux 3/5 (very low)
- Complex wh-questions 2/4 (inconsistent)
- Non-word repetition 2/6 (average)

Scores on DELV-CR

- **Total Score: 89** (mean of 100, S.D. of 15)
- Scaled Domain scores
  - Syntax: 7
  - Pragmatics: 12
  - Semantics: 12
  - Phonology: 3

Weaknesses:

- **Phonology**
  - Targets in initial or medial syllables only.
  - Missed “s-clusters”: splash, stove, smart, destroying, etc.; omitted initial unstressed syllables (afraid, control)
- **Not dialect-related; getting speech therapy for it.**
- **Contrast: “gif/gift” in Screener, dialect, not disorder**

Weaknesses:

- **Complex wh-questions (inconsistent)**
  - Long distance barriers
    - These children are planning a surprise party for their favorite teacher. Everyone was going to bring something for the party, but the boy didn’t know what to bring. He asked the woman at the store, “What should I bring?”
  - Double-wh
    - This father and this baby were having lunch together. Who ate what?

Strengths:

- **Theory of mind**
  - Articulated the classic "unseen displacement"
  - Why is he looking under the bed?
    - “because he put the choo-choo train under the bed.”

Only 1 in 10 5-year-olds (in DSLT Tryout) could suppress their own knowledge and answer from the character’s point of view.
**Strengths:**
”meaning” of grammatical structures (in fast mapping from complex sentences)

- Correctly answered "Which one did the girl meep to send the flowers?" & "Which one did the girl meep the boy to send?" (Correct with real-verb component structure too.)

**Gold Standard for the Child ZG: a Language Sample**
- Took 12 measures on the transcript, including: No. Words in 50 utterances, Ipayn Sentences, Ipayn total, LARSIP-MU, LARSIP_Clausal Complexity, LARSIP_Mean Syntactic Length, LARSIP_% of complex sentences, SALT % of spontaneous sentences. ZG was high compared to peers on 3, average on 7 and just barely below average (95% confidence interval) on 1, far below average on 1.
- For example, he used 2 relative clauses, 2 bitransitive clauses (cf. “meeped the boy”), and used a sentence with 3 vps, all above average, especially for an LI population.
- Language Sample agrees with the DELV.

(Note 12 of 14 cases of “discrepancies” between a priori test scores and the DELV score resolve in favor of the DELV. The other children are “inconsistent” in both DELV and LS.)

**Narrative Assessment in the DELV-CR**
Why we assess specific narrative elements...
“These narrative elements (i.e., contrastive reference, temporal cohesion, and mental state & belief references) have been identified as crucial indicators of a child’s understanding of texts and how texts are made more meaningful and more cohesive” (Berman & Slobin 1994; Bruner 1986; Halliday & Hassan 1976)

---from the DELV Manual, p. 66

**Two Children**
- Child A: Female African-American; 6 years, 7 months of age; AAE Speaker
- Child B: Male Caucasian; 6 years, 11 months of age; MAE speaker

Both enrolled in the 1st grade (in different towns) at the time of testing.
Their Overall Test Performances

Both produced errors in three subsets of the DELV - syntax, pragmatics, and semantics.
Child A = Disorder; Child B = No Disorder
Neither demonstrated difficulty or impairment on the phonology task.
Very little overlap in terms of error types with the exception of narratives.

Narrative Re-telling Skills

Task: Tell story based on pictures presented.
Expectation:
- Recognition of a central theme, character and plot. (Paul 2001)
- Recognition of the motivations behind the characters' actions, as well as logical and temporally ordered sequence of events.
Performance: Both below developmental expectancy (Stage 5 or "True Narrative")

Child A’s Narrative

The boy won’t give the little boy his toy. In this part (pointing), the second one, the boy is putting the toy under the bed. In the other one, the other little boy is putting the train under the bed - under his bed. And the boy - the little boy is putting the choo-choo train in his box with all his other toys. The boy is gonna look under the bed, and the toy ain’t gonna be there. He looked under the bed, and he didn’t see the toy.

Characteristics of Child A’s Narrative
- Inadequate Reference Contrast
  - Child A did not clearly and consistently differentiate between the two boys
- Inadequate Temporal Links
  - Child A did not consistently use time clauses or time sequencing words
- Failure to Recognize False Beliefs
  - When prompted, did not explain why boy was looking under the bed

Child B’s Narrative

He’s not letting him have the uh train - the toy train. He put it under the bed, then took it out from under the bed. Put it in the toybox. He came over here and looked under but it wasn’t here. And he put his hand in, but it wasn’t there.

Characteristics of Child B’s Narrative
- Inadequate Reference Contrast
  - Child B did not differentiate between the two boys at all
- Inadequate Temporal Links
  - Child B did not consistently use time clauses or time sequencing words
- Use of Indefinite Vocabulary
  - Child B’s narrative is striking in its lack of specificity. No referents for pronouns of persons or objects (he, it), nor for locative or deictic terms (in, there).
Example

Goal and Objectives

- Goal: Child will demonstrate the production of developmentally-appropriate oral narratives
  - Objective 1: Child will use appropriate proper noun referents with at least 90% consistency in story-telling tasks across sessions.
  - Objective 2: Child will use appropriate time clauses or time sequencing words with at least 90% consistency in story-telling tasks across sessions.

Activities to Increase Higher Level Language Skills

- Inadequate Reference Contrast
  - Create-a-story hands-on activity using icons of items that must be used to introduce the proper noun before pronouns can be used.
- Inadequate Temporal Links
  - Activities that focus on sequencing - first in short stories (3 events) without implicit text, building to more complex simple text
- Failure to Recognize False Beliefs
  - Discussion of implicit text that includes the character’s feelings, thoughts, motives as reflected in the character’s actions.

Conclusions

An analysis of the narrative elicited from the DELV-CR can provide valuable information regarding a child’s early literacy development, regardless of the child’s dialect.

The DELV-CR can be used as a valuable resource in selecting appropriate higher-level language goals for children of various dialectal backgrounds.

Afterward / Post-script

Child A was referred to a reading specialist, at the end of her 1st grade year, 3 months following testing due to reading processing difficulties noticed by her classroom teacher.

Child B’s early writing is proving to be a reflection of his oral skills in terms of omissions.

References

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See Seminars in Speech and Language, 25 (1), Feb. 2004, devoted to explaining the rationale of the DELV.

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