

A COMPARISON OF DEVELOPMENTAL SENTENCE SCORES  
FROM HEAD-START CHILDREN COLLECTED IN FOUR CONDITIONS

by

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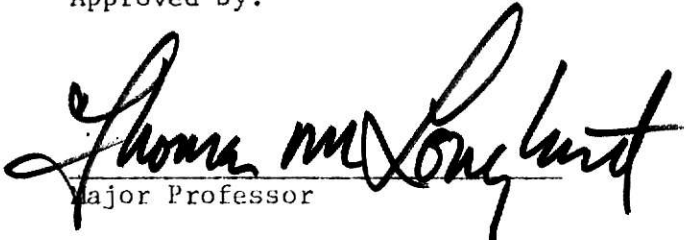
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## INTRODUCTION

Many speech pathologists and other professionals have evaluated the development of language in children. Language assessment has typically been completed by administration of standardized tests and comparison of the results with normative data. Such assessment tools are readily available, easily administered, and quick to ascertain a deviance when compared to normative data. However, when emphasis is placed on such structured test formats, the child's typical linguistic performance is often excluded by such factors as inappropriate stimuli and unnaturally structured tests situations. Consequently, a more representative sample of oral language would serve as a more adequate measurement of how the child functions and how well he can function.

The elicitation of oral language to obtain a representative sample of one's typical linguistic performance has become increasingly popular within recent years (Longhurst, 1974). Assessment of oral language samples has often been computed by one of the following linguistic measures: type-token ratio, a feature of vocabulary quality and diversity; mean length of response; and the length complexity index (Miner, 1969), a qualitative measure of sentence length and complexity. Of increasing popularity is the Developmental Sentence Scoring procedure (Lee and Canter, 1971; Lee, 1974) which assesses the syntactical development of the subject's verbal output. One major problem, however, with using this method of assessing speech and language

is that there is no standard method presently employed for eliciting the language sample from the child.

Various methods have been utilized to elicit oral language samples from handicapped children. Elicitation procedures have included free play, toys, pictures, child/child and child/adult conversations, and engagement in various other activities. Menyuk (1964) obtained language samples from three different situations--child/adult, child/child, and the child's response to a variety of other circumstances. Wilson (1969) used the Picture Story Language Test (Mykelbust, 1965) to obtain a language sample from forty normal subjects ages three to seventeen. Wilson recommended this as a standardized procedure although Griffith (1969) criticized this procedure. Labov (1970) criticized all methods of elicitation which included questions and answers between the adult and child, regardless of stimulus materials being utilized. He recommended that a group of children be left alone with a guinea pig and instructed to talk to it so it wouldn't get lonely. He found that under these conditions the children's language was much richer in content, ideas, and syntactic structure than when adults were included in the conversation. In another study, (Engler, Hannah, and Longhurst, 1973) it was recommended that the clinician use "optimum stimulus materials" and avoid excessive participation by merely asking the child what he sees or what is happening and then allowing the child to talk freely.

Several recent investigations have studied effects of elicitation procedures upon the linguistic complexity of the samples as measured by type-token ratio, mean length of response, and length-complexity index. Cowan, Weber, Hoddinott, and Klein (1967) studied variations in mean length of response as a function of the stimulus conditions.