Language Sampling

What is it?

- A way to assess a child's progress in acquiring language
- LSA (Language Sample Analysis) can be used in diagnostic settings
  - It's not okay to pick and choose. To keep it scientific, we should take 50 consecutive utterances, so we're not making subjective choices about utterances. Even if there's a lot of topic-jumping it's fine. That's what little kids do.

Why do we need it?

- Language samples provide some of the most useful information we can gather about a child's communication because it's an immediate snapshot of:

  - Utterance length (MLU)
  - Complexity
  - Articulation abilities
  - Narrative skills

  - Perspective-taking
  - Comprehension
  - Imitation
  - Direction-following abilities

- Find new targets after documenting with CASLLS
  - **Syntax**: form or structure
  - **Semantics**: meaning of words and word combinations
  - **Pragmatics**: use of language, often social meaning

How do we do it?

- Spend time "warming up" the child to talking before you begin to record. Break the ice with a fun activity, some bubbles, or a magic trick
- Use objects and activities that can be manipulated and/or controlled by the child in order to elicit a variety of language forms and intentions (e.g., toy cars, dolls, play dough, etc.) Use objects that are appropriate to the child's age and cognitive level.
- Ask questions that will require the child to give you more information than yes or no. Use broad-based questions. Example: How do/did…, What happened…, Why do/did…? Make comments, when needed, to engage the child into producing a variety of utterances and language uses.
- Document utterances how they are said by the child. Do NOT embellish the child's utterance. In other words, don't add morphemes that are missing.
- Highlight all utterances that are elliptical so when you analyze each you will know that some information has been omitted by the child.
- Document contractions. *Don't* should be typed as "don't" rather than "do not"
- If an utterance contains more than two clauses joined with *and*, consider it a run-on sentence and divide

- **Codes**:
  - R: repeated or imitated
  - P: prompted (as with a visual cue or gesture)
  - Q: response to question
  - A: approximation (when the word cannot be written as pronounced)
  - ~~~ : unintelligible/babble
  - XXX: marks individual vocalizations to show prosody or single unintelligible words
  - ( ): missing or intended word or phrase
- If an entire utterance is a noise or has three unintelligible words, omit the utterance for MLU count. Mark the occasional noise or unintelligible word as X and count as both 1 morpheme and 1 word.
  - /: omitted sound (usually initial or final)

Tips and Tricks

- Collect the language sample, whenever possible, in a location that is natural and familiar to the child in order to elicit a more representative and realistic sample of the child's linguistic abilities and intentions.
- Elicit in less structured conversational settings for more language and more complex language than in task oriented settings, such as picture descriptions.
- Narratives ("Tell me about…, Tell me what happened when…") produce the most complex language.
- Try to see things from the child's perspective. It's okay for the child to have pauses. Don't rush the topics.