



Uncommon Understanding: Development and Disorders of Language Comprehension in Children

Dorothy V.M. Bishop

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A great deal has been written on how children learn to speak, but development of language comprehension has been a relatively neglected topic. This book is unique in integrating research in language acquisition, psycholinguistics and neuropsychology to give a comprehensive picture of the process we call "comprehension", right from the reception of an acoustic stimulus at the ear, up to the point where we interpret the message the speaker intended to convey by the utterance. A major theme of the book is that "comprehension" is not a unitary skill: to understand spoken language, one needs the ability to classify incoming speech sounds, to relate them to a "mental lexicon", to interpret the propositions encoded by word order and grammatical inflections, and to use information from the environmental and social context to select, from a wide range of possible interpretations, the one that was intended by the speaker. Furthermore, although neuropsychological and experimental research on adult comprehension can provide useful concepts and methods for assessing comprehension, they should be applied with caution, because a sequential, bottom-up information processing model of comprehension is ill-suited to the developmental context. The emphasis of the book is on children with specific language impairments, but normal development is also given extensive coverage. The focus is on research and theory, rather than practical matters of assessment and intervention. Nevertheless, while this book is not intended as a clinical guide to assessment, it does aim to provide a theoretical framework that can help clinicians develop a clearer understanding of what comprehension involves, and how different types of difficulty may be pinpointed.

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