COMMUNICATION THEME:
How do children learn to use language structure to communicate effectively?

LuCiD
The ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development

Theme Lead: Anna Theakston, University of Manchester
Contact: anna.theakston@manchester.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

Children need to learn not only the sentence structures of their language, but also how to use them effectively.

This theme explores how children learn different language structures, and how their use is affected by social understanding.

LANGUAGE AND PERSPECTIVE TAKING

We can adopt multiple perspectives on the same event, choosing to highlight the protagonist (*FROG washed Teddy*) or the undergoer (*TEDDY got washed by Frog*).

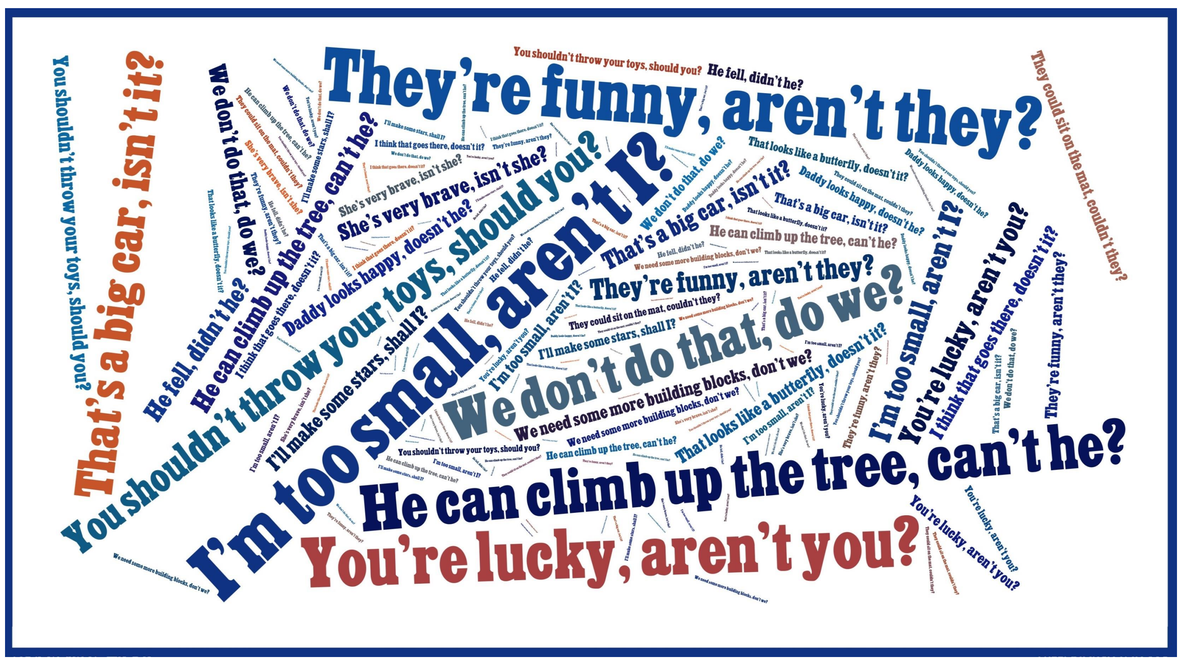
And we can describe events from our own point of view (*I know what Frog's doing*) or from someone else's viewpoint (*She knows what Frog's doing*). We will be investigating how children's ability to adopt other people's perspectives and understand what other people know influences their proficiency in using a range of mental state terms, and different kinds of complex sentences.

OLD NEWS, NEW NEWS

To talk about events, we need to choose the most effective way to convey information. Compare "*After you've eaten, brush your teeth*" with "*Brush your teeth after you've eaten*". Which you choose may depend on which part of the event is currently more in focus for the speaker and hearer. We will be investigating how children develop the skills to choose how best to order information in their utterances.

QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS?

Tag questions (*It's raining, isn't it?*) provide speakers with a wealth of options with which to express opinions, doubts, and to request or provide information. We will be investigating how children learn this complex system to facilitate successful conversations.



IMPACT

We will be able to

(a) Provide detailed information on how children learn form-function mappings to signal different communicative goals

(b) Advise practitioners on the best contexts for learning complex social language.

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
LuCiD is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council grant ES/L0089SS/1
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL
MANCHESTER 1824 The University of Manchester
Lancaster University

@LuCiD_Centre