



Speech Act Responses in Children: A Closer Look
 Valerie Johnson¹, Sonia Vargas², Jill de Villiers³, Peter de Villiers³ & Bernard Grela¹
¹University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT ²Hartford Public Schools ³Smith College, Northampton, MA



Introduction

- Purpose**
- To examine the performance of TD and LI AAE- and MAE-speaking children on a communicative role taking (CRT) task.
 - Semantic/pragmatic appropriateness was scored.
 - To examine the syntactic forms that TD and LI AAE and MAE children produce during the CRT task.
 - The forms are:
 - > Direct speech responses
 - > Indirect speech responses
 - > Partial/Mixed responses
 - > Ambiguous responses
 - Specifically, how does the dialect of AAE differ from MAE in the syntax of indirect speech reports?

Participants

- 529 TD and LI AAE- and MAE-speaking children between the ages of 4;0 and 9;11.
- 337 TD (n = 186 AAE; n = 151 MAE)
- 192 LI (n = 105 AAE; n = 87 MAE)
- Criteria used to be classified as TD AAE speaker:
 - Examining SLP identified child as an AAE speaker
 - Participants were identified as showing "significant deviation from MAE" according to the DELV-ST (Seymour, Roeper & de Villiers, 2003)
 - Identified as "lowest risk" TD language users by the DELV-ST diagnostic items
- Criteria to be classified as LI:
 - Examining SLP identified child as LI
 - Participant scored as "high" or "highest risk" on DELV-ST

Method

- The Role-taking subtest of the DELV: CR provided opportunities for elicitation of two examples of each of the following speech acts based on a two-picture sequence:
 - > Reporting an event (telling)
 - > Making a request (asking)
 - > Prohibiting an action (saying to)
 - For example, the child was asked, "What is the girl telling/asking/saying to her mother?"

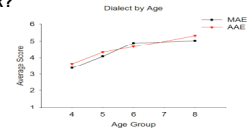
Coding

- Semantic/Pragmatic Appropriateness of Responses**
 - Appropriate = 1; Inappropriate = 0
- Syntactic Form of Responses**
 - Direct:** Type of response is directive or direct quote/interrogative (e.g., "He said, "Can I go out?")
 - Indirect:** Description of what was said by the character (e.g., "He asked if he could go out.")
 - Partial/Mixed:** Partial quote and description of what was said by character (e.g., "Can he go play baseball with his friend.")
 - Ambiguous:** Response does not fit in one of the three categories (e.g., "Play baseball.")

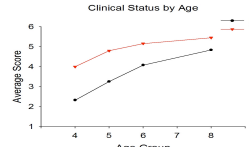
Results

1. CRT: Semantic/Pragmatic Appropriateness

- Question 1a: Are there significant differences between AAE- and MAE-speaking children on the CRT task?**



- Question 1b: Are there significant differences between TD and LI children on the CRT task?**



- TD significantly better than LI (p = .000)
- Interaction between clinical status and age (p = .001)

Results

2. CRT: Syntactic Form
Question 2a: Direct Speech responses

- AAE vs. MAE: NS
- TD vs. LI: NS
- Age: p = .000
 - Post-hoc:
 - * 4 < 6, 8
 - * 5 < 8
- No interactions

Question 2b: Indirect Speech responses

- AAE vs. MAE: p = .003
 - *AAE < MAE
- TD vs. LI: p = .002
 - *TD > LI
- Age: NS
- No interactions

Question 2c: Partial/Mixed Speech responses

- AAE vs. MAE: p = .000
 - *AAE > MAE
- TD vs. LI: p = .000
 - *TD > LI
- Age: NS
- Interaction between Dialect and Clinical Status: p = .016

Question 2d: Ambiguous Speech responses

- AAE vs. MAE: NS
- TD vs. LI: p = .028
 - *TD < LI
- Age: p = .002
 - Post-hoc:
 - * 4 > 8
 - * 5 > 8
- No interactions
- Further analysis: Indirect + Mixed/Partial Speech responses combined**
 - AAE vs. MAE: NS
 - TD vs. LI: p = .000
 - *TD > LI

Discussion

- 1. CRT: Semantic/Pragmatic Appropriateness**
- No significant differences were found between the two dialect groups. This indicated that the designed CRT task is not biased against AAE-speaking children.
 - The CRT task differentiates clearly between TD and LI populations.
 - The CRT task should accurately distinguish a language disorder from a language difference based on the semantic/pragmatic appropriateness of the responses provided by children.

2. CRT: Syntactic Form

- No significant differences were found between the two dialect groups for Direct speech and Ambiguous responses; however, significant differences were found between the two dialect groups for Indirect speech and Partial/Mixed.
- Indirect speech responses showed a clinical effect because the LI group produced more Ambiguous speech responses than the TD group. They were missing the syntactic markers that disambiguate the forms.
- Indirect speech responses showed an effect for the dialect group because MAE-speaking children produced more Indirect speech forms. AAE speakers produced more Partial/Mixed speech forms.
 - > Examining verbatim responses for Mixed/Partial revealed that the auxiliary verb was inverted in the AAE-speaking children's responses although the indirect speech form of the pronoun was used.
 - ❖ An inverted auxiliary verb is acceptable in embedded question forms in AAE (e.g., "I wanted to see [was it the one we bought]"; Green, 2002)
 - ❖ The TD AAE-speaking children used this dialectal indirect embedded form in place of the MAE indirect form, but only in the case of Interrogative speech acts.
 - ❖ LI AAE-speaking children produced significantly fewer of this indirect embedded form than the TD AAE.
 - ❖ When Indirect + Mixed/Partial forms were combined, the difference between AAE and MAE children was eliminated.