DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 600   EC 182 015

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TITLE   Verbal Strategies by Specific Language Impaired.
PUB DATE   Nov 85
NOTE   8p.; Paper present_d at the Annual Convention of the
               American Speech-Hearing-Language Association (12th,
               Washington, DC, November 22-25, 1985).
PUB TYPE   Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports -
               Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Communication (Thought Transfer); Elementary
               Education; *Language Handicaps; *Verbal
               Communication
IDENTIFIERS   *Referential Communication

ABSTRACT
          In an analysis of verbal strategies, 15 specific
language impaired (SLI) children were compared with two groups of
normally developing children: age-mates and language-mates
Communicative success or failure was ascertained in tasks requiring
Ss to verbally communicate novel referents to an adult. Ss'
utterances prior to and following perceived failure were analyze.
Results indicated three referential strategies: (1) association of
known referent to the novel drawing; (2) description of the novel
referent; and (3) mixed responses. SLI and age-mate groups relied on
the description strategy significantly more often than
language-mates. Further, following a communicative obstacle, age-mate
and language-mate Ss adopted a new strategy significantly more often
than SLI Ss. SLI Ss failed to respond significantly more often than
the other two groups. (CL)

Paper presented at the meeting of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Washington, D.C., November 1985

Snyder and McLean suggested that language intervention ". . . focus less on the products of language development and more on the processes, or strategies, critical to such development" (1977, p. 341). A focus on adding new strategies or modifying existing strategies is likely to bring about the most efficacious treatment.

However, in order to accomplish this feat, effective strategies and existing strategies must be identified. Toward this end, McLean and McLean (1977) have described several possible language-learning strategies. In addition, investigators such as Chapman and Kohn (1977) have conceived research in which various strategies are identified. The present study examined strategies used in communicating new information both prior to and following perceived failure. As Dweck and Licht (1980) have noted, failure has dramatic effects on performance. "For some children, these effects are positive ones. . . . For other children, the effects are quite the reverse: Efforts are curtailed, strategies deteriorate, and performance is often severely disrupted" (Dweck & Licht, p. 197).

The following questions were addressed: 1. Are specific language impaired and normally developing children distinguished by the verbal strategies used in communicating new information? and 2. Do verbal strategies vary before and following perceived failure?

Procedure

Subjects

Fifteen specific language impaired children were compared with two groups of normal developing children: age-mates and language-mates. Language impaired subjects had no identifiable neurologic, visual, or hearing impairments. Fifteen age-mates were chosen on the basis of chronological age and 15 language-mates were chosen on the basis of linguistic maturity. Subject characteristics are given in Table 1.

Method

A communication task required each subject to verbally communicate novel referents to an adult. Communicative success or failure was signaled by the adult's response. In the case of communicative failure, the adult made an explicit statement, "I don't understand." Subjects' utterances prior to and following perceived failure were analyzed across a number of variables, including strategies employed.

In order to evaluate subjects' responses for communicative effectiveness, 10 independent listeners chose referents based on each subject's verbal communications. The result was a score from 0 to 10 for each communication with 0 representing the lowest possible value and 10 the highest.

Results

Analyses of subjects' responses yielded a number of interesting results. Three referential strategies were identified: (1) the association of a known referent to the novel drawing; for example, "I think it's a birdie," "Looks like a moustache," or "This one sorta looks like a pretzel or a corn

curl." (2) a description of the novel referent; for example, "It goes up and down and up and down and up and down and up and down and up and down," or "It has four lines and they all have curves on them," and (3) mixed responses (those which combined the first two strategies). Figure 1 displays the communicative values for each strategy across subject groups. The use of a known referent was a significantly more successful strategy for all groups. The age-mate group was more effective than SLI and language-mate groups when using the known referent strategy. The SLI group was more effective than the other two groups when using descriptions of the novel referent. A known referent strategy was clearly the most effective strategy. In addition, since the description of the novel referent strategy proved to be rather burdensome in terms of communicative length, the known referent strategy was also more economical.

The frequency of using certain strategies varied across subject groups. A known referent strategy was used about equally across groups (SLI = 71%, AM = 68%, LM = 70%). However, SLI and age-mate groups relied on the description of the novel referent strategy significantly more often than language-mates (SLI = 22%, AM = 28%, LM = 11%). Language-mates mixed known referent and description of the novel referent strategies significantly more often than the others (LM = 19%, SLI = 7%, AM = 4%).

Figure 2 compares responses by the three groups following a communicative obstacle. Age-mate and language-mate groups adopted a new strategy significantly more often than SLI children. Conversely, SLI children failed to respond significantly more often than age-mates and language-mates.

Summary

Overall, results suggest that specific language impaired children are superior to language-mates when communicating novel referents and less effective than age-mates. SLI children are more likely to use descriptions of the novel referents than age-mates and language-mates. Finally, SLI children are more likely than age-mates and language-mates to not respond following a communicative obstacle.

References

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Table 1. Characteristics of specific language
         impaired, age-mate, and language-mate subjects.

