

Language and the SASC 2025 Report Guidance

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Overview

Why assess language?

Understanding of profile. What language skills is the person being assessed bringing to literacy?

Recognition of language needs. This can inform recommendations for support and/or referral to a speech and language therapist

How should language be assessed?

Quantitatively: standardised tests from 2025 test list

Qualitatively: background history, conversation, observation, error analysis

The Elusive Nature of Language

- Natural, fluid, evolving
- Numerous interconnected elements and processes
- SpLD assessor constraints
- Capturing valuable pieces
- Implications for reporting



Why Assess Language?

Language Components
Language and Literacy
Language Difficulties
Implications

Language Components

- Language is the way we communicate with people.

‘the **comprehension** and/or **use** of a spoken (i.e. listening and speaking), written (i.e. reading and writing) and/or signed ...communication system...’ (ASHA)

Comprehension: **receptive** language

Use: **expressive** language

- 5 language domains:

phonology (speech sounds)

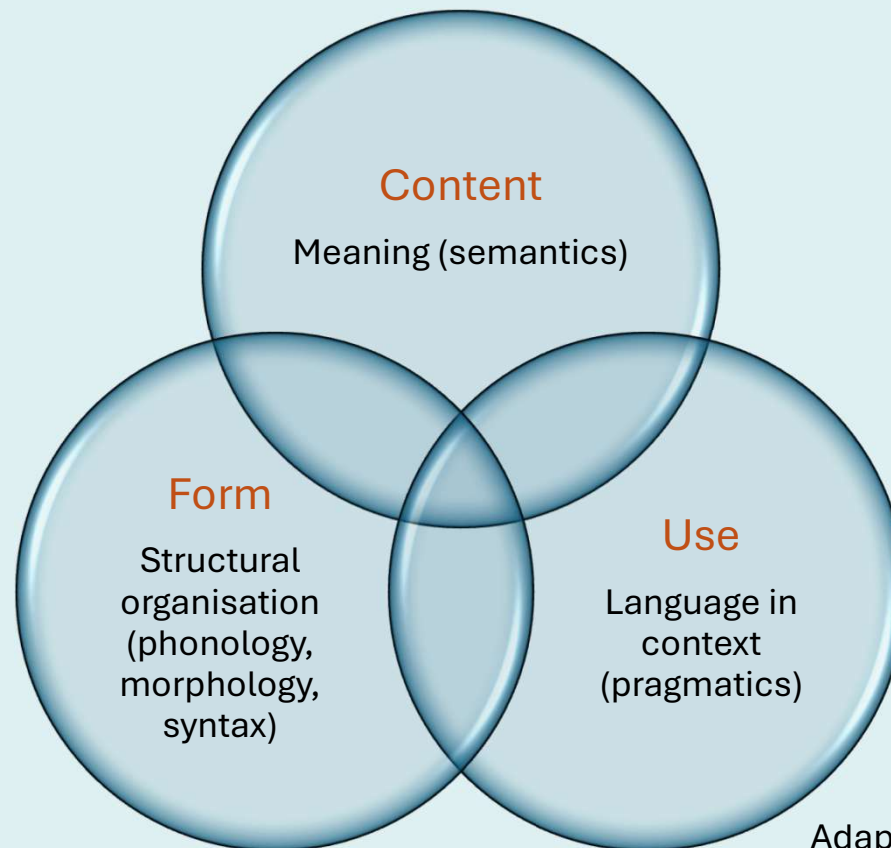
morphology (word structure)

syntax (sentence structure)

semantics (meaning)

