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Una A. Lange
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Dixie D. Sanger
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Sheldon L. Stick
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

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AN INFORMAL READING— LANGUAGE TEST

Una A. Lange, Dixie D. Sanger & Sheldon L. Stick

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN

Professionals working with children who need help in language development and reading have reported a positive relationship between reading performance and the development of language skills (Mattingly, 1972; Goodman, reported in Gutknecht and Keenan, 1978; Berger, 1978; Semel and Wiig, 1975; Stark, 1975). Semel and Wiig (1975) report that many reading problems are due to a child's difficulty or inability to understand the ideas being expressed by complex syntactic structures, and Rupley (1974) states that problems in understanding the vocabulary used in reading texts may contribute to reading problems. The relationship and parallelism between reading and language development becomes more evident when considering some of the the correlates that can have an effect on either or both of them: auditory or visual perceptual problems; motivation. Although such correlates are not synonymous with etiologies for poor developmental reading skills, they are conditions often accompanying an inability to read (Kirk, Kliebhan and Lerner, 1978).

Harris and Sipay (1975) refer to reading as the meaningful interpretation of written or printed symbols. In order to get meaning from written words, the reader must understand the vocabulary and the sequence of ideas. Disabled readers often have trouble because they do not understand common lexical units or other linguistic elements. If a disabled reader is expected to read material and then answer questions, professionals should be aware of whether variables like poor word attack skills or lack of comprehension, or some combination of variables, account for the poor reading performance. To provide meaningful treatment it is necessary to specify the nature and degree of the problems.

Before expecting young children to learn how to read it should be determined whether they can comprehend what is read to them. The Informal Reading-Language Test was designed for this purpose. The stories selected for the Informal Reading-Language Test (See Figure 1) were ones Piaget (1959) used to measure the language skills of young children. They were selected because they were short, had a number of interrelated facts, and had plots of interest to young children. Story I, Epaminondas, (Piaget, 1959, p. 82) was changed in that the boy's name was shortened to Ep, to make it easier to pronounce. Story II, Niobe, was not changed.

Story I (Ep)

Ep is a little boy and he lives in a country where it is very hot. His mother once said to him: "Go and take this shortbread cake to your granny, but don't break it." Ep put the shortbread under his arm, and when he got to his grandmother's the shortbread was in crumbs. His granny gave him a pat of butter to take back to his mother. This time Ep thought to himself: "I shall be very careful." And he put the pat of butter on his head. The sun was shining hard, and when he got home the butter was melted. "You are a silly," said his mother, "You should have put the butter in a leaf, then it would have arrived whole."

Score Sheet

Ep - Story I	Pre	Post
1. A little boy	___	___
2. Lives in a hot country	___	___
3. Mother sends him to take shortbread cake	___	___
4. Cake arrives broken (in crumbs)	___	___
5. He had held it under his arm	___	___
6. His granny gives him some butter	___	___
7. Butter arrives melted	___	___
8. Because he put it on his head	___	___
9. Because it was very hot	___	___

1. What are crumbs?
2. What's a pat of butter?
3. What does melted mean?
4. Why did the butter melt?
5. Why did Ep put the butter on his head?

Story II (Niobe)

Once upon a time, there was a lady who was called Niobe, and who had 12 daughters and 12 sons. She met a fairy who had only one son and no daughter. Then the lady laughed at the fairy because the fairy only had one boy. They the fairy was very angry and fastened the lady to a

rock. The lady cried for ten years. In the end she turned into a rock, and her tears make a stream which still runs today.

Score Sheet

Niobe - Story II	Pre	Post
1. Once there was a lady (or fairy, etc.)	___	___
2. She had children (provided they outnumber those of the other fairy)	___	___
3. She met a fairy (or girl, etc.)	___	___
4. This fairy had few children (or none at all, provided their number is inferior to the first lot)	___	___
5. The lady laughed at the fairy	___	___
6. Because the fairy had so few children	___	___
7. The fairy was angry	___	___
8. The fairy fastened the lady (to a rock, a tree, to the shore, etc.)	___	___
9. The lady cried	___	___
10. She turned into a rock	___	___
11. Her tears made a stream	___	___
12. Which flows to this day	___	___
1. Why was the fairy angry?		
2. Why did the lady cry?		
3. What turned into a rock?		
4. Tell me what a stream is.		
5. What's the difference between a daughter and a son?		

