

## Toddlers Through First Grade Language: What does the Research Say

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### Abstract

There are many ideas concerning the appropriate lexicon to provide toddlers, preschoolers, and children through first grade. This presentation reviews the literature concerning language acquisition and the vocabulary used through Brown's V Stages through the first year of academic learning. Language samples from typically developing toddlers, preschool children, and first graders will be compared with similar language samples from children using augmentative communication. The augmentative communication systems explored will be both manual boards and speech generating devices (SGDs). Videos will be shown. Vocabulary availability will be compared to actual usage for the augmented communicators.

### Summary of proposal

Few topics in augmentative communication draw as much attention from educators and clinicians as vocabulary selection for young children. Much of this research has been based in the language of typically developing children (Banajee, *et al.*) (Beukelman, *et al.*, 1989) (Marvin, *et al.*) Actual language samples from young augmented children have not been collected until recently, (Hill).

The current authors wish to compare the data derived from typically developing children with that formally collected from SGD users and less formally collected from manual board users. The available lexicon will be compared to the lexicon actually used by the augmented communicators. SGD users' language will be compared with that of manual board users and with speaking children with disabilities who are their classroom peers.

The language of SGD users will be shown to be similar in lexical selection to that of typically developing children. Manual boards with core vocabulary will be compared to manual boards with a noun or context-specific vocabulary. The language production from SGDs using noun-rich, multiple-page systems will be compared with those SGDs using core vocabulary.

Analysis of typical toddler and preschool language reveals that 80% of a child's speech is made up of core vocabulary. This vocabulary has limited noun usage. Pronouns (I, me, mine, you, your, it) and demonstratives (this, that) perform diverse pragmatic and semantic functions including social control, affirmation, and establishing joint attention. Over 90 percent of toddler vocabulary is represented by fewer than 30 core words (Banajee, 2003). One hundred core functional words comprise 73 percent of preschool language usage (Beukelman, 1989).

Clinicians and teachers will be provided with principled approaches to select the first words to teach when implementing an AAC system. This presentation develops and applies a linguistic methodology for selecting the first words to teach four distinct AAC populations: toddlers, preschool children, first grade children, and young children with moderate to severe cognitive limitations.

A morphological and semantic method for expanding the 25 most frequently occurring toddler words into a teaching corpus of 75 to 100 words is discussed in terms of teaching strategies that focus on simple, functional words. Early functional word combinations are essential in the learning of semantic roles (agent, action, object), basic morphemes, and question structures -- Brown's Stages I through III (Brown, 1973).

### **References**

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