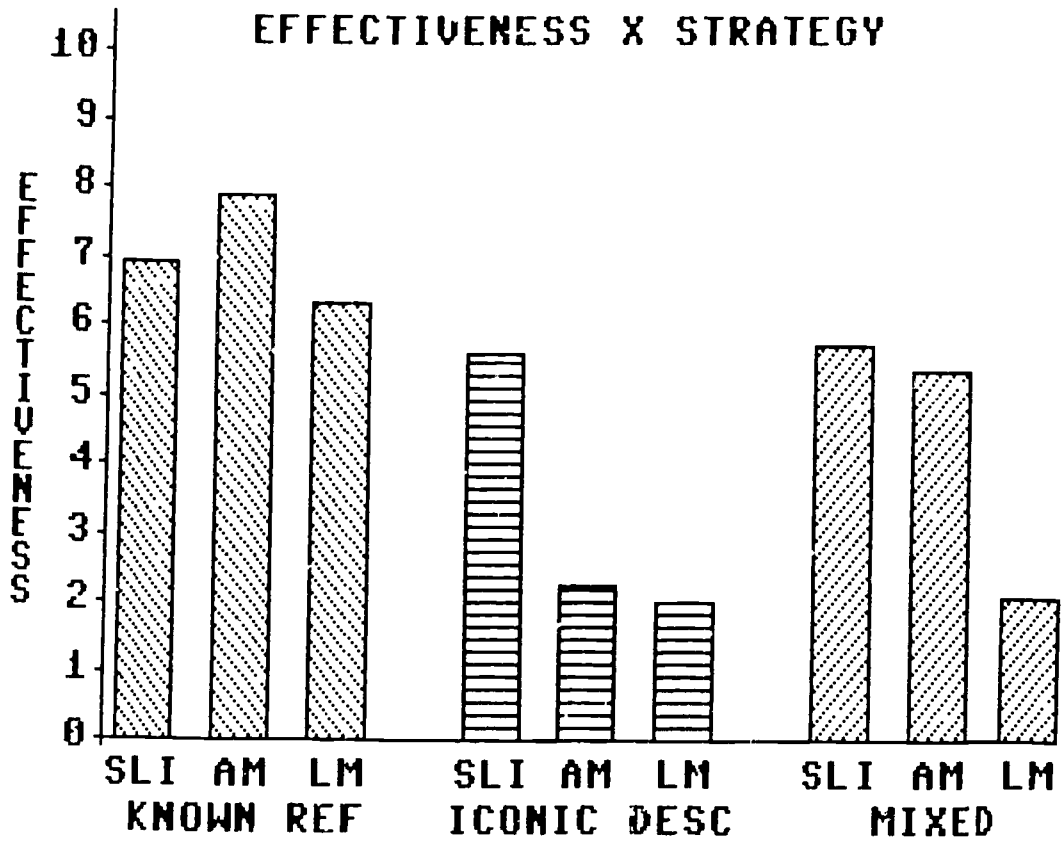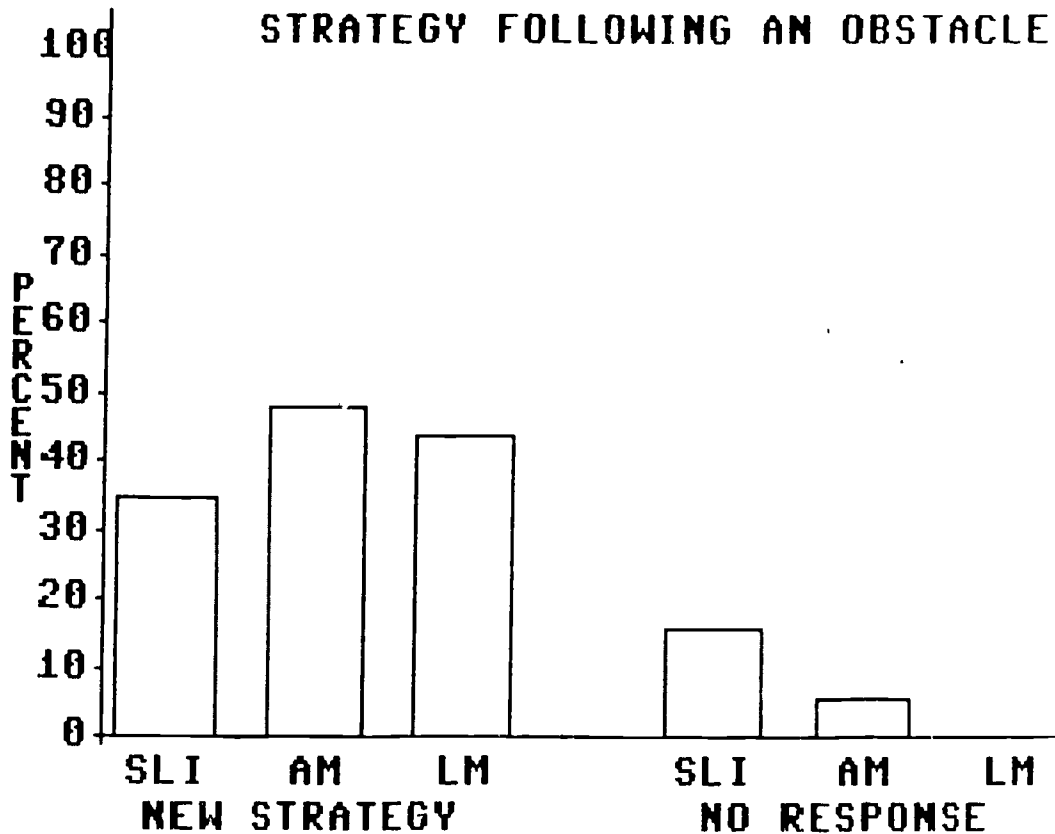| Subjects	Mean		
	C.A.(mos.)	MLUm	Receptive Language(mos.)
SLI	98	4.98	86.2
AM	97.7	--	122.8
LM	62.3	5.04	84.4

Figure 1

EFFECTIVENESS X STRATEGY

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Figure 2

STRATEGY FOLLOWING AN OBSTACLE

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