In order to determine how well children understand what is read to them, two types of tasks should be required. The first would be to relate the facts in sequential order. The second would be to answer specific questions about facts embedded in the stories.

For each story, Piaget (1959, p. 87) sequentially listed the facts he believed important. The list of facts became part of the scoring criteria for the test. Story I included nine statements and Story II included twelve.

Since language skills are presumed to affect reading skills, five questions were designed to measure a child's expressive skills. The questions related to vocabulary and facts embedded within each story. The questions were scored qualitatively to provide information about the semantic, morphological and syntactical language skills of children in primary grades. Each question was scored either three, two, one or zero, depending on the quality of the answer. Samples for each qualitative value were provided in the scoring criteria.*

The scoring criterial consisted of two parts. In Part I points were earned by a student for retelling each story. One point was given for each relevant idea recalled regardless of the sequence. Another point was given for each idea that was sequenced correctly.

The possible score for the first section of the scoring criteria was 42, with Story I being worth 18 points and Story II being worth 24. In Part II each question was scored either a three, two, one or zero, according to the quality of the answer. Thus, it was possible to earn a score of 15 points for each set of questions accompanying the story or a total of 30 for both stories. The maximum score for the entire test was 72 points.

The test was administered to 32 kindergarten children in rural Nebraska. An item analysis was computed whereby the individual item scores were correlated with the total score of the test resulting in the subtotal scores shown in Table 1. For statistical purposes the test was divided into two parts. The first part was made up of the scores from the sequencing of ideas in retelling the stories. The second part consisted of the scores from the answers to the questions. The means, standard deviations, and alpha reliability coefficients for the scoring criteria are shown below.

Table 1
Summary of the Subtotal Statistics
for the Informal Reading-Language
Test for 32 Kindergarten Children

Order of presentation	Mean	Standard deviation(SD)	Alpha reliability coefficients
Part I, Story I (Ep 18*)	6.84	4.02	.82
Part II, Story I (Ep 15*)	6.81	3.24	.61
Part I, Story II (Niobe 24*)	12.19	6.92	.90
Part II, Story II (Niobe 15*)	8.88	3.70	.63

*Total possible

As can be noted, the alpha reliability coefficient for Part I on each story was higher than the correlation for Part II for each story. An alpha reliability coefficient of 0.92 was obtained for the total Informal Reading-Language Test. Since the test was designed to be given in its entirety, the lower correlation coefficient for Part II does not affect the test.

Interjudge reliability (Table 2) was determined by having three judges independently score 12 test protocols selected from 32 subjects at random. The coefficients for each of the four sections of the informal test indicate high internal consistency across the subsections.

The Informal Reading-Language Test was the result of cooperation among a Reading Specialist and two Speech-Language Pathologists who integrated their professional skills to assess listening comprehension for reading in primary grade children. It was determined that the test was easy to administer, the children found it interesting and attended to the tasks, it was administered in a brief amount of time and it provided information regarding

children's linguistic development. The interrater agreement among independent judges indicated that the directions for scoring the test and the scoring criteria were defined in a clear, descriptive, operational and reliable manner.

Table 2
Average Intercorrelations among Three Judges
for Scoring the Four Sections of the
Informal Reading-Language Test
(N = 12 kindergarten children)

Section of test	Average interrater correlation among three judges
Part I, Story I (Ep)	R = 0.87
Part II, Story I (Ep)	R = 0.88
Part I, Story II (Niobe)	R = 0.86
Part II, Story II (Niobe)	R = 0.88

After using the Informal Reading-Language Test the authors found that the last three facts in Story I were not listed in the order in which they appeared in the story; rather, the facts were listed in a cause-effect sequence. When the test was administered to kindergartners and second graders, it was found that the students were unable to determine the cause-effect relationship; therefore, the last three items were rearranged to occur in the order in which they appeared in the story.

The Informal Reading-Language Test is considered to be a screening test for reading readiness. Students that have difficulty in relating facts in sequential order when they are read a story often experience the same type of problem when they read to themselves. Poor performance on Part I of the Informal Reading-Language Test suggests a student may have difficulty in auditory memory and/or comprehension. Poor performance on Part II should be viewed as indicating that further analysis of the student's expressive language, receptive vocabulary and comprehension skills need to be made.

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