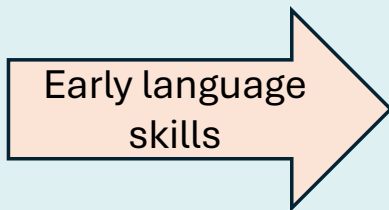
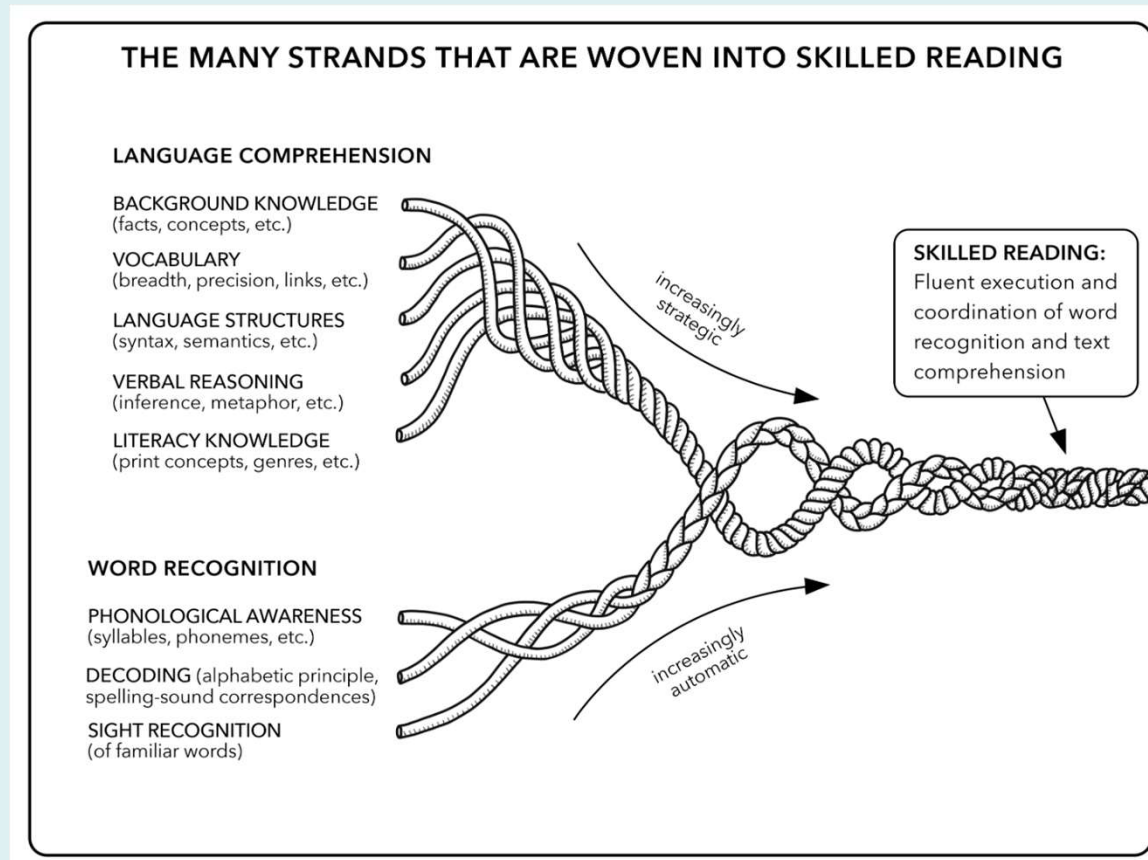
pragmatics (use in context)

Form, Content and Use



Adapted from Bloom, L. and Lahey, M. (1978)

Language and Literacy



Scarborough, H. (2001)

