

LanguageLinks® to Literacy Research

Current language research highlights the importance of syntactic competence in both oral and written language. Early syntactic ability is an especially important factor in predicting future reading and school success. LanguageLinks® to Literacy is an extensive language intervention curriculum to help students master the syntax needed to comprehend and produce sentences, which are the foundation of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. LanguageLinks® research was supported by grants from the National Institutes on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD).

Language is one of the most important skills that children need to succeed in school (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001), and early language competence is a strong predictor of subsequent reading ability and overall academic achievement (Catts et al., 2002).

Indeed, the Supporting Research section of the 2010 *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* states:

“Oral language development precedes and is the foundation for written language development; in other words, oral language is primary and written language builds on it. Children’s oral language competence is strongly predictive of their facility in learning to read and write: listening and speaking vocabulary and even mastery of syntax set boundaries as to what children can read and understand no matter how well they can decode” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, June, 2010, emphasis added)

In this connection it is well established that preschoolers with **semantic-syntactic** language deficits are at much greater risk for reading disabilities during their school years, **with early syntactic ability seeming to be an especially important variable** (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Catts, 1993; Catts, Adolf, & Weismer, 2006; Scarborough, 2001). A meta-analysis by the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP; 2009) concluded that oral language was particularly related to later literacy achievement when this variable was defined in terms of grammar and receptive language (as opposed to, e.g., vocabulary knowledge). An epidemiologic study which examined the reading ability of second and fourth graders in a sample of more than 300 children who had been identified in kindergarten as having language impairments (Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002), found that as a group these children scored significantly below matched controls on word recognition and reading comprehension. In fact, about half of the children met criteria for having a reading disability in second (52.9%) and fourth grade (48.1%). Academic difficulties associated with language delays also tend to persist through the later school years (e.g., Dockrell, Lindsay, & Connelly, 2009; Kelso, Fletcher, & Lee, 2007). One study found that 40% of preschoolers with language impairments continued to have a significant impairment at follow-up some four to five years later, and many had been held back a grade in school or were receiving special services for learning disabilities (Aram & Nation, 1980; Aram, Ekelman, and Nation, 1984).