

UNIT 2. LEARNING DISABILITIES IN ORAL LANGUAGE: SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT



What are we going to learn in this unit?

- The importance of oral language.
- Components of language system: phonology, morphology, semantic and pragmatic.
- Classification of learning disabilities in oral language.
- Specific language impairment (SLI)
 - What is it?
 - Symptoms
 - Consequences in relationship with peers.
 - Consequences in reading and writing acquisition.
 - Psychoeducative intervention in classes for children with SLI.

Materials

- ✓ Dockrell & McShane (1992). *Children's learning difficulties*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- ✓ Ebbels, S. (2007). Teaching grammar to school-aged children with specific language impairment using Shape Coding. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* 23: 67–93.
- ✓ <http://www.education.com/topic/speech-disorder/>
- ✓ <http://www.youtube.com/user/RALLIcampaign>
- ✓ <http://www.ican.org.uk>
- ✓ <http://merrill.ku.edu/IntheKnow/sciencearticles/SLIfacts.html>

Other interesting web pages:

- ✓ <http://www.ncl.org/>
- ✓ <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/Pages/default.aspx>
- ✓ <http://www.ldonline.org/>

Introduction: The importance of oral language

Language is an extremely important way of interacting with the people around us. We use language to let others know how we feel, what we need, and to ask questions. We can modify our language to each situation. For instance, we talk to the small children with different words and tone than we conduct a business meeting. To communicate effectively, we send a message with words, gestures, or actions, which somebody else receives. Communication is therefore a two-way street, with the recipient of the message playing as important a role as the sender. Therefore, both speaking and listening are important for communication to take place.

1. Can you think of any other reasons why language is so important? Write one at least.
2. Because language is so important, how do you think a child with communication problems feels?

Before starting with the LD in oral language it is very important that we recall some concepts about the language system. Remember that oral language is listening and speaking (that is, comprehension and expression) and language has some levels or components.

3. See this picture about language levels and give two examples for every level (you can get more information in the Dockrell & McShane's chapter).

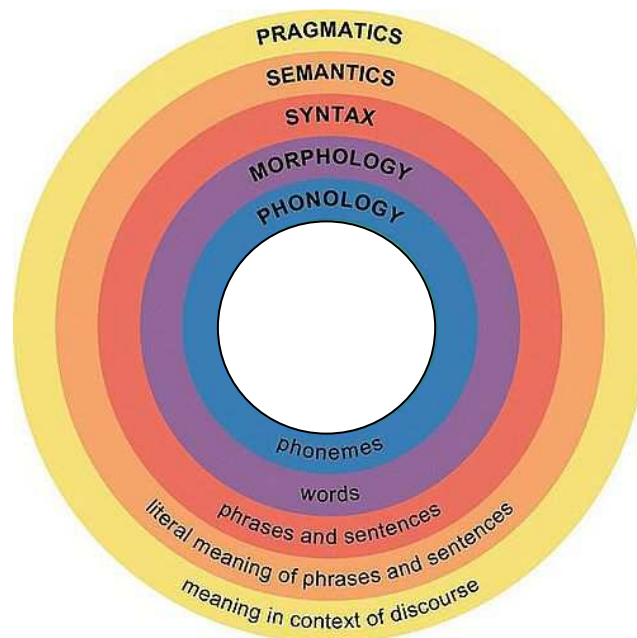


Figure 1. Components of Language System

Language difficulties may occur for a variety of reasons. Sometimes there is a precipitating organic cause such as hearing loss, which affects language comprehension, or a defect in the neuromotor control of the vocal tract, which affects language production. Sometimes a child has inadequate early language experiences and this

prevents the normal process of language acquisition from occurring. Sometimes language difficulties are one manifestation of general overall impairment in learning and cognitive functioning. There also is a large group of children who experience language difficulties in the absence of any of these causes. This group of children has LD in oral language.

How many types of LD in OL are?

4. Browse through the web page <http://www.education.com/topic/speech-disorder/> and describe briefly the main types of LD in oral language.

Moreover, there is another LD in oral language called **Phonological Disorders**. A child is said to have a phonological disorder if she/he has the ability to produce a given sound and does so correctly in some instances but does not produce the sound correctly at other times. Children with expressive phonological disorders are apt to experience problems in academic areas, and they are especially at risk for difficulties in spelling and reading. Determining whether a speech sound error is primarily an articulation or a phonological disorder is important because the treatment goals and procedures are different.

5. So, what are the differences between articulation and phonological disorders?

SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT (SLI)

You have seen that there are several types of LD in oral language but SLI is particularly important due to the fact that this problem is very frequent, persistent and disruptive. It is therefore essential that a teacher know the characteristics and how to improve the children's learning in class.

Such children will already have a diagnosis (usually in preschool) so that the parents will be able to report to you their specific characteristics.

What is SLI?

