# Receptive Language in SLI

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## Background & Purpose

- Specific language impairment is characterized as poor language ability in the absence of hearing impairment, cognitive impairment, and frank neurological damage (Leonard, 1997).
- While receptive language deficits are a feature of specific language impairment, emphasis has traditionally focused on expressive language deficits most likely due to:
  - Historical bias towards expressive language deficits (Arnn & Nation, 1975; Rapin & Allen, 1987).
  - Lack of sensitive receptive language measures (Leonard, 2009).
  - Distinctions between expressive and receptive language disorders (World Health Organization, 2005).

This study examines receptive language skills in preschool-aged children with and without specific language impairment across three different receptive language measures in order to:

- Identify each measure’s ability to discriminate between children with and without SLI.
- Examine how frequently receptive deficits are documented on the different measures.
- Determine whether receptive deficits tend to be test-specific or are detected with multiple receptive language domains.

By comparing performance on different types of receptive language tests, we aim to illustrate the effect of different tests in the identification of receptive deficits in children with SLI. Our hypotheses are:

- Measures will differ in their ability to discriminate between children with and without SLI.
- Receptive deficits are not limited to the most severe children with SLI, but may instead characterize a majority of these children.

## Method (continued)

### Participants

- 39 children (17 girls, 22 boys) with the diagnosis of SLI and 39 age-matched peers with typical language development (TD group).
- Native English speakers.
- Passed hearing screening.
- Received a minimum standard score of 75 or higher on the nonverbal scales of the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children—Second Edition (KABC-II; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2004).

Children were classified as SLI or TD based on scores on the Structured Photographic Expressive Language Test—Preschool, 2nd Edition (SPEL-P2; Dawson, Stout, Eyer, Tassellars, Forkenbrod, & Cisley, 2005).

## Results (continued)

### Discussion

- Overall, the children with SLI have weaker receptive language skills than the TD children.
- No measure achieved the established criterion recommended for clinically-useful specificity and sensitivity for identifying SLI (80% minimum; see Plante & Vance, 1994).
- Cut-scores that best differentiated the groups were different for the three tests.
- The measures did not always identify the same set of children as having receptive deficits.
- Performance differences across measures likely reflect distinct aspects of receptive language tested and response modality differences.
- Different performance outcomes may provide local versus global deficit characterizations.

## References


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