Language growth in Dutch school-age children with specific language impairment

In this dissertation, the results of a longitudinal study of two age-groups of Dutch-speaking children with specific language impairment (SLI) and an intervention study examining a metalinguistic approach for older school-age children with SLI are reported. Grammatical development of school-age children with SLI between the ages 6 and 10 years was investigated in narratives with a wide range of measures of grammatical complexity and grammatical correctness. The grammatical profile that was obtained from the grammatical analysis was used to select appropriate targets for the intervention study. In addition, speech fluency was examined in the children with SLI aged 8-10 years. Speech disfluencies can offer a window into formulation difficulties of older children with SLI, even when sentences are produced grammatically accurate.

Grammatical complexity and grammatical correctness in the children with SLI show a continuous development between the ages 6 and 10 years. In addition, the higher speech disfluency rates in children with SLI reflect their compromised expressive language skills. The higher disfluency rates at word-initial positions suggest that difficulties with lexical retrieval contribute to the speech disfluencies. Furthermore, a five week intervention program with five hours of individual therapy yielded significant progress on relative clause production in children with SLI of 10 years of age and older.

This dissertation is of relevance to researchers in the fields of language acquisition and language disorders, as well as to clinicians working with language impaired children.