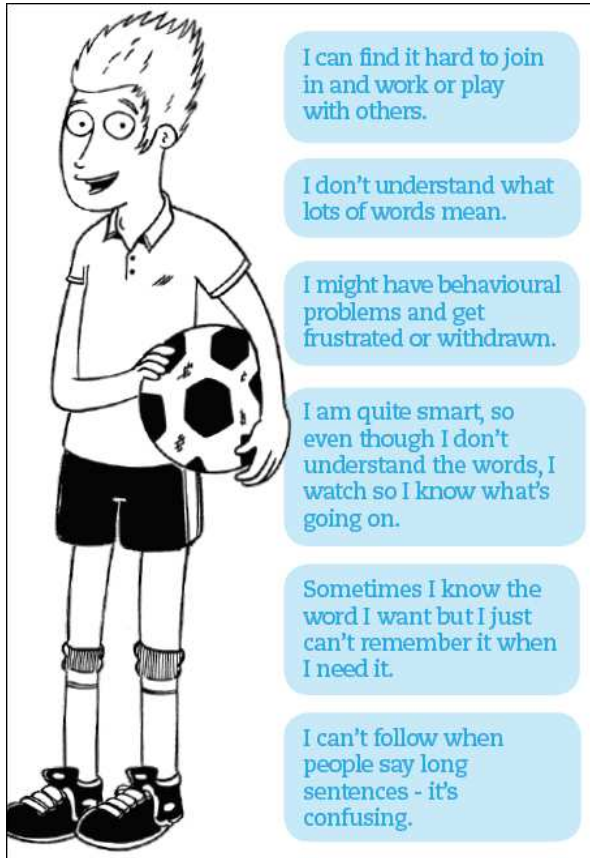
Specific language impairment is diagnosed where there is a failure of normal language development that cannot be explained in terms of mental or physical handicap, hearing loss, emotional disorder or environmental deprivation. In other words, SLI is diagnosed when a child fails to develop language normally for no apparent reason: hearing and intelligence are adequate and the social environment is unexceptional. Other terms to refer to this condition are dysphasia, specific developmental language disorder, receptive and/or expressive disorder.

En español, se conoce como Trastorno Específico del Lenguaje (TEL), disfasia o trastorno mixto del lenguaje expresivo-receptivo.

Compared with other disorder SLI attracts considerably less media coverage and research funding and whereas most member of the public have some idea of the characteristics of autistic disorder and dyslexia, this is not so for SLI. It is not a question of numbers: according to the epidemiological survey, SLI has a prevalence of around 7%, which makes it comparable in frequency to dyslexia, and it is seven times more common than autistic spectrum disorder (Bishop, 2009). One child in every classroom is

affected by a specific language impairment, a little-recognized condition that affects all aspects of life, prompting a group of leading academics to come together and launch.

What are the characteristics of specific language impairment?



Children with SLI are often late to talk and may not produce any words until they are 2 years old. At age 3, they may talk, but may not be understood. As they grow older, children with SLI will struggle to learn new words and make conversation. Having difficulty using verbs is a hallmark of SLI. Typical errors that a 5-year-old child with SLI would make include dropping the “s” from the end of present-tense verbs, dropping past tense, and asking questions without the usual “be” or “do” verbs. For example, instead of saying “She rides the horse,” a child with SLI will say, “She ride the horse.” Instead of saying “He ate the cookie,” a child with SLI will say, “He eat the cookie.” Instead of saying “Why does he like me?”, a child with SLI will ask, “Why he like me?”

6. Read carefully the text by Dockrell & McShane about *Problems within Language System* and complete the activities A and B on this chart.

	Phonological problems	Lexical and semantics problems	Syntactic problems	Pragmatic problems
A. Characteristics				
B. Ejemplos en español				
C. Victor <i>(Activity to complete in classroom)</i>				

Activity C (for classroom). Victor is a Spanish child in 3rd grade. He has an average IQ and his schooling has been regular. He doesn't have any hearing impairment or any other sensory problems. Please, listen carefully to the talk with Victor (we'll listen in class).

7. Children with serious language disorders are almost certain to have problems in social development. They are less likely to initiate conversations than their peers and frequently play a passive role in communication; when language-disordered children are asked questions, their replies rarely provide new information related to the topic.

Reflect about the difficulties that a child with SLI could have in his/her relationship with the peers.

8. Children with oral language problems are likely to have difficulties in both reading and writing. Catts (1993) reported that 83% of kindergarteners with speech-language problems show delays in reading acquisition. Moreover, children with speech-language difficulties are more likely than their typically developing peers to be "treatment-resistors" to generally effective early literacy interventions. Why do you think the children with LD in oral language could have a LD in written language too?

9. If you want to become specialized as an English teacher, you will teach English to children with SLI. Reflect about the difficulties that a child with SLI could have to learn a second language.

10. How can a teacher help a child with SLI?

To answer this question, use the information on the webpage http://www.ican.org.uk/en/what_is_the_issue/about%20sli/sli%20and%20schools.aspx, read this text and see the Duncan's case (see Figure 2).

It should be noted that, although children with SLI are at substantially increased risk of reading difficulties compared to other children, they are by no means destined for poor reading. Some youngsters with a preschool history of SLI go on to achieve normally in school, and those with ongoing difficulties can certainly be helped. Toward this end, there are a number of things schools can do.

*A comprehensive reading curriculum that provides **explicit, systematic** instruction in the abilities known to be important in reading — phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension — benefits all children, including those with language problems. In addition, information about whether children have a history of SLI and about their language abilities upon entry to kindergarten should be shared as they make the transition from preschool to formal schooling. Schools should be aware that a history of SLI increases the risk of reading problems even if children no longer meet eligibility criteria for speech-language services. These children must be monitored closely for early signs of reading difficulties — including difficulties in component reading-related skills such as phonemic awareness and knowledge of letter sounds — and provided with prompt intervention if it is needed.*

Children with continuing language difficulties will require speech-language services that are integrated and coordinated with reading instruction. A high-quality reading

curriculum, careful monitoring, and prompt, appropriate intervention as needed can help children with SLI achieve success.

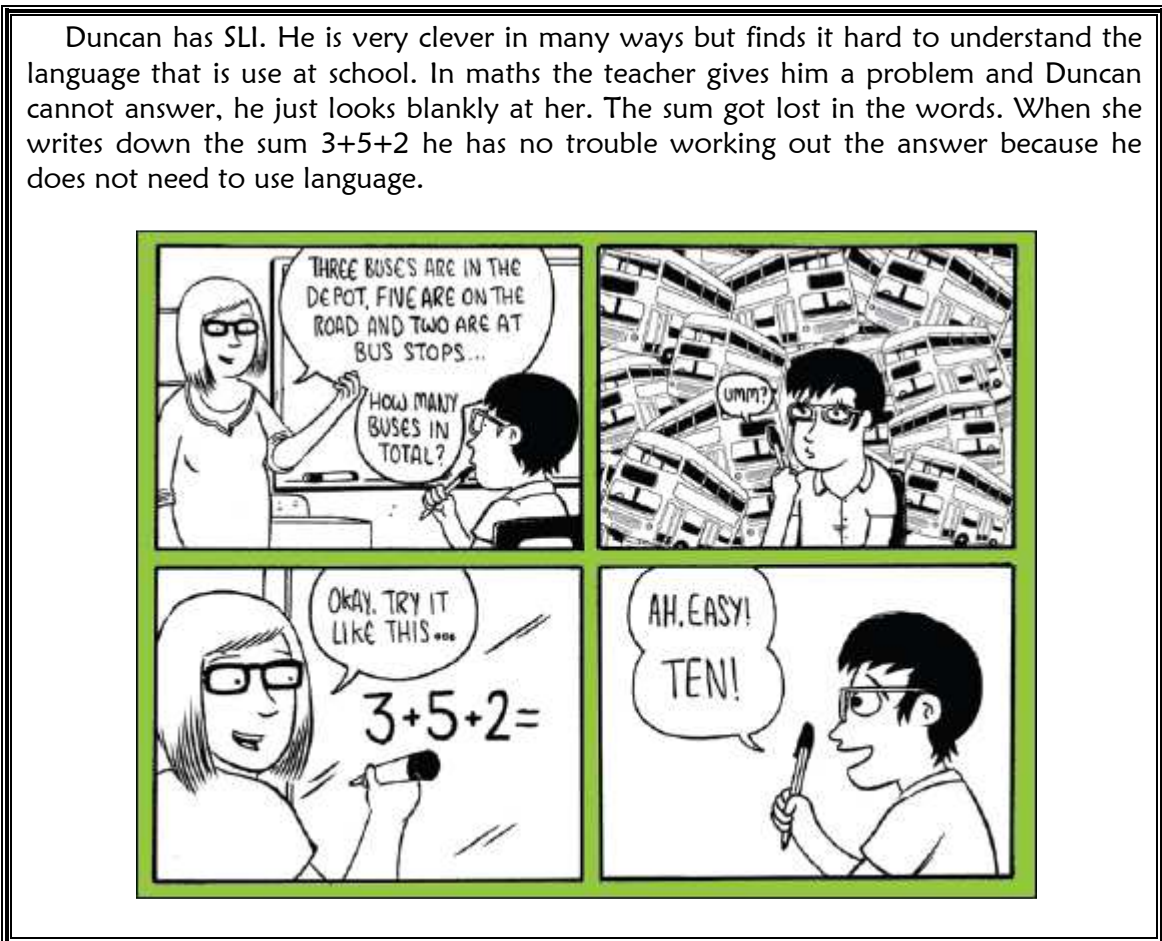


Figure 2. Duncan´s case

11. Read the document titled "Overview of Shape Coding System" by Ebbels and design an adaptation for a Spanish child using this methodology to improve his/her learning about syntactic structure, verb morphology and noun-verb agreement.
12. Raising Awareness of Language Learning Impairments (RALLI) is a Youtube channel created to raise awareness of language impairments. There you will find videos that explain what a language impairment is, the impact it can have and how to get help. Have a look and choose a video to watch and write a summary about it.
13. To finish the unit you can find a excellent summary at <http://merrill.ku.edu/IntheKnow/sciencearticles/SLIfacts.html>