The Language Literacy Network

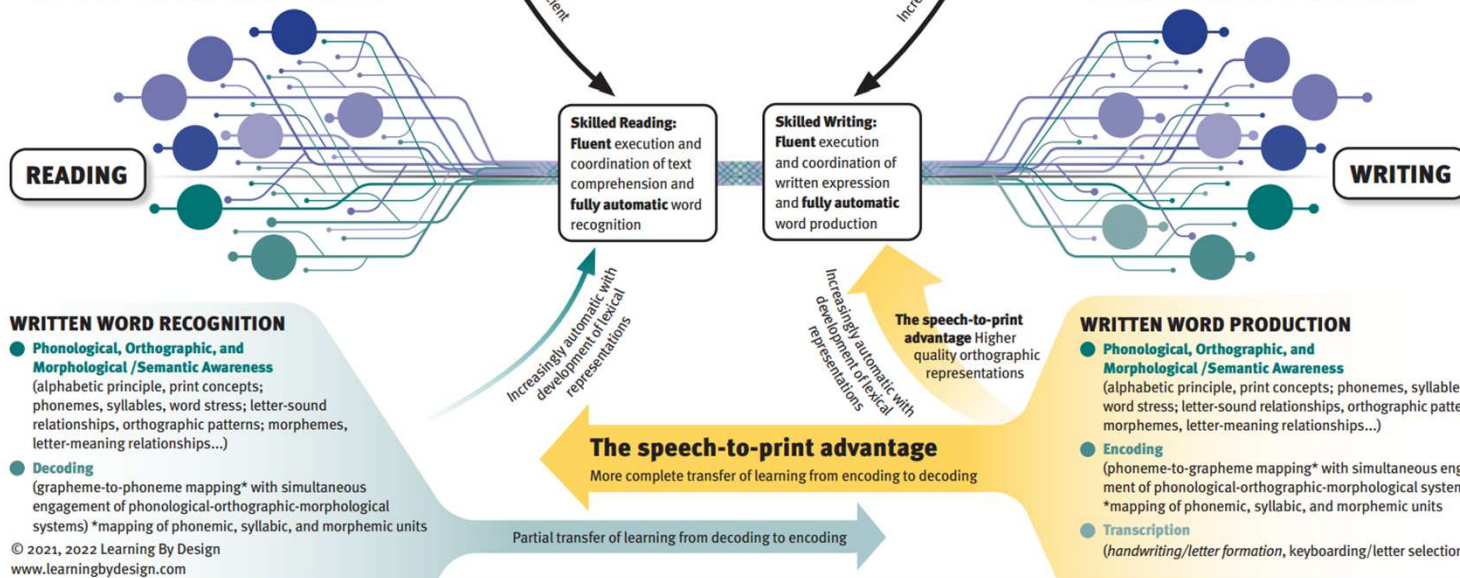
The many language components that unify into skilled reading and writing (Wasowicz, 2021)

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

- **Background Knowledge** (facts, concepts, schemas...)
- **Vocabulary** (breadth & depth; definition, polysemy, related words...)
- **Language Structures** (phonology, morphology, word class, syntax, prosody...)
- **Verbal Reasoning** (connection of ideas; inference, prediction, metaphor...)
- **Pragmatics** (intended audience, purpose...)
- **Literacy Knowledge** (print concepts & conventions; text genre & structure...)

LANGUAGE EXPRESSION

- **Background Knowledge** (facts, concepts, schemas...)
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Wasowicz, J. (2024)

Language Difficulties

Dyslexia

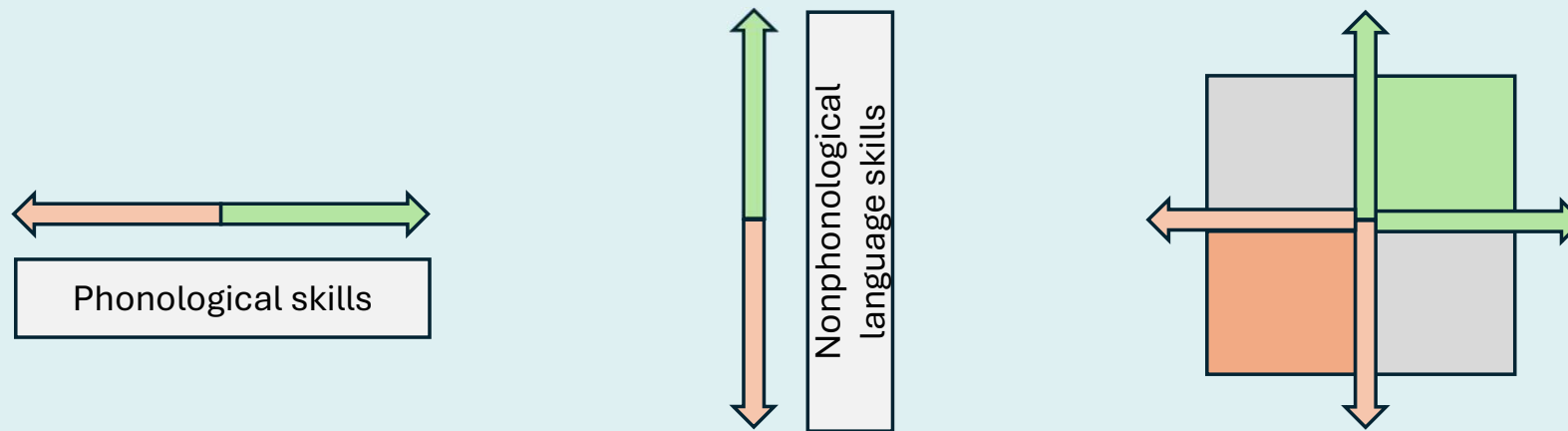
- Language-based disorder - phonological processing at core
- Early oral language difficulties - risk factor (Snowling et al, 2000)
- Subtle oral language difficulties can persist - (Adlof & Hogan, 2018)
- In addition, reduced reading limits language acquisition and world knowledge
- Developmental language disorder (DLD) frequently co-occurs

Language Difficulties

Developmental Language Disorder

- DLD is a significant and persistent impairment in the ability to learn, understand and use spoken language, not attributable to any clear cause or biomedical condition (Bishop et al 2016, 2017)
- Impact on everyday life must be evident
- No linguistic subtypes defined, but type of language difficulty must be clearly identified and documented
- Term not used if difficulties are only in phonology (Stringer, 2023)
- Morphosyntactic difficulties are a ‘hallmark’
- DLD vs ‘Language disorder associated with....’

Dyslexia and DLD Relationship



DLD and dyslexia are best seen as ‘distinct conditions that commonly co-occur’ (Catts et al 2005).

Model does not capture: (1) dimensional nature of both or multiple (including shared) risk factors (2) changes over time e.g. in the relationship between phonological and nonphonological aspects of language – assumes they are independent variables

‘The Language Difficulties in Dyslexia have been Underplayed’

Snowling et al (2026)

- Longitudinal study - phonological and nonphonological language skills were strongly correlated
- Significant difficulties beyond phonology in children in ‘dyslexia without DLD’ group
- Language may be a ‘unitary factor’ in early development, differentiating later, with teaching of skills for reading
- Difficulties may persist in both areas - clinical or sub-clinical
- ‘Assessments of children with reading difficulties **should include some measure of oral language skill**’

Implications

Understanding Profiles

Strong language skills:

- Secure foundations for literacy and other areas of learning
- May be evidence of unexpectedness in a profile

Some areas of weakness:

- Consider consequences for literacy and other areas of life
- Make recommendations that could help address needs

Considerable difficulties, with impact on everyday life:

- May indicate a co-occurring language disorder and the need for full assessment by a speech and language therapist

How should Language be Assessed in an SpLD Assessment?

Quantitative Assessment
Beyond the Scores

Quantitative Assessment

The 2025 Report Guidance AG46

Normally assessors will test **both** receptive and expressive language skills

There may be situations where assessors, after drawing on the background information supplied, and/or their informal impressions of the verbal skills of an individual being assessed, may decide that a full range of language tests is not needed

- In some instances, there may already be in place, for example, a recent, comprehensive speech and language assessment
- Additionally, if assessors have used tests, for example, of listening comprehension and oral skills which they feel have fully covered either language or verbal reasoning abilities, there is no need to add in further separate tests

Tests of Language

General Considerations

Receptive language

Best tested with nonverbal responses (e.g. point to...)
Develops before expressive language and underpins it



Expressive language

Usually (but not always) indicates that there is understanding too
Without understanding, tends to be rigid, context-bound and prone to error
Low scores may indicate expressive language weakness, but underlying difficulty may be a receptive one
Conversational skills are less demanding than language for writing

Reflecting on Test Scores



Know Your Test

Carefully analyse test demands, consulting manuals and SASC guidance



Does Score Reflect Language?

Poor performance doesn't always mean poor language skills



Error Analysis

Analyse errors - linguistic factors and other



Reporting

Avoid extrapolating too much from too little when reporting



Big Language Picture

Which pieces are you looking at and which are missing?

Receptive Language Tests

Word Level

Example of Test Type	Examples of Tests from 2025 List
Point to picture in response to spoken word	Picture Vocabulary - TOD Receptive Vocabulary - WIAT 3 Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - PPVT-5
What do they tell us about? Word comprehension	
Considerations Education and culture have great impact on vocabulary test scores - no context Pictures need to be clear, unambiguous, up to date Single word level strengths may not extend to competency in sentences and beyond	

Receptive Language Tests

Sentence Level

Example of Test Type	Examples of Tests from 2025 List
Point to picture matching spoken sentence	Listening Comprehension: Words & Sentences - AAB
Following directions	Following Directions - IDS-2 Understanding Directions - WJV (1-2 sentences)
<p>What do they tell us about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of sentence structure and morphology e.g. word order, negation, temporal concepts, embedded clauses • Capacity for multi-step processing of language (sequencing, memory) 	
<p>Considerations</p> <p>Increased sentence length and complexity -> increased cognitive load e.g. memory and attention</p>	

Listening Comprehension Tests

Beyond Sentence Level

Example of Test Type	Examples of Tests from 2025 List
<p>Listen to a passage and answer questions</p> <p>Listen to sentence/ passage and supply missing word</p>	<p>Oral Discourse Comprehension - WIAT 3</p> <p>Listening Comprehension: Passages - AAB</p> <p>Oral Passage Understanding Scale - OPUS</p> <p>Story Comprehension - WJV</p> <p>Auditory Comprehension (3 tests) - TAPS 4</p> <p>Oral Comprehension - WJV</p>
<p>What do they tell us about?</p> <p>Comprehension of connected speech (receptive language), including integration of information</p>	
<p>Considerations</p> <p>Challenging to disentangle understanding from expressive language, memory and attention</p> <p>Optional on SASC list - tests have own section. Can compare with reading comprehension</p>	

Expressive Language Tests

Word Level

Example of Test Type	Examples of Tests from 2025 List
Picture naming Expressive vocabulary	Picture Vocabulary - WJV Expressive Vocabulary - WIAT 3 Expressive Vocabulary Test - EVT-3 Oral Production - AAB
Word association/ Oral fluency	Associational Fluency - KTEA-3 Oral Fluency - AAB Oral Word Fluency - WIAT 3
Word finding	Test of Adolescent/Adult Word Finding - TAWF-2
What do they tell us about? Vocabulary, semantic links / organisation, word retrieval efficiency	
Considerations Strong performance at single word level may not extend to sentence level competency or to effective use in daily life situations	

Types of Expressive Language Tests

Sentence Level

Example of Test Type	Examples of Tests from 2025 List
Sentence formulation	Oral Expression - KTEA3 Expressive Language - IDS-2 Oral Expression - AAB Oral Language Samples - WJV
Sentence repetition	Sentence Repetition - WIAT 3
What do they tell us about? Morphological knowledge and syntax, vocabulary Memory/language interactions	
Considerations Strong performance at sentence level does not guarantee effective use in daily life situations	

Repetition Tasks



Repetition Tests

Factors affecting performance on word/nonword repetition

Real words (Martin et al, 1996)

- Item length (number of syllables)
- Word frequency and familiarity
- Concreteness and imagery

Nonwords (Gallon & Marshall, 2009)

- Item length
- Word likeness and phonotactic probability (likelihood of sound combinations)
- Prosodic structure (syllabic structure and stress)

Sentence Repetition Tests

Factors Affecting Performance

Sentence length

Increases demands on memory, attention, sequencing

Semantic predictability

Predictable and meaningful sentences are easier to repeat

Repetition is easier if sentence is understood correctly

Syntactic complexity

Difficult structures are those containing passives, relative clauses, embedded clauses, negation, conditionals etc

Small grammatical markers are particularly vulnerable e.g. tense markers, plurals, pronouns, articles

Sentence Repetition Tests



Involves '**processing and regeneration of the sentence**, which is **contingent on prior language knowledge**' (Ward et al, 2024)



Not just short-term memory



Sensitive to residual language processing weakness which may not be detected other expressive and receptive language tasks (Conti-Ramsden et al 2001)



Error analysis can give clues as to language weaknesses.

