

Atypical Grammatical Profiles in Children Can Arise
from an Interaction between Weak Language Aptitude and Typical Language Input

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Children with developmental language disorder (DLD) often show an extraordinary weakness in their use of grammar. In English, this is seen especially in these children's prolonged struggles in using tense/agreement morphology. At age five years, for example, they use these tense/agreement forms less consistently than three-year-old typically developing children matched for mean length of utterance or verb vocabulary size. Unlike their younger peers, these children are more likely to produce utterances such as *Every day mom drive to work*, *Ben do the dishes*, *Yesterday we play in the snow*, and *The dog running*. This atypical discrepancy between these children's use of tense/agreement morphology and their use of other aspects of language is thought to be one of the clinical markers of DLD, at least in English.

In this presentation, it is argued that this atypical profile so often associated with language impairment could be a natural outcome when children with weak language aptitude are faced with some of the more challenging grammatical details that occur in typical child-directed input. To make the case, a series of studies will be reviewed – studies that were inspired by earlier (“non-clinical”) work in the syntactic priming, computational modeling, and usage-based literature. Specifically, studies of English-speaking children with DLD and typically developing peers will be reviewed using evidence based on: (1) novel verb learning; (2) traditional forced-choice sentence comprehension tasks; (3) looking-while-listening; (4) grammatical intervention; and (3) electrophysiological evidence. Predictions will be offered for studies of English-speaking children representing a continuum of language aptitude, and expected outcomes for similar methods applied to other languages will be discussed.