

Trade-Offs between Verb Frequency and Syntactic Complexity in Children with Developmental Language Disorder

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Abstract : Purpose: Children with developmental language disorder (DLD) have persistent language difficulties and often face great challenges when demands are high. The aim of this study was to investigate whether verb frequency would trade-off with syntactic complexity when they talk. Method: Forty-five children with DLD, 45 chronological age matches with TD (AGE), and 45 MLU-matches with TD (MLU) who were Mandarin speakers were selected from the previous study. Language samples were collected under three contexts: conversation about children's family and school, story retelling, and free play. MLU, verb density, utterance length difference, verb density difference, and average verb frequency were calculated and further analyzed by ANOVAs. Results: Children with DLD and their MLU matches produced shorter utterances and used fewer verbs in expressions than the AGE matches. Compared to their AGE matches, the DLD group used more verbs and verbs with lower frequency in shorter utterances but used fewer verbs and verbs with higher frequency in longer utterances. Conclusion: Mandarin-speaking children with DLD showed difficulties in verb usage and were more vulnerable to trade-offs than their age-matched peers in utterances with high demand. As a result, task demand should be taken into account as speech-language pathologists assess whether children with DLD have adequate abilities in verb usage.

Keywords : developmental language disorder, syntactic complexity, trade-offs, verb frequency

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