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The Effects of Past Experiences on the Vocabulary Use and Sentence Structure of a Two-Year-Old

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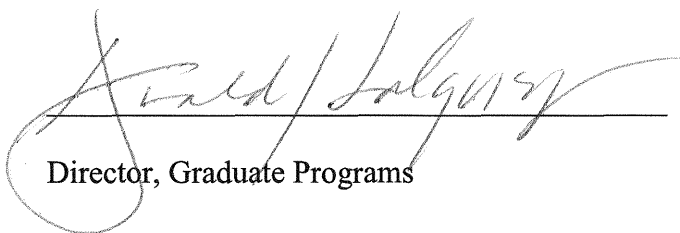_____   _____
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Abstract

Literacy acquisition does not begin with the onset of formal instruction in schools.

Exposure to all aspects of literacy (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and

language) in the home literacy environment before school-age can significantly

impact an emergent learner's foundation of literacy. The purpose of this study was to

examine how one emergent learner's language related to past experiences changed

over time. This six-week naturalistic empirical action research study investigated the

following research question: How do past experiences affect vocabulary use and

sentence structure of a two-year-old? Throughout the study, naturally occurring data

were collected every time the participant discussed a past event. A journal, a laptop,

and a handheld recording device were used in order to record the data, which were

then inputted into one or two charts (Appendix A and Appendix B) for analysis. The

results of the data analysis were that adults and objects can influence an emergent

learner's language development related to past events, including through the

modeling of appropriate sentence structure as well as exposure to academic

vocabulary that the learner might imitate. Implications for teachers are addressed in

addition to recommendations for further research in this area.

Chapter I: Introduction

Problem Statement

> *It began as a typical day at the local mall; trips to some of the stores*
> *and then a visit to the food court with my husband and our two young*
> *children. As we were eating our lunch, John (age 2) began to look*
> *around. My husband and I glanced at each other because we knew the*
> *inevitable question would be coming soon. Just then, John asked,*
> *"Can I ride the carousel?" We told him that if he ate a good lunch,*
> *we would take him on it. After lunch, when we were standing in line*
> *for the carousel, John longingly looked through the iron posts on the*
> *fence separating the intriguing carousel from the bustling food court.*
> *I quickly snapped a picture with my phone. Little did I know that John*
> *would revisit this food court experience two times within the next*
> *week, talking about details including riding the carousel as well as*
> *what we ate for lunch. This event, including the people and objects in*
> *it, would come to influence John's vocabulary development as well as*
> *his sentence formation.*

I can just see it now. My two-year-old son John (pseudonym) will soon be

able to read the words on the page, not just the pictures as he can now. However, that

point in time is NOT the beginning of his literacy. Just as a basement is the

foundation for a well-supported house, many literate experiences have come before

reading the words on a page that have helped support building John's literacy. When

a house is viewed from the outside, the basement is not even visible, but it still plays

a very important role in supporting the structure. Similar to a house's foundation,

many of these building blocks of literacy go unnoticed. Professionals and parents

often think that these early aspects of literacy don't exist or that they happen

automatically and they don't need to be concerned about literacy until later in the

preschool years (Sparling, 2004).

The New York State Common Core Learning Standards for English Language

Arts and Literacy, adopted on July 19, 2010 divides the standards into four strands,

which are: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. However, they

state that these "processes of communication are closely connected" in "an integrated

model of literacy" (p. 4). The home literacy environment (HLE) is the amount of

exposure children have in their homes to activities that help them develop literacy

(Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002). A young child's HLE significantly impacts their

foundation of literacy (DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000). The importance of the

HLE as a contributor to young children's emergent literacy is grounded in the fact

that the home serves as a setting in which language and literacy are typically first

encountered (Purcell-Gates, 1996). Due to the links between a strong home literacy

environment and the acquisition of literacy and its major components, it is important,

especially to teachers, to know what type of literate background children may

possess.

Significance of the Problem

Literacy learning does not begin with formal instruction in schools. Children

begin learning about reading, writing, listening, speaking, and language at a very

early age by observing and interacting with adults and other children as they use

literacy in everyday life activities (Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2008). This manner of

literacy acquisition is known as the emergent literacy approach (Clay, 1966). A

central principle of the emergent literacy approach is that children acquire crucial

foundation skills and an understanding of literacy well before the onset of formal

instruction (NAEYC, 1998). This process occurs over time, mostly in a social

context (Sparling, 2004).

A number of at-home ethnographic and linguistic research studies have been

conducted in which researchers investigated how critical literacy concepts,

knowledge, and skills developed over time (Bissex, 1980; Heath, 1983; Scollon &

Scollon, 1981; Taylor, 1982; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). These studies mainly

looked at the reading and writing development of young children at home. In another

study in 2008, Senechal, Pagan, Lever and Ouellette looked at the relationship

between shared reading and four-year-old children's vocabulary and morphological

and syntax comprehension. Canadian researchers (Evans & Shaw, 2008) examined

the positive relationship between shared book reading and vocabulary development as

well as shared reading and word recognition. Though I searched Academic Search

Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and PsychINFO databases using the

terms *at-home research, young children, literacy, emergent learner, daily events,*

language development, and *relationship,* I have not come across a study that looks at

an emergent learner's vocabulary use and sentence structure in relation to past

experiences, so I see the need for research regarding the way in which emergent

learners use language related to past events and how this language evolves over time.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how one emergent

learner's language related to past experiences changed over time. This was done

through the exploration of his use of language and comparing his language to

experiences he encountered (see Appendix A and Appendix B). The following research question was addressed: How do past experiences affect vocabulary use and sentence structure of a two-year-old?

My central interest was in studying John's approach to emergent literacy that serves as the foundation for his language acquisition. My intention was to form conclusions that will help others better understand what some aspects of language development can look like before formal schooling. Additionally, my research will help me to better understand the linguistic background of some emergent learners in my own future classrooms.

Study Approach

This study was conducted in a naturalistic setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from an epistemological stance. Epistemology investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge (Maione, 1997). Specifically, I took a relativist perspective in which there was interaction between me, the researcher, and the data (Maione, 1997). My research was grounded in sociolinguistic theory, which recognizes the importance of language and interaction in learning (Bernstein, 1996; Tompkins, 2010). Sociolinguists believe that oral language serves as the foundation for learning to read and write (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Therefore, in order to address the above question, I conducted the research about my son (age 30 months) in my home. My data collection consisted mostly of observation and journaling daily at home and where needed. During observations, I took notes on paper, on my laptop, or with a handheld recording device. I used the recording device when I could not

write or type to give a narration of the data as soon as it occurred. Audio-recorded

data were transcribed into my journal within 24 hours.

Rationale

I was interested in uncovering how conversations and proceedings affected

how John selected morphology (i.e., combining meanings into words) and syntax

(i.e., combining words into sentences) while speaking and how that selection changed

over time (Senechal et al., 2008). Recent studies found that between the ages of two-

and five-years-old, children advance to words that are more morphologically complex

and that are embedded in more syntactically complex sentences (Brandone, Salkind,

Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006; Hoff, 2006b). In a positive HLE with average adult

speech, children are exposed to language that not only promotes vocabulary

expansion, but it also provides models of contextually clear morphology along with a

variety of complex sentence patterns (Senechal et. al., 2008). What remained to be

learned through my research was just how much influence the HLE had on emergent

learner's language development grounded in past experiences.

As a parent of two young children and a future educator of elementary

students, I have a strong interest in parental involvement at home, especially in

regards to literacy. For my son John, I was intrigued by how his speech and

vocabulary were developing, especially in relation to his HLE and events that he had

participated in daily. With reading and writing at the foundation of knowledge and

communication, it is important that youth learn literacy at a very young age. Since

knowledge of morphology and syntax development are crucial to successful reading

and writing, I believe parents should create a bountiful HLE that models appropriate morphological and syntactical choices and stresses the importance of reading and writing.

Out of interest and convenience, I chose to conduct the research at home with my older son, John, who was progressing through the beginning stages of emergent literacy. I had been observing his speech development since he first started talking. I began to notice his vocabulary started to include information about recent events that he had been involved in. Also, as I conversed with John, I observed changes in his selection of morphology and syntax, and I wondered just how these components of speech developed in emergent learners.

My son's linguistic reactions to past events were central to my study. The basis for this study was rooted in sociolinguistic theory (Bernstein, 1996). Sociolinguistic theory recognizes the importance of language and interaction in learning (Bernstein, 1996; Tompkins, 2010). Sociolinguists believe that oral language serves as the foundation for learning to read and write (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This theory is built upon the principle that language is made as people act and react to one another (Cairney, 2003). Cairney (2003) drew four conclusions about sociolinguistic theory based on the work of four pioneers in the field, Bahktin, Gumperz, Halliday, and Hymes. First, literacy is learned in groups as people relate to each other in order to communicate and participate in society. Second, literacy is driven by purpose and bound by context. Third, actions of others and pre-set patterns of group interaction produce reactions. Fourth, sequences of actions, not just single

acts, are often how people act with and react to each other. By examining John's development embedded in sociolinguistic theory in a naturalistic setting, I was able to get the most accurate answers to my research question.

Definition of Terms

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language (Whitney, 1867).

Psycholinguistics "provides insights into how we assemble our own speech and writing and how we understand that of others; into how we store and use vocabulary; into how we manage to acquire a language in the first place; and into how language can fail us" (Field, 2004, p. ix).

Sociolinguistics is the study of language in human society (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008).

Literacy is a multifaceted and dynamic process with ties to cognitive, social, linguistic, and psychological features (Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Literacy involves the ability to read and write, speak, listen, view, and think (Cooper, 1997) in order to communicate effectively for real life purposes. According to Zygouris-Coe (2001), "Children learn to develop these abilities through real opportunities and support provided by experienced individuals (i.e., parents, teachers, or peers)" (p. 4).

Emergent Literacy is the process in which children learn to read and write; term coined by New Zealand educator Marie Clay (Clay, 1966; Tompkins, 2010). According to Sulzby and Teale (1991), "Emergent literacy has expanded the purview of the research from reading to *literacy* because theories and findings have shown that

reading, writing, and oral language develop concurrently and interrelatedly in literate

environments" (p. 728).

The *Home Literacy Environment* is the amount of exposure children have in their

homes to activities that help them develop literacy (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan,

2002). DeBaryshe, Binder, and Buell (2000) believe that the home environment is

particularly important in the development of foundational literacy skills because

children may have opportunities at home to

> (a) become familiar with literacy materials, (b) observe the literacy activities of others, (c) independently explore literate behaviors, (d) engage in joint reading and writing activities with other people and (e) benefit from the teaching strategies that family members use when engaging in joint literacy tasks. (p. 119–120)

Summary

The home literacy environment plays a critical role in young children's

acquisition of important literacy skills. John has yet a few years until formal

schooling, but I was interested in examining the hidden elements in his foundation of

attaining literacy during this crucial period of emergent literacy in order to better

understand the linguistic development that takes place before students enter school.

By examining John's language development related to past experiences, I was able to

gain insight into how young children might develop emergent literacy skills that will

help them in their education and in life in general.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Language development of children changes over time and can be highly

influenced by people and events in their surrounding environment. This is especially

true of children's literacy attainment at home with their relatives and other household

members. In this chapter, I investigate three main viewpoints on the theory of

language acquisition. The first is the behaviorist perspective (Skinner, 1957), the

second is the innatist perspective (Chomsky, 1957, 1959), and the third is the

interactionist/developmental perspective (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

Research seems to indicate that both interaction with and input from the environment

play a role in young children's procurement of language (Heath, 1982; Hollich,

Hirsch-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2000; Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005; Kesler, 2010;

Piaget, 1951; Robinson, 2008; Sachs, Bard, & Johnson, 1981; Senechal et al., 2008;

Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). In addition, I also consider research regarding the

background of language development, the importance of interaction, and how events

play a role in developing language.

Background of Language Development

The development of language has been a widely studied topic for centuries by

everyone from linguists to psychologists to anthropologists to behaviorists. Different

theories have been developed and challenged by scientists in the field, but one theory

remains central to language development, the theory of language acquisition

(Lightbown & Spada, 2006). This theory states that language does not have to be

taught directly in order for children to learn and use it; rather, it is acquired over time

(Jalongo, 2003; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). How it is acquired, however, has been a topic of debate for many years (Brandone, Salkind, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006; Chomsky, 1957, 1959; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Piaget, 1951; Skinner, 1957; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

The acquisition of language. Many prominent behaviorists, linguists, and psychologists have researched language acquisition for the past century, and a number of theories have emerged. The acquisition of language results from mental processes that receive input from the environment and yield as their output the ability to produce and understand language (Hoff, 2006a). Over the past fifty years, three main theoretical positions have sought to explain language acquisition: the behaviorist, innatist, and interactionist/developmental perspectives (Chomsky, 1957, 1959; Piaget, 1951; Skinner, 1957; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

The behaviorist perspective. The behaviorist perspective appeared in the 1940s and 1950s and was best supported by American behaviorist and social philosopher B. F. Skinner. Central to his behaviorist theory is the idea that children imitate the sounds and languages of those around them (Skinner, 1957). When children engage in this behavior, they are rewarded with positive reinforcement. They are encouraged by their environment, sometimes in the form of praise and at other times in the form of successful communication. Through practice and support, they continue to imitate sounds and patterns until they have generated habits of correct language use. This theory lists the environment as the source of everything the child needs to learn (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Skinner, 1957).

The innatist perspective. Noam Chomsky, an American linguist, has been one of the most influential figures in linguistics, and his radical ideas in the mid-1900s about language acquisition and how it is stored in the mind sparked a sort of revolution in many aspects of linguistics and psychology (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Central to his beliefs is the idea that all human languages are essentially innate and that they are all governed by universal principles (Chomsky, 1957, 1959). His theoretical principles contradicted the behaviorist viewpoint that language is learned through imitation and replication of sounds and words (Skinner, 1957). Instead, Chomsky (1959) contended that children are biologically programmed for language, and the environment makes only a basic contribution. He posited that children can know more about the structure of their language than they can be expected to learn based solely on exposure to language (Chomsky). The idea that this grammatical framework is engrained in children from birth is called *universal grammar* (Chomsky, 1959; Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

The interactionist/developmental perspective. Cognitive and developmental psychologists contend that the innatist perspective deposits too much emphasis on the final product (adult speech), discounting the developmental aspects of language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The interactionist/developmental perspective combines both the behaviorist and innatist perspectives into the theory that what children need to know about language is available in the language they are exposed to through interactions with the people and objects around them, as well as what is rooted in their biological make-up (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1926, 1951) observed infants and children in their play and interaction with objects and people. Piaget's theory of language acquisition is built on the interaction between the child and the things in the environment that can be observed and manipulated (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). According to Piaget (1951), language is a symbol system that children can use to express knowledge acquired through interaction with the physical world.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978) observed interactions among children and also between children and adults in schools in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. He theorized that language develops primarily from social interactions, and that in a supportive, interactive environment, children can reach a higher level of awareness and routine (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) believed that community plays a central role in the process of making meaning. Similar to Piaget, Vygotsky posited that young children are curious and actively involved in their own learning and the discovery and development of new understandings (schema). However, Vygotsky placed a stronger emphasis on social contributions to the process of development, while Piaget highlighted self-initiated discovery (Thirumalai, 2003). Central to his sociocultural theory is the belief that language develops from social interactions for the purposes of communication (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sociocultural theory of learning. According to Genishi and Dyson (2009), three commonalities to learning any language exist. First, we acquire our primary language simply by being human and surrounding ourselves with language, not by

being taught language directly. Second, children learn language through numerous social interactions within many different sociocultural environments. Third, language that is spoken or written holds open an invitation for a response from others; it invites dialogue (Genishi & Dyson).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory states that as a social activity, learning is highly influenced by the "funds of knowledge" that learners bring to situations, and that knowledge is meaningfully constructed in social activities. "Funds of knowledge" refers to the summation of cultural and social experiences that assist learners as a result of interacting with their families and communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988), social collaboration gives way to higher order functions that might not be possible without the interaction with others. Vygotsky (1962) claimed that in order to understand the development of a child, one must not solely examine the child, but also the external social world in which they have developed. In his sociocultural philosophy, Vygotsky (1978) described learning as being rooted in social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment.

According to Brandone, et al. (2006), even though language development never officially ends in a lifetime, the most important years are in infancy and preschool. Through interactions with others, children have opportunities to discover the meanings of words (semantics), the way in which meaning is represented (language form – phonology, morphology, syntax), and how language is used for the purpose of communication (pragmatics) (Brandone et al.).

Even though theorists may disagree about the most important influence on children's language development, most theorists agree on the basic chronology of language learning and that heredity and environment both play a role. Based on a combination of the environment, in which children are engulfed in a sea of words, and biological make-up, children slowly and sequentially acquire the nouns, verbs and phrases of language, as well as the intonations and dialects of those with whom they interact (Jalongo, 2003).

The Importance of Interaction in Language Development

Children learn language from input from their environment. Young children often imitate the words and actions of their caregivers (Robinson, 2008). Imitation eventually leads to intention, or actions with a goal in mind. Robinson's (2008) review of current research states that intentions are first understood to relate to the physical world and second to the mental world. When information is transferred from the physical to the abstract, learning takes place. Each time information is assimilated into the memory, it can be used as a basis for future learning. When new information is presented, schema, or a network of prior knowledge, is activated in order to assist in comprehension (Robinson, 2008). Piaget (1926) first coined the term schema when he suggested that as children progress through the stages of language development, they tend to interpret experiences based on what they already know.

As discussed by Thirumalai (2003), Piaget divides the functions of child language into two groups: egocentric and socialized. Then, each group is further

divided into sub-categories. Piaget (1926) identified one of the sub-categories of socialized speech as *adapted information*. In adapted information, children's speech involves specified information with the purpose of exchanging their thoughts with others. Adapted information takes place when children purposefully take the point of view of the listener (Piaget). Furthermore, adapted information leads to dialogue, where children can talk about themselves as easily as any other subject of conversation (Thirumalai, 2003).

Input is the single most significant aspect that contributes to the development of the content, use, and form of language (Brandone et al, 2006). Children must hear language and experience it being used in the context of communication in order to learn it. The importance of interaction in language learning is highlighted in cases where interaction is missing. For example, researchers Sachs and colleagues (1981) studied the language development of a hearing child named Jim (pseudonym) whose parents were deaf. Jim's parents did not use sign language with him, and his only exposure to oral language was through television, which he watched frequently, and a brief experience in nursery school. As a result of a lack of interaction in language learning, all aspects of Jim's language were below age level when an assessment was given at three years and nine months of age. Although he attempted to express ideas appropriate to his age, he used unusual, ungrammatical word order.

When interventions were used and Jim began conversational sessions with an adult, his expressive abilities began to improve. By the age of four years and two months, most of the unusual speech patterns had disappeared, replaced by structures

more typical of his age. Jim's younger brother Glenn (pseudonym) did not show the same type of language delay because he had his older brother as a conversational partner. Jim is two years older than Glenn, so when Jim was receiving structured language supports, Glenn was just beginning to form simple sentences (Sachs et al., 1981).

Jim showed very rapid acquisition of the structures of English once he began to interact with an adult on a one-to-one basis. The fact that he had failed to acquire language normally prior to this experience suggests that impersonal sources of language such as television or radio alone are not sufficient. One-to-one interaction gives the child access to language that is adjusted to his or her individual level of comprehension. The adult may repeat or paraphrase when the child does not understand something, as well as respond appropriately to utterances by the child. Once the child gets the response, they realize if they were understood by the adult or not (Sachs et al., 1981). There is no substitute for this type of interaction; television cannot provide adjustments to the needs of each individual child, even if the program has a simpler language and is geared towards children. Once children have acquired some language, however, television can be a source of language and cultural information (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

In a study that examined input on vocabulary and grammatical development by Hollich and colleagues (2000), 338 children ranging in ages from 11-months to 27-months participated in a series of up to 12 separate laboratory science experiments. Half of the participants were male and half were female. The children

were placed on a parent's lap in front of the testing apparatus. The parent put on a

blindfold so as not to interfere with the test results. Then, two sets of alternating trials

took place, one with new objects and one with familiar objects. For each trial with

new objects, there was an exploration phase, a salience phase, a training phase, and a

test phase. For each trial with familiar objects, there was an exploration phase and a

test phase. Objects that were chosen for the familiar trials (e.g., book, keys, block,

and ball) were chosen based on the assumption that even the youngest participants

would have names for these objects in their vocabularies. Objects that were chosen

for the novel trials (e.g., tea strainer, garlic press, bottle opener, etc.) were chosen

based on the strong likelihood that young children would not have labels for these

objects in their vocabularies.

In the exploration phase for both novel and familiar objects, two familiar or

two novel objects were displayed for the child to see for 26 seconds. In the salience

phase, an experimenter hid behind the display board and turned it to reveal two new

objects side-by-side. Then the experimenter said something neutral to get the child to

look up at the display board (e.g., "Look up here!" or "What do you see?") and the

child was given six seconds to look at the novel objects until the board was turned

around. The times that each infant spent looking at each novel object provided a

baseline measure of their relative salience. In the training phase, two objects were

placed in front of the display board for the child to see. The experimenter used a

variety of social cues (e.g., eye gaze, pointing, or combining these two) or

verbal/language cues (e.g., words, mouth noises, other nonlinguistic noises) in order

to draw the child's attention to the desired object. If words were used to draw the child's gaze, the word was not the correct label for the object. In the test phase for both new and familiar objects, the experimenter engaged the child when the objects were out of view (e.g., "Where's the modi?"). The experimenter then hid out of sight and the board with two objects was turned for the child to see for six seconds. During the time the child could see the objects, the experimenter would say, "Do you see the X? Look at the X." Then the board was flipped so the child could not see the objects anymore (Hollich et al., 2000).

All of the trials were videotaped and data from the salience, labeling, and test phases were coded for three behaviors: looks to the right and left at the objects, attends to the experimenter, and looks at neither the objects nor the experimenter. The results showed that during the familiar object trials, children looked longer at the target object than the non-target object. This study revealed that the process and rate of acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical components are sensitive to environmental input (Hollich et al., 2000).

In a review of how different social contexts support and shape language development, Erika Hoff (2006a) addressed many studies examining language acquisition. She found evidence that supports the idea that exposure to adult speech plays a role in children's acquisition of structural elements of language. Some of the findings suggested that children who hear longer utterances in input are more advanced in syntactic development (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998). In addition, grammatical complexity is increased in some aspects of syntax development (e.g., question-

asking) as a result of positive differences in input (Hoff, 2006a). From her review of

research, Hoff revealed that the process and rate of acquisition of morphology and

syntax are sensitive to environmental input.

Hoff (2006a) also examined the effects of syntactic complexity and the

vocabulary richness of child-directed speech. Child-directed speech, or the way

adults talk to and interact with children, can be characterized by many aspects,

including a slower rate of delivery, higher pitch, more varied intonation, shorter and

simpler sentence patterns, stress on key words, frequent repetition, and use of

paraphrase (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Hoff states that the total amount of speech

that is directed toward children has a positive relationship with vocabulary

development. This is because an increase in speech means an increase in the variety

of vocabulary that children receive in input. It was found that mothers who produce

more speech illuminate the same words more times, and frequency in input is a strong

correlate of word learning (Naigles & Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998). Furthermore, the order

in which words enter children's vocabularies depends on the frequencies of those

particular words in maternal speech, and, for verbs at least, on the degree to which the

structure of the sentences in which they are used reveals their meaning (Naigles &

Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998).

How Events Influence Language Development

A number of studies have explored the practice of adults engaging (or not

engaging) in shared reading with children and the impacts that the interactive

experience can play in language learning (Heath, 1982; Karrass & Braungart-Rieker,

2005; Kesler, 2010; Senechal et al., 2008). Shirley Brice Heath's (1982)

ethnographic study across three racially and socioeconomically diverse communities

in North Carolina demonstrated the variation that exists in the use and purpose of

literacy. She studied families from a predominately White middle-class community

(Maintown), a predominately White working-class community (Roadville), and a

mostly Black working-class community (Trackton). Maintown children were

consumers and producers of print early on, being read to and creating stories of their

own to share. Roadville children were immersed in print from the time they were

born through decorations, games, and storybook reading for very practical and

educational purposes. Trackton children were not read to and were exposed to print

only when the situation called for it and print was available in the context (e.g.,

reading labels).

Heath's (1982) findings revealed how the values, expectations, and practices

surrounding literacy were different across the three communities. Although the

Maintown and Roadville children were better prepared for literacy expectations in

school practices, Trackton children's language use was more holistic and dynamic

(e.g., playful use of language in sophisticated manners such as creating analogies).

Heath argued that Trackton children did not lack literacy exposure; rather, the

practices they encountered led to the development of skills different from those

expected to prepare them for school success. In any of these communities, child

socialization and language practices contributed to the language development of the

young children (Heath). Although children from Trackton were not read to and had

little print exposure, this should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of low-literacy homes. Instead, these children were exposed to rich language and literacy experiences that were not as common or were accomplished in nontraditional ways (Purcell-Gates, Melzi, Najafi, & Orellana, 2011).

While examining at what age shared reading begins to impact later emergent literacy skills, Karrass and Braungart-Rieker (2005) asked parents about shared book reading while it was occurring. In this study, 87 typically developing infants and their parents visited a research lab at 4-months, 8-months, 12-months, and 16-months of age. The infants were from families that were well-educated, primarily White, and middle-income. The infants were assessed using the Bayley Mental Scale, which includes items such as listening selectively to words, showing objects on request, and following directions, as well as parent report items regarding language development.

The researchers found that shared book reading at 8-months was linked to later expressive language abilities at 12 and 16 months. This finding supported other research that the age of onset of shared book reading is a good predictor of later language abilities. The reason for this link is not fully understood, but the researchers hypothesized that joint attention (the ability to follow another's gaze and share the experience of looking at an object or activity) provides infants with consistent opportunities for learning. Also, parents use more sophisticated language with their infants during the book readings, which may result in richer input for children's language development. Lastly, the authors state that many parents use shared book

reading to teach vocabulary through labeling, having the infant point, and using

questioning activities (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005).

Through a study on using shared reading to build vocabulary and

comprehension, Ted Kesler (2010) examined first through third graders in a high-

needs, urban elementary school. Kesler's study, grounded in sociocultural practice,

used four approaches during shared reading to promote vocabulary knowledge and

comprehension. One approach he calls *possible sentences*. In it, he lists all of the

Tier 2 vocabulary words (high-frequency, academic words [Beck, McKeown, &

Kucan, 2002]) in the same sequence that they appear in the text and he asks students

to come up with a possible sentence that they think might actually be in the text.

These sentences are used to help predict what the text might be about. Additionally,

while reading the text, the researcher put a tally mark next to each word whenever it

occurred in context. After reading, students were invited to generate new sentences

based on new textual information. Furthermore, students were asked to later share if

they heard any of the targeted words being used in their daily interactions. Another

approach to building vocabulary and comprehension Kesler uses is called *using*

context clues. In this method, he uses cloze procedures, where he omits selected

words from the text in order for the students to use their background knowledge and

cues imbedded in the text to supply appropriate words. A third technique that Kesler

uses is *repeated readings*, in which students are read to or read a short passage again

and again to help develop fluency. Additionally, questions can be answered, ideas

can be clarified, and characters can be better understood with repeated readings. The

fourth approach Kesler uses is called *using our bodies*, where he asks students to use

gestures along with other instructional approaches to help students understand

difficult academic vocabulary. Tactile and kinesthetic activities provide alternative

modes bedsides language for expressing understanding.

Throughout the shared reading time, students were engaged in their own

learning and gave thoughtful, in-depth responses. As a part of every shared reading

session, active collaboration and meaningful social interactions helped students

expand their vocabulary and deepen their reading comprehension.

Researchers Senechal, Pagan, Lever, and Ouellette (2008) conducted a study

that considered how shared reading at home can affect children's expressiveness in

vocabulary choice, morphological knowledge (use of grammatical markers), syntax

comprehension (rules in which words are arranged into sentences) and narrative

skills. The study included 106 children (49 boys and 57 girls) with an average age of

four years and eight months. For each child that participated, one parent was also a

part of the study. The researchers hypothesized that shared book reading experiences

provide models of contextually clear morphology along with a variety of complex

sentence patterns, and therefore provide increased exposure to specific structural

elements of language. Data were collected through tests conducted over two testing

sessions that were less than one week apart, with each session lasting approximately

30 minutes. In the first session, children completed the morphological and syntax

subtests (TACL-3), a personal story, and the shorter of the two picture book stories.

In the second testing session, children completed the Expressive Vocabulary Test, the

longest of the two picture book stories, and the nonverbal intelligence subtest. Children's narratives were audiotaped. Additionally, each child was tested by the same examiner at each testing session.

The study (Senechal et al., 2008) revealed a positive correlation between the frequency and variety of shared reading and children's oral language skills as well as their morphological knowledge. Syntax comprehension, however, was not predicted by shared reading directly, but rather, by the parents' own print exposure. Lastly, the researchers found that the frequency of shared reading does not significantly predict children's narrative ability. Although shared reading could expose children to the key structural elements of narratives, young children might not appreciate the presence of these key elements and they might not be able to use them in their own storytelling. The associations found between shared reading and vocabulary, as well as morphology, demonstrate that frequent exposure to shared reading may help children acquire important component skills for reading comprehension (Senechal et al.).

Summary

The theories surrounding language development have long been researched and debated. Some scholars argue that children acquire language through environmental exposure to it (the behaviorist perspective) (Skinner, 1957). Other linguists believe that children are born with the inherent ability to learn language (the innatist perspective) (Chomsky, 1957, 1959). And yet others combine the first two theories into the interactionist/developmental perspective (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) in which both surroundings and genetic make-up play a role in the

progress of language acquisition. Many recent studies support the notion that interaction can influence children's linguistic acquisition (Hoff, 2006a; Hollich et al., 2000; Sachs et al., 1981). Additionally, research has found that events, specifically shared reading situations, have been found to have an impact on children's language development (Heath, 1982; Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005; Kesler, 2010, Senechal et al., 2008). Children's exposure to emergent literacy and language at home and interaction with others and events in their environment are very important in their linguistic expansion.

Chapter III: Methods and Procedures

This study was designed to explore one emergent learner's speech and vocabulary development in relation to past events in which he participated. Specifically, I addressed the following research question: How do past experiences affect vocabulary use and sentence structure of a two-year-old? In this chapter, I describe the research participant and context of the study, my positionality as the researcher, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the procedures involved. In addition, I consider the criteria for trustworthiness as well as the limitations of the study.

Participant

John is a two-and-a-half-year-old Caucasian boy who comes from a middle class working family. He is an average two-year-old with a one-year-old baby brother, whom he loves very much. John stays home every day with his mother or father; he does not attend any daycare/preschool services. He is read to on a daily basis by both parents, mostly at naptime and bedtime. He has many favorite books that he likes to be read repeatedly, which he can "read" to others by using the pictures to explain the text. In addition, he is able to fill in missing words when they're left out of a phrase or sentence in many of his favorite books. Furthermore, he has a large oral vocabulary, consisting of at least 500 words.

Context of the Study

Through this study, I collected naturally occurring data. I did not ask my son the change any activities. I listened to and interacted with my son the same as I do

every day. I transcribed his language as it pertained to the research question and fit

the parameters of the protocols (see Appendix A and Appendix B). The study was

conducted mostly in my single-family home with my two-year-old son. My husband

and I live in a suburban town in upstate New York. The house has three bedrooms,

one bathroom, an eat-in-kitchen, a large living room, a breezeway, and a garage.

Additionally, there is a large backyard that is often used during playtime. Notes were

collected at home, both inside and outside, as well as in the car, at relatives' or

friends' houses, and wherever warranted.

Positionality of the Researcher

I grew up in a nice suburban town in upstate New York, in a middle-class

neighborhood. I am a young, Caucasian mother of two children under three-years-

old. I received my Bachelor's degree in Childhood Education, grades 1-6, and I am

currently studying to obtain my Master's degree in Literacy, birth-grade six. Between

the time I received my undergraduate degree and when I had my children, I substitute

taught per-diem for two-and-a-half years in multiple suburban and rural school

districts.

I believe reading, writing, listening, speaking, and language (New York,

2010) are the foundation for knowledge and communication. The idea of *emergent

literacy* (Clay, 1966) refers to how young children interact with print before they can

actually read or write. This gradual process occurs over time, from birth until a child

can read and write in what we consider a conventional sense (Tompkins, 2010). The

emergent literacy approach looks at reading and writing as reciprocal processes where

one does not precede the other (Clay, 1966). Couple this approach with the home

literacy environment (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002) that students are exposed to

outside of school, and that is where my interest in children's emerging literacy

development lies. I believe that children's exposure to all aspects of literacy, not just

reading and writing, before formal schooling plays a very important role in their

future of education and literacy acquisition in the school setting.

Data Collection

Data from this home-based case study were collected using field notes that

were written, typed, or audio recorded. In my role as a stay-at-home mom, I am

exposed to John's speech and language on a daily basis. The field notes contain

excerpts or summaries of statements and conversations between John and me or

others if I was present. These conversations occurred anywhere and anytime,

including outside play, inside play, eating meals, car trips, bath time, and visits with

relatives/friends. Specifically, I took notes on John's language that he used in

relation to an event that happened in the past, and I noted what the event was and

when it occurred. On average, I recorded John's speech development at least four

days per week for each of the six weeks that the study covered. When I did not have

access to a pen and paper or my laptop in order to take notes (e.g. – driving in the car,

swimming), I used a handheld recording device to narrate the conversation or

statement as soon as it was over. It was impossible to predict when John might link a

prior event to his language, so it was important to keep my notebook, laptop, or

recording device with me at all times when I was with him during this study.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data first by ensuring that John's language truly connected to a prior event. Then, I examined how many days or hours it had been since the event occurred. Trends were examined in order to better understand how John's word choice and sentence structure that is related to prior experiences changed over time. In order to use the data collected to answer my research question, I broke this section into two subsections: *Sentence Structure* and *Vocabulary*.

Sentence Structure. Using Appendix A, I analyzed John's sentence structure and how it changed over time, including completeness, complexity, subject-verb agreement, correct use of pronouns, and the use of affixes. This chart showed me how often John's sentences were fragments versus complete when he was constructing sentences that related to a prior event. Also, I was able to see how often these sentences were simple, complex, or compound. Using this chart, I was able to tell if John conjugated the verbs properly based on the subject, as well as if he chose the correct pronoun for each sentence that related to a past experience. Lastly, this chart helped me understand what prefixes and suffixes John used while building these sentences.

Vocabulary. Using Appendix B, I looked at vocabulary words that were new or difficult for John. I analyzed if he used the vocabulary word correctly in his sentences. Also, in order to examine how complex each new or difficult word was, I classified each one into one of three tiers based on how frequently the word would be used in typical English. Using the guidelines set forth by Beck, McKeown, and

Kucan (2002), I decided if the new or difficult vocabulary words fit into Tier 1 (basic, everyday words), Tier 2 (high-frequency, academic words), or Tier 3 (low-frequency, specialized words). Appendix B shows how many words were added to John's vocabulary due to the event and how complex they are.

Procedures

This study was conducted over a period of six weeks during January and February, 2012. I gathered and analyzed data throughout the entire six weeks. Most of the data were written or typed in a journal at the time that they were collected. When a tape recorder was used to collect data, I transcribed the data into my journal within 24 hours. In addition, at the end of each day in which I gathered data, I added vocabulary words that were new to or difficult for John, if any, to Appendix B. Also at the end of each day that resulted in a collection of data, I analyzed John's sentence structure using Appendix A.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

Due to the fact that I am with John about 95% of the time, this study encompassed persistent observation, which contributed to the validity of the study. There were a large number of observations noted in the journal, which in turn produced a lot of data for both of the observation charts (Appendix A and Appendix B). Additionally, this study contains transferability, which provides detailed descriptions of the participant and research context. Lastly, validity was established through dependability in that the research process is described in detail and open to examination.

Limitations of the Study

This study contains several initial limitations, including the short duration of the research (six weeks) and the small number of participants (only one). Ideally, this topic should be studied over several years with multiple, diverse participants, and the relationship between emergent language and early literacy acquisition in school should be examined. The results of the study will not be generalizable across different populations because the sample size only included one child. Also, the fact that the only participant is my son was a limitation of the study. During the course of the research, John realized that I was noting specifics about his speech development; however he did not produce drastic results one way or the other on purpose. Additionally, the research was collected by one person using one method (field notes from observations). Being the only observer and recorder, I was not able to record *every* time John talked about a prior experience, but I did so every time I was present.

Summary

During this six week case study, data were collected whenever John linked a past occurrence to his speech. The information was written/typed into a journal and a tape recorder was used when access to writing/typing was limited. The research specifically focused on John's use of new or difficult vocabulary words related to the event and also the way in which John structured his sentences and how the morphology changed over time. Two charts (Appendix A and Appendix B) were used to help analyze his sentence structure and vocabulary use. Using these charts,

trends were identified to see how John's vocabulary choice and syntax changed over

time when talking about past events.

Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate how one emergent learner's language in relation to past experiences developed over time. During the six weeks of this naturalistic empirical action research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Adelman, 1993), organic data were collected using methods of observation and recording. In order to gather data, a journal, a handheld recording device, and a laptop were utilized. The data were then entered into two charts (see Appendix A and Appendix B). In terms of my role as researcher, I partook in the observation and collection of the data, as well as the conversations at times (due to my role as the subject's mother). The research setting for this study was mostly in our home environment, including outside. Additionally, a small portion of the data collected was from the participant's statements and conversations made in the car and at other people's houses. The research question that was addressed in this study was: How do past experiences affect vocabulary use and sentence structure of a two-year-old? In this chapter, I discuss the results of the data analysis.

Adult Influence on Language Development

As the only adult recording John's language development, I was also the only adult conversing with him as he talked about and asked questions about past experiences in terms of the information documented for my research. All of the data collected were from times that it was just John, his younger brother Ryan, and I present and/or involved in the conversation. In my role as John's mother, I would often ask clarifying questions when he made a statement, especially if I didn't

understand everything he was saying. For example, one day John said, "There was

something at the other play date. There was a giraffe there. And there was this

thingy that pinched" (*pinching with fingers*). I responded with, "What thing that

pinched?" in order to reveal what he was talking about, to which he added, "The

thing, that digs on the floor. Can you remember?" Another example of an instance

that I asked an explicatory question was when John said, "When you made cupcakes

for Ryan and we put that thing down and it spins just like this." I responded with,

"Yeah, what about it?" to which he said, "And I wanna see Cosmo bunny." These

exchanges were nothing more than the normal everyday conversations that we usually

participate in. In other words, I never provoked a conversation about past

experiences on purpose in order to obtain a better response for my research.

As part of our routine conversations, I often responded with a natural reaction.

For instance, when John made the statement "I had your pillow when you were on

your trip," I replied by saying, "Yep, but now you don't have it because I'm back!"

Another occurrence of my natural reaction to John's speech was when John said,

"There was a spider at Grama's house. Uncle Mack ate it!" I responded by saying,

"He didn't eat it, he was only pretending." Additionally, when John asked questions,

I answered with appropriate, expected replies, which sometimes triggered him to say

more. For example, one morning John asked me, "Did we take a bath before bed?"

and I said, "Yeah." Then he went on to ask, "Does Ryan usually come in?" to which

I answered, "Yeah, you always take a bath together." Then he added, "When he's

sleeping he can't come in." Another example of my responses to John's questioning

was when John inquired, "Do you remember in that little mice book, that picture you looked up in your phone?" I said, "Yep, a badger," to which he supplemented with, "Yeah, maybe we can go see a badger sometime in the zoo."

What Triggers Language Grounded in Past Experiences?

Statements made by John or conversations prompted by him in relation to past experiences were activated by different things. There were four prominent triggers that impelled John to link a past occurrence with his speech. Sometimes, we would be discussing an upcoming event and he would remember a similar event. At other times, John linked specific vocabulary words or concepts that he heard to prior happenings. Additionally, sometimes John made associations between recent prior episodes and his language because the events were newly produced. Last, at times, John discussed a past event when he saw a visual object that reminded him of the event.

An example of a time when we were discussing a future event was when we were talking about going to his Grandmother's house later that day to go sledding and he said, "And I went sledding with Aunt Linda and I was sick." We had been talking about a future event and he gave the conversation a new direction by talking about an event that occurred more than a year prior. Another similar example in which John changed the course of the conversation was when we were talking about going to a birthday party in a week and he said, "I remember Cosmo bunny." He was referring to almost twelve weeks earlier when we were looking at a friend's pictures on the computer and she had a picture from her bunny Cosmo's birthday celebration in

which he was licking the frosting off of a cupcake. John connected the future

birthday party to the bunny's past birthday party experience that we had viewed in the

pictures.

In terms of a situation in which John made a connection to a past event based

on specific vocabulary or ideas related to the vocabulary that he heard, one day I was

saying to him how it's nice that he shares his water bottle with his younger brother

Ryan since Ryan loves to drink out of a bottle with a straw. The idea of sharing with

his brother triggered a memory from about a month earlier when we saw his cousin's

bunk bed and I told him he will have to share a room with his brother soon and they

will sleep in bunk beds too. After making the statement about sharing the water

bottle, John said, "I will share that bunk bed with Ryan. And he will go down low,

and I will go up higher. Way, way, way, way, way up here" (*gesturing up high in the

air with his hands*). Another example in which John connected vocabulary to a past

experience was when we were talking about how John liked spoons when he was a

baby just like his brother. The idea of him as a baby led to a link with an experience

from over a month prior in which we hung ornaments on our Christmas tree,

including several special ones from when John was born. In response to me

mentioning John liking spoons when he was a baby, he said, "We hanged something

on the Christmas tree when I was a baby. And we hung it there. And I wanna sing to

the Christmas tree."

Very often, John would talk about recent past experiences because they were

fresh on his mind, sometimes occurring earlier the same day. To illustrate this point,

one night we were eating dinner when John said, "You said we couldn't go far to the crane when we were outside?" He was referring to a couple hours earlier when we had walked across the street to the hospital that is under construction in order to get a close-up view of an enormous crane that was being used for the construction. Another example that shows this type of connection was one day, after John had taken an afternoon nap, he said, "Did I goed on the carousel yesterday?" He was making a reference to almost six hours earlier when he rode the carousel at the mall after we ate lunch there.

In other instances, tangible items triggered a statement/conversation about a past experience. Case in point, one day I bought a specific cup-of-soup that John had tried and while we were putting away the groceries, John said, "Know how I ate that cup of soup that Josh brought over? When I ate the cup of soup?" John was referring to about a month prior when his friend Josh came over with his mom for a play date and we all ate lunch together. Josh had brought a package of cup-of-soup that the two of them shared. Additionally, the next day when John was eating the cup-of-soup that I had bought, he said, "I'm eating it like Josh. I was sitting in that chair when Josh was sitting in my chair. Did her mama have to go pick up Dina?" Here again, he was indicating the same play date when his friend Josh came over for lunch. Another day while we were looking at pictures, John said, "Yeah, I was looking in to see cause it was almost our turn. And we had fruits when I ate my burger." He was referring to five days previous when he rode the carousel at the mall after we ate lunch there. In this case, the picture triggered the memory and speech related to the past event.

In regard to the major influences that triggered John's language development related to past experiences, he would most often verbalize events because they were recently generated. Figure 1 shows how the 34 prior events that John referred to are classified in relation to the four main triggers.
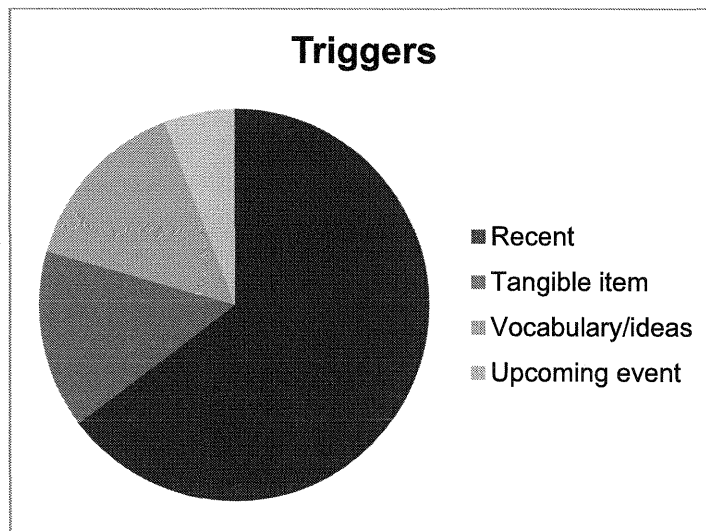
Figure 1. Main triggers of John's speech regarding past experiences.

Twenty-two references to past events were part of John's speech because they happened recently and were fresh on his mind. Five prior experiences were referred to because of a tangible item, another five were discussed because specific vocabulary or idea(s) inspired John's language, and two prior happenings came up while discussing upcoming events. Based on the interactionist/developmental perspective (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) discussed in Chapter II, it makes sense that John's language that pertained to past events would be based on the language he was exposed to through communication and interaction with the people and objects around him, in addition to what is biologically programmed in his

composition as a human. Additionally, the sociocultural theory of learning (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978) comes into play here; John's language was acquired through exposure to the prior experiences and through various social interactions within a variety of sociocultural circumstances. John used his "funds of knowledge" (aggregate cultural and social experiences resulting from interactions with family and community [Moll, et al., 1992]) to discuss the past events.

Developing Sentence Structure Over Time

During the six weeks in which data were collected, I recorded 73 sentences related to 34 past experiences. Using Appendix A, I noted the date, each sentence and what past experience it was related to, as well as sentence completeness (fragment, complete, or run-on), sentence complexity (simple, complex, compound), subject/verb agreement, whether the correct pronoun was used, and if the verb used had a prefix or suffix. Table 1 shows the results of the recorded data.

Table 1

Components of Sentence Structure

Components	Completeness			Complexity			Subject/verb agree-ment		Correct pronoun used		Verb prefix (P)/ suffix (S)			
	Fragment	*Complete*	*Run-on*	*Simple*	*Complex*	*Compound*	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*	*(P) re-*	*(S) -ed*	*(S) -ing*	*(S) -s*
Sub-total	5	63	5	47	25	7	102	11	94	1	4	16	14	2
Total	73			79			113		95		36			

Note. A *fragment* is a sentence that is missing a subject, verb, and/or does not complete an idea. A *complete* sentence contains a subject, verb, and a complete idea. A *run-on* sentence has at least two parts that are improperly connected. A *simple* sentence contains a subject, a verb, and expresses a complete thought. A *complex* sentence has an independent clause joined by one or more dependent clauses. A *compound* sentence contains two or more independent clauses. A *prefix* is added to the beginning of a word in order to alter the meaning. A *suffix* is added to the end of a word in order to alter the meaning.

As noted in Table 1, the majority of the 73 sentences John created were complete sentences (about 86%). Due to John's very young age and his use of the words *and* or *but* as transitional words at the beginning of sentences, I included sentences that started with either of these words as complete as long as it contained a subject, verb, and a whole thought. For example, both of the following sentences were categorized as complete: "But Daddy doesn't have a crane," and "And it swinged over my head and Daddy's head." Out of the five sentence fragments indicated in Table 1, John was usually either adding a thought to the first sentence or answering a question. An example of a sentence fragment in which John added a

thought to the first sentence is the second sentence in this data: "Know how I ate that cup of soup that James brought over? When I ate the cup of soup." An example that illustrates a sentence fragment in John's speech that resulted from him answering a question is evident in the following exchange: John said, "This guy has a big nose like we were watching." I then asked him, "Like Gonzo?" to which he responded, "Yeah, like Gonzo." The incomplete sentences were pretty evenly spaced throughout the six weeks of research, some toward the beginning, some in the middle, and some near the end.

On the other hand, the bulk of the five run-on sentences documented in Table 1 were recorded toward the end of the six week study. The following sentence demonstrates an instance when John connected clauses inappropriately and formed a run-on sentence: "When I get bigger and I can work in the crane like those instruction workers." In this example, John did not need the conjunction *and*. At other times, John combined too many clauses together, forming a run-on sentence. The subsequent sentence illustrates this point: "I tipped my head back when I were at the barber and then I got down and I sat with Daddy in the spin chair and then the barber cut my hair." When run-on sentences fit this pattern, the analysis was split for the remaining components (*sentence complexity, subject/verb agreement, correct pronoun used*, and *verb prefix/suffix*) and the run-on sentence was treated as if the parts were actually separate sentences. (See Appendix A.) The first part of this run-on sentence (*I tipped my head back when I were at the barber*) was classified as a complex sentence in which the first subject/verb pair (*I tipped*) agreed and the second

subject/verb pair (*I were*) did not agree. In both subject/verb pairs, the correct

pronoun (*I*) was used. Additionally, the first verb contained the inflectional suffix

-*ed* (*tipped*) and the second verb (*were*) contained neither a prefix nor a suffix. The

second part of this run-on sentence (*then I got down*) was categorized as a simple

sentence in which the subject/verb pair (*I got*) agreed and the correct pronoun (*I*) was

used. There was no prefix or suffix for this verb. In terms of the third part of this

sentence (*I sat with Daddy in the spin chair*), it was grouped into the simple sentence

category in which the subject/verb pair (*I sat*) agreed and the correct pronoun (*I*) was

used. Here again there was no prefix or suffix used in conjugating this verb. The

fourth and final section of this run-on sentence (*then the barber cut my hair*) was also

placed into the simple sentence category. Once again the subject/verb pair (*the

barber cut*) agreed, however there was no pronoun used or any verb prefix/suffix.

Similar to the manner in which run-on sentences were scrutinized and

assessed in parts, whenever a sentence was deemed complex or compound, the

remaining components (*subject/verb agreement, correct pronoun used,* and *verb

prefix/suffix*) were split in order to analyze the sentence constituents. (See Appendix

A.) Since complex and compound sentences contain at least two clauses joined

together, and each clause, whether dependent or independent, contains a subject and a

verb, this type of breakdown was necessary. This adjustment accounts for the lower

number of sentences compared to the numbers of *subject/verb agreement* and *correct

pronoun used* columns represented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of John's sentences that were recorded were simple (about 60%). Almost one-third of the sentences recorded in this study were complex, and less than 10% of the time John used compound sentences. Ninety percent of the time, John's subject agreed with the verb used and in all but one case he used the correct pronoun. Many times, neither yes nor no was checked in the *correct pronoun used* column because John used the noun instead. Similarly, there were many instances when N/A (not applicable) was recorded in the *verb prefix/suffix* column because the verbs chosen did not contain any affixes. As evidenced in Table 1, John is proficient in using inflectional verb suffixes (both *–ed* and *–ing*), and he seldom uses the verb prefix *re-* or the plural suffix *–s*. The four times that he used the prefix *re-* were for the word remember (twice he was asking me, "Do you remember…" or "Can you remember?" and twice he said, "I remember…"). Five out of the 16 times that John used the past tense inflectional *–ed* suffix he used it incorrectly. For example, instead of *hung,* he said, "We *hanged* something on the Christmas tree when I was a baby." Another example of John misusing the inflectional *–ed* suffix was when, instead of *go,* he said, "Did I *goed* on the carousel yesterday?" In each of these five cases, the past tense of the verb John was trying to use was irregular, but he applied the inflectional *–ed* suffix instead.

Additionally, one aspect of sentence structure that is not represented in Table 1 is the use of colloquialisms by John. While speaking, John often combines common words to create a shortened version that means the same thing. For example, he frequently combined the words *want to* into *wanna* and *going to* into

gonna, as evidenced in the following sentences: "I wanna go see them," and "I told you one day I'm gonna fly in an airplane." When I analyzed these sentences, I incorporated the colloquialisms as he meant them, not as he said them. Furthermore, there was one example in which John shortened the word *because* and said *cause* instead, as seen in the ensuing sentence: "Yeah, I was looking in to see cause it was almost our turn." Here again I assessed the data based on what he meant and not on what he said.

As evidenced in Chapter II, children learn language through contributions from those around them, often imitating the language of their caregivers (Robinson, 2008). Input from others in the environment is the most influential characteristic contributing to the expansion of all aspects of language (Brandone et al., 2006). After reviewing many studies that researched language acquisition, Hoff (2006a) found that exposure to adult dialogue contributes to children's attainment of the fundamental components of language structure. The language that John was exposed to during the events he was referring to, as well as the language he is exposed to daily, is mostly simple, complete sentences. Therefore, it makes sense that the majority of the sentences that John constructed were simple and complete. Also, since birth, John has been surrounded by language in which the subject and verb agree as well as sentences that contain the use of a correct pronoun. Additionally, the prefixes *–ed* and *–ing* make up a large portion of verb conjugations in the English language, hence John's prominent use of these verb forms after prolonged exposure.

New or Difficult Vocabulary Usage Over Time

Throughout the six weeks of this action research study, I recorded every time John used new or difficult vocabulary related to prior experiences using Appendix B. Using this chart, I noted the date, the new or difficult vocabulary word he used, what previous experience the word was related to, when the experience occurred in relation to him using the new or challenging word, whether it was new or difficult, if John used it correctly, and what tier the vocabulary word fits in. See Table 2 for the results of this data collection.

Table 2

New or Difficult Vocabulary Usage

Date	Word	New word		Used correctly		Tier*		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	1	2	3
1/23/12	play date		X	X		X		
1/28/12	bunk bed	X		X		X		
2/20/12	instruction	X			X		X	
2/24/12	carousel		X	X			X	
2/27/12	badger	X		X			X	
2/28/12	barber		X	X			X	
2/28/12	gigabytes	X		X				X
3/2/12	roller coaster		X	X			X	
Total	**8**	**4**	**4**	**7**	**1**	**2**	**5**	**1**

Note. *Tier refers to the level of usefulness that words possess. Tier 1 words are basic, everyday words. Tier 2 words are high-frequency, academic words. Tier 3 words are low-frequency, specialized words (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

As noted in Table 2, there were eight instances in which John used a new or difficult vocabulary term. Of those eight times, half were new words for John and half were deemed difficult since they are not prominent in his everyday language. In all but one case, John used the new or tough words appropriately. The only time that he used a new word incorrectly was when he said, "When I get bigger and I can work in the crane like those instruction workers." Instead of *instruction*, he meant *construction*.

As illustrated in Table 2 regarding the tiered levels of vocabulary words used by John, almost two thirds of the new or difficult words fell under tier 2, meaning they are high-utility words that are encountered frequently by young children. Two of the new/difficult vocabulary words fit into tier 1, which means they are basic words known by most children John's age. Lastly, there was only one term that was suitable for tier 3. *Gigabyte* is designated as a tier 3 word because it is content-specific and pertains to a subject area that lacks generalization to other subject areas.

The role of environmental contributions comes into play with John's vocabulary acquisition as well. As discussed in Chapter II, Hollich et al. (2000) studied 338 children and found that the method and attainment of vocabulary are related to input from one's surroundings. John's use of seven of the eight new/difficult vocabulary words was directly affiliated with the language that he heard pertaining to the past events. The only time that input partially played a role in his use of new/difficult vocabulary was when he heard the word *construction* (workers) and later substituted the word *instruction* (workers) in his speech. Additionally, the

total amount of child-directed speech has a forthright and positive correlation with vocabulary development (Hoff, 2006a). In a 1998 study, Naigles and Hoff-Ginsberg found that the more often mothers highlight the same words in their own speech, children are more likely to produce and flexibly use those words in particular. John has been surrounded by a surplus of language since birth, including vocabulary that was not "dumbed-down" because he was a child. As his mother, I would ensure that I spoke to him in a similar way that I would speak to an adult; therefore, it is clear why the majority of John's new/difficult vocabulary fell under either tier 2 or tier 3.

Conclusion

The quantity of data collected during this six week naturalistic empirical action research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Adelman, 1993) helps to demonstrate how John's language associated with past experiences changes over time. Through the use of close observation and meticulous recording and data analysis methods, various aspects of language development were examined. These facets include how adults and objects can influence language progression related to past events, how the sentence structure of an emergent learner mimics the structure they are exposed to, and how exposure to academic vocabulary can play a role in the types of new or difficult vocabulary emergent learner's use that connects to earlier experiences.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

After six weeks of data collection, I dissected the evidence in order to answer the following research question: How do past experiences affect vocabulary use and sentence structure of a two-year-old? In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions of the data analysis and implications for my teaching. I found that people and items in the environment are a contributing factor to a two-year-old's development of language based on past events. Also, I concluded that the way in which two-year-olds structure their sentences related to past experiences has a direct relationship with the sentence structure of people they hear on a regular basis. Moreover, I found that when emergent learners are exposed to more Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary, they tend to use/repeat those words. Lastly, I determined that, with time, a two-year-old adds more Tier 2 and sometimes Tier 3 vocabulary related to prior events to their repertoire. Implications for my teaching include providing emergent learners with many opportunities to use language that relates to past events, modeling clear and proper sentence structure at all times, and providing daily exposure to Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary. I recommend that further research should be conducted in order to examine the relationship between emergent literacy and early language acquisition in the school setting. Additionally, further research that studies a more diversified population of two-year-old children would provide more generalizable conclusions. Finally, I recommend that further research that focuses on data collected from several parent/child pairs would contribute to transferability of results to other contexts.

Conclusions

  Language associated with past experiences develops with the assistance and input of people and objects in the environment around a two-year-old emergent learner. After I analyzed data from my study, I found social contributions played a role in John's language development surrounding prior events. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, learning takes place in social situations, in which a child has interactions with people, objects, and events in the environment. This type of learning was evident in the data. For example, one day, when John said, "When Ma-P broke her leg, she was at the hospital?" and I responded with, "Yep buddy, she went to the hospital." Then John went on to say, "Who did fix her?" to which I answered, "Oh, the surgeons and the doctors." This conversation developed with the assistance of me (in the role of John's mother). Furthermore, sometimes the influences from the environment came in the form of objects, like the day that John sat in his Dad's chair in the living room and that sparked him to say, "One day I sit in Daddy's chair with Ryan and you take pictures." In these situations, John was learning and using language related to past events with the support of his environment.

  Emergent learners model their sentence structure after the language of people around them. Since this case study involved one child who was raised in a home where verbal acquisition was promoted since birth, it became evident through the research findings that John formed his sentences in a similar manner to the sentences that he was exposed to on a daily basis. Supported by research in the field

(Brandone et al., 2006; Hoff, 2006a; Robinson, 2008), basic mechanisms of language structure are influenced by input from others in children's surrounding environment, and they often reproduce the language of their caregivers. This idea was demonstrated through the analysis of John's components of sentence structure (see Table 1). Since the majority of the language John was exposed to included simple, complete sentences in which the subjects agreed with the verbs and pronouns were used correctly, the results of Table 1 make sense. The majority of John's sentences were structured the same way: simple, complete sentences where the subject and verb matched and an accurate pronoun was used.

Emergent learners who are exposed to more academic language, including Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary, are inclined to possess and use that terminology. Out of the eight new/difficult vocabulary words recorded during the six week study, only one word was classified as Tier 3. John's father and I were discussing looking into a new internet service provider and that we might be limited to how many *gigabytes* we could download per month. A few hours later, John asked me, "Were you guys talking about *gigabytes*?" This term is considered a technical, computer-related term that is used with low frequency, but had John never been exposed to it, he would not have used it at such a young age. In terms of a Tier 2 word that John used as a result of disclosure, he repeated the word *badger* in conversation one day. John asked me, "Do you remember in that little mice book, that picture that you looked up in your phone?" to which I replied, "Yep, a *badger*." Then he said, "Yeah, maybe we can go see a *badger* sometime in the zoo." These

examples show that John was developing his Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary as a result of hearing it used by those in his surroundings.

Based on the analysis of a two-year-old's new/difficult vocabulary use related to past events, emergent learners tend to go from using mostly Tier 1 vocabulary to Tier 2 mixed with Tier 3 as time progresses. Established through my six week data collection of John's new and difficult vocabulary usage that relates to past events, I found that he began to use more Tier 2 words toward the middle of the study. The two new/difficult Tier 1 vocabulary words (*play date* and *bunk bed*) that I recorded were used by John within the first eight days of research. Then after almost four weeks, John began to weave Tier 2 words such as *instruction, carousel, and badger* into his lexicon. In addition, the only Tier 3 word recorded during the six weeks was *gigabytes* and John used it three days before the close of the study.

Implications for My Teaching

I would provide emergent learners with many opportunities to discuss past events. As a contributing factor to the development of language related to past experiences of a two-year-old, I think that it's important for teachers to understand why students talk about things they have done or experienced. In the study I conducted regarding the language development of my two-year-old son, I found four main triggers that caused him to use language related to past experiences. First, when prior events were recently produced, John would include them in his language. Second, a tangible item sometimes prompted John to discuss a prior event. Third, in some cases, John associated vocabulary words or concepts with past experiences.

Lastly, I found that at times when John and I were discussing an upcoming event, he linked it to a past event. Some of these triggers were the result of a person, while at other times they resulted due to an object in the environment. This concept could play a role in student's language development in the classroom as well. I would ensure students receive reminders of past events when necessary. For example, students are often asked to discuss and/or write about experiences they have participated in (e.g. write about three things you did over vacation; tell me about your weekend). While substitute teaching, I have witnessed many times when children sit down to write about a topic and get stuck. If something, like an object or an idea, could be used to help get the child thinking about the topic and stimulate prior knowledge, then the child might have an easier time writing about the subject. Additionally, often when students can't get started on their writing, I have seen the method of having them verbalize what they want to write about before they actually write it. Knowing what triggers language based on past events can also assist this type of pre-writing activity.

I would be more conscious of the way in which my own sentence structure affects that of an emergent learner. In the study I administered with my two-year-old son, I found that his sentence structure was modeled after the language he was exposed to. As a future teacher, I think this carries over to how students, especially emergent learners, develop sentence structure with input from their environment. With environmental contributions playing a large role in children's acquisition of language, teachers should understand this role and how they can best support

successful sentence progression. Because children often imitate the language of those

around them, teachers must be aware of this imitative behavior and ensure that they

are always modeling proper sentence structure in the classroom.

I would provide consistent exposure to Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary

words. Through a six week research study conducted with my two-year-old son, I

found that when he was exposed to more academic language (i.e. more Tier 2 and

Tier 3 vocabulary), he used more of that language himself. It is important for

teachers to understand how emergent learners develop and use new/difficult

vocabulary after experiencing an event. In terms of children's use of new and

difficult vocabulary that relates to prior events, teachers who understand the role of

the events and other environmental contributions are at an advantage. The linguistics

that children are exposed to becomes their own, so it is evident that students should

be experiencing a high level of academic and sophisticated language on a daily basis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the current study aimed to uncover how prior experiences influence

an emergent learner's speech development, there are several ways to improve it. The

following are areas in which other researchers could expand upon the present

research.

Longitudinal research studies should be conducted in order to examine

what type of relationship exists between emergent literacy and early language

acquisition in the school setting. The duration of the research should be longer than

six weeks. The short timeframe allowed only a snippet view of John's language

development based on past events. Ideally, the researcher could collect data over months or even years in a longitudinal study (Menard, 2002). A longitudinal study could examine the same subject during the emergent years as well as during the early school years. A correlation could be drawn between how language related to past events affects the morphological and syntactic choices of a child at ages two, three, four, five, and six.

Further research studies should be conducted to investigate a more diversified population of two-year-old participants. The fact that the only participant was a Caucasian male from a middle-class working family was a limitation of this study. Additionally, the participant's parents both had at least a high-school education and chose to expose the participant to shared book reading on a daily basis almost since birth. This area of research would benefit from examination of two-year-olds from many different multicultural backgrounds, including various races, socioeconomic statuses, genders, and abilities. Then, more generalizable conclusions could be drawn.

Further research involving a similar data collection method should be conducted with several parent/child pairs. Due to the method of data collection and the fact that the researcher had to be present in order to hear the language based on past events, involving many researcher/participant pairs would be beneficial. If more children participated in the study, one parent of each child would become a research partner of sorts, collecting the necessary data on language development. In addition, a survey could be administered to the parents in which they share

information about the home literacy environment. By involving supplementary

perspectives, sources, and methods of data collection, the study would possess aspects

of triangulation. Then the primary researcher could compile all of the data, and with

a larger sample size and more diverse data, results would be more transferable to

other contexts.

Final Thoughts

After a six-week naturalistic empirical action research study (Lincoln & Guba,

1985; Adelman, 1993) that investigated one emergent learner's language

development surrounding prior experiences, I analyzed and scrutinized the data in

order to determine conclusions and recommendations. The morphological and

syntactic expansion of children in the home literacy environment takes place in large

part due to the input from people and objects in their environment. When students are

participants in a strong HLE, they are exposed to many factors that enhance their

literacy development. These factors include opportunities to expand their language

related to past experiences, chances to hear and mimic proper sentence structure, and

continuous exposure to sophisticated, cultured vocabulary. I encourage parents and

teachers to provide emergent learners with many opportunities to discuss past events,

to expose children to sentences that are both morphologically and syntactically

correct, and to provide consistent exposure to academic language.

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Appendix A

Observation Protocol for Recording Sentence Structure

Date	Sentence	Related to what prior experience? When did it occur?	Completeness			Complexity			Subject-verb agreement		Correct pronoun used		Verb prefix (P) / suffix (S)
			Fragment	Complete	Run-on	Simple	Complex	Com-pound	Yes	No	Yes	No	Type
1/20/12	"The frog swallowed the drum."	Earlier that morning we watched a movie in which a frog swallowed a drum.		X		X			X		N/A	N/A	(S) Inflectional -ed
1/21/12	"And I went sledding with Aunt Linda and I was sick."	Just over 12 months ago, he went sledding while staying with my Mom, brother, and sister when his baby brother was born.		X				X	X		X		(S) Inflectional -ing
									X		X		N/A
1/22/12	"That was a big giraffe!"	Four days ago, we went to a play date and there was a big stuffed giraffe to play with.		X		X			X		X		N/A

Date	Child Utterance	Adult Model									Code
1/22/12	"There was a spider at Ma-P's house."	Yesterday, we visited my Mom's house where my brother and sister live.		X		X			X		X		N/A
1/22/12	"Uncle Mack ate it!"			X		X			X		N/A	N/A	N/A
1/23/12	"There was something at the other play date."			X		X			X		X		N/A
1/23/12	"There was a giraffe there."			X		X			X		X		N/A
1/23/12	"And there was this thingy (pinching with fingers) that pinched."	Five days ago, we went to a play date and there was a big stuffed giraffe to play with.	X				X		X		X		N/A
									X		X		(S) Inflectional -ed
1/23/12	"The thing, that digs on the floor."			X		X			X		X		(S) Plural -s
1/23/12	"Can you remember?"			X		X			X		X		(P) re

Date	Utterance	Context											
1/24/12	"I remember Cosmo bunny."	Twelve weeks ago, we met a friend in a park so she could take pictures of us. Then about two days later, we were looking through the friend's pictures and saw one of her bunny Cosmo.		X		X			X		X		(P) *re*
1/24/12	"Yeah, I remember Shelly too."			X		X			X		X		(P) *re*
1/24/12	"I wanna go see them."			X		X			X		X		N/A
1/28/12	"I will share that bunk bed with Ryan."	About 1 month ago when we saw his cousins' bunk bed, I told him he will have to share a room with his brother and they will sleep in a bunk bed someday.		X		X			X		X		N/A
1/28/12	"And he will go down low, and I will go up higher."			X				X	X		X		N/A
									X		X		N/A
1/28/12	"Way, way, way, way, way up here."		X			X			N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Date	Utterance	Context											
1/29/12	"When you made cupcakes for Ryan and we put that thing down and it spins just like this."	One month ago we made cupcakes for his brother's birthday. We used a mixer.			X		X		X		X		N/A
								X		X		N/A
					X				X	X		(S) Plural -s
1/29/12	"And I wanna see Cosmo bunny."	About 12 weeks ago when we looked through my friend's pictures online, we saw one of her bunny eating a cupcake on his birthday.	X	X				X		X		N/A
1/29/12	"I want some big bunk beds so I can sleep up higher and then I could sleep down low."	About 1 month ago when we saw his cousins' bunk bed, I told him he will have to share a room with his brother and they will sleep in a bunk bed someday.			X		X		X		X		N/A
								X		X		N/A
					X			X		X		N/A

1/29/12	"We hanged something on the Christmas tree when I was a baby."	A little over a month ago we hung Christmas ornaments on our tree.		X			X				X	X		(S) Inflectional -ed
									X		X		N/A
1/29/12	"And we hung it there."			X		X				X		X		N/A
1/29/12	"And I wanna sing to the Christmas tree."			X		X				X		X		N/A
1/29/12	"It's not Christmas anymore?"			X		X				X		X		N/A
1/29/12	"When we put Christmas presents under the tree, Ryan opened one and I said 'aaaaah.'"	Just over a month ago when we opened Christmas presents.							X		X		N/A
				X			X			X		N/A	N/A	(S) Inflectional -ed
										X		X		N/A

Date	Child Statement	Description										Inflectional Type
1/29/12	"When I opened my ATM and I said 'aaaaah.'"		X				X		X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ed*
									X		X		N/A
2/2/12	"When I was eating a carrot here with Grama, then I choked on it."	Five days ago, his Grama visited and we were eating lunch. He was eating a carrot and she tickled him and he almost choked.		X			X		X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ing*
									X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ed*
2/2/12	"I was eating a carrot and I choked on it."			X				X	X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ing*
									X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ed*
2/8/12	"Did you fly over here in a airplane?"	During the last five days, I was on a trip in which I flew in an airplane to and from the destination.		X	X				X		X		N/A
2/8/12	"Did you fly over the zoo?"			X	X				X		X		N/A
2/9/12	"One day, I sit in Daddy's chair with Ryan and you take pictures."	Just over a week ago, I took some pictures of my sons before I went out of town.		X			X			X	X		N/A
										X	X		N/A

Date	Utterance	Context	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Notes
2/9/12	"Know when there was a car out there and they lifted the truck down to get the car?"	About four weeks ago we were eating lunch and we looked out the window and saw a car broken down on the side of the road. Then we saw the tow truck come and take it away.	X			X	X		N/A	N/A	N/A
							X		X		(S) Inflectional -ed
2/10/12	"I had your pillow when you were on your trip."	Five days ago when I was away on a trip out of town, he wasn't sleeping well and Dad gave him my pillow to cuddle with while he slept.	X		X		X		X		N/A
							X		X		N/A
2/10/12	"I don't have it anymore."		X		X		X		X		N/A
2/12/12	"When he was crying when you taked him out in the snow."	Yesterday, we went out to play in the snow and Ryan fell face-first into the snow and started crying.	X		X		X		X		(S) Inflectional -ing
								X	X		(S) Inflectional -ed
2/13/12	"Did we take a bath before bed?"		X		X		X		X		N/A
2/13/12	"Does Ryan usually come in?"	Last night both boys had a bath.	X		X		X		N/A	N/A	N/A

Date	Utterance	Context											Type
2/13/12	"When he's sleeping, he can't come in."			X			X		X		X		(S) Inflectional -ing
									X		X		N/A
2/14/12	"Dad woke up when I were coughing in the bath yesterday."	Two days ago when he was in the bath and I was changing his brother in the living room, he started coughing because he swallowed water and Dad woke up and went running in the bathroom to check on him.		X			X		X		N/A	N/A	N/A
										X	X		(S) Inflectional -ing
2/14/12	"Know how I ate that cup of soup that James brought over?"	One month ago, a friend came over with his mom for a play date and we all ate lunch together.		X				X	X		N/A	N/A	N/A
									X		X		N/A
									X		N/A	N/A	N/A
2/14/12	"When I ate the cup of soup."		X			X			X		X		N/A
2/15/12	"I'm eating it like James."	One month ago, a friend came over with his mom for a play date and we all ate lunch together.		X		X			X		X		(S) Inflectional -ing

Date	Quote	Context	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	Notes
2/15/12	"I was sitting in that chair when James was sitting in my chair."			X			X		X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ing*
									X		N/A	N/A	(S) Inflectional *-ing*
2/15/12	"Did her Mamma have to go pick up Dana?"			X		X			X			X	N/A
2/20/12	"You said we couldn't go far to the crane when we were outside?"			X			X		X		X		N/A
									X		X		N/A
									X		X		N/A
2/20/12	"Why couldn't we?"	About two hours ago, we went for a walk to see the huge crane across the street at the hospital (they are doing construction there).		X		X			X		X		N/A
2/20/12	"The crane was locked in there."			X		X			X		N/A	N/A	(S) Inflectional *-ed*

Date	Utterance	Context								
2/20/12	"Why couldn't the crane get out and get us?"	About two hours ago, we went for a walk to see the huge crane across the street at the hospital (they are doing construction there).	X			X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A
2/20/12	"When I get bigger and I can work in the crane like those instruction workers."			X	X		X	X		N/A
							X	X		N/A
2/20/12	"But Daddy doesn't have a crane."		X			X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A
2/20/12	"But I can get bigger and work in one sometime."		X			X	X	X		N/A
2/20/12	"The crane was moving when we were walking."		X		X		X	N/A	N/A	(S) Inflectional *-ing*
							X	X		(S) Inflectional *-ing*

Date	Quote	Time reference											Notation
2/23/12	"This guy has a big nose like we were watching."	Four days ago we watched The Muppets at Ma-P's house.		X			X		X		N/A	N/A	N/A
									X		X		(S) Inflectional -ing
2/23/12	"Yeah, like Gonzo.		X			X			N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2/24/12	"Did I goed on the carousel yesterday?"	About six hours ago he rode the carousel at the mall after lunch.		X		X				X	X		(S) Inflectional -ed
2/27/12	"Do you remember in that little mice book, that picture you looked up in your phone?"	About one week ago, I looked up what type of animal was pictured in his book (I couldn't remember the name).		X			X		X		X		(P) Re
									X		X		(S) Inflectional -ed
2/27/12	"Yeah, maybe we can go see a badger sometime in the zoo."			X		X			X		X		N/A
2/28/12	"This is what I have to do at the barber to			X			X		X		X		N/A

Date	Utterance	Context											
2/28/12	get my hair washed." (leaning back in his chair)	Three days ago he got his hair cut at the barber, but he refused to have his hair washed.								X		N/A	N/A	(S) Inflectional *-ed*
	"I tipped my head back when I were at the barber and then I got down and I sat with Daddy in the spin chair and then the barber cut my hair."				X		X			X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ed*
										X	X		N/A
						X			X		X		N/A
						X			X		X		N/A
						X			X		N/A	N/A	N/A
2/28/12	"Were you guys talking about Gigabytes?"	About 2-3 hours ago, my husband and I were talking about getting a new internet provider and how many gigabytes we would be able to download per month.		X		X				X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ing*

Date	Utterance	Context											Marker
2/29/12	"I drawed something for you Mom, on the back of the fridge with a letter."	Four days ago, he was using markers to make a card for his uncle's birthday and he made something for me too.	X		X					X	X		(S) Inflectional *-ed*
2/29/12	"Yeah, I was looking in to see cause it was almost our turn."	Five days ago, he rode the carousel at the mall after lunch. We were looking at pictures today which triggered the memory.	X			X			X		X		(S) Inflectional *-ing*
									X		X		N/A
2/29/12	"And we had fruits when I ate my burger."		X			X			X		X		N/A
									X		X		N/A
3/1/12	"I told you one day I'm gonna fly in an airplane."		X			X			X		X		N/A
									X		X		N/A
3/1/12	"Yeah, did you fly in an airplane with Uncle Mack?"		X		X				X		X		N/A

Date	Quote	Context												
3/1/12	"One day, maybe I can fly in an airplane with Mom."	About a month ago, I went on a trip in which I flew on an airplane to and from the destination.		X		X				X		X			N/A
3/1/12	"I like to go to the airport and fly in an airplane and land at the airport and you can land next to me Mom."				X						X		X			N/A
									X		X		X			N/A
											X		X			N/A
								X			X		X			N/A
3/1/12	"Yeah, I wanna fly a plane."			X		X				X		X			N/A
3/2/12	"We can go to Chuck-e-Cheese again and ride on a roller coaster."			X			X			X		X			N/A
										X		N/A		N/A	N/A
3/2/12	"And it goes up, up, up, up, and	About five hours ago we went to Chuck-e-Cheese for lunch.		X					X	X		X			N/A

Date	Utterance	Context											Notes
	it goes down, down, down, down."									X		X		N/A
3/2/12	"I had fun at Chuck-e-Cheese."			X		X				X		X		N/A
3/2/12	"And it swinged over my head and Daddy's head."	About ten days ago we went for a walk to see the huge crane across the street at the hospital (they are doing construction there).		X		X					X	X		(S) Inflectional *-ed*
3/2/12	"When Ma-P broke her leg, she was at the hospital?"	About ten days ago when we walked to the hospital to see the crane, we talked about how Ma-P was at that hospital right after he was born because she broke her leg.		X				X		X		N/A	N/A	N/A
										X		X		
3/2/12	"Who did fix her/"			X		X					X	X		N/A

Appendix B

Observation Protocol for Recording New or Difficult Vocabulary

Date	Word	Related to what prior experience? When did it occur?	New word		Used correctly		Tier*		
			Yes	No	Yes	No	1	2	3
1/23/12	play date	Five days prior, we went to a play date at a friend's house.		X	X		X		
1/28/12	bunk bed	About 1 month ago when we saw his cousins' bunk bed, I told him he will have to share a room with his brother and they will sleep in a bunk bed someday.	X		X		X		
2/20/12	instruct-tion	About two hours earlier, we went for a walk to see the huge crane across the street at the hospital (they are doing construction there).	X			X		X	
2/24/12	car-ousel	About six hours earlier he rode the carousel at the mall after lunch.		X	X			X	
2/27/12	badger	About one week ago, I looked up what type of animal was pictured in his book (I couldn't remember the name).	X		X			X	

2/28/12	barber	Three days ago, he got his hair cut at the barber, but he refused to have his hair washed		X	X			X	
2/28/12	giga-bytes	About 2-3 hours earlier, my husband and I were talking about getting a new internet provider and how many gigabytes we would be able to download per month.	X		X				X
3/2/12	roller coaster	About five hours earlier, we went to Chuck-e-Cheese for lunch.		X	X			X	

* Level of usefulness that words possess. Tier 1 are basic, everyday words, Tier 2 are high-frequency, academic words, and Tier 3 are low-frequency, specialized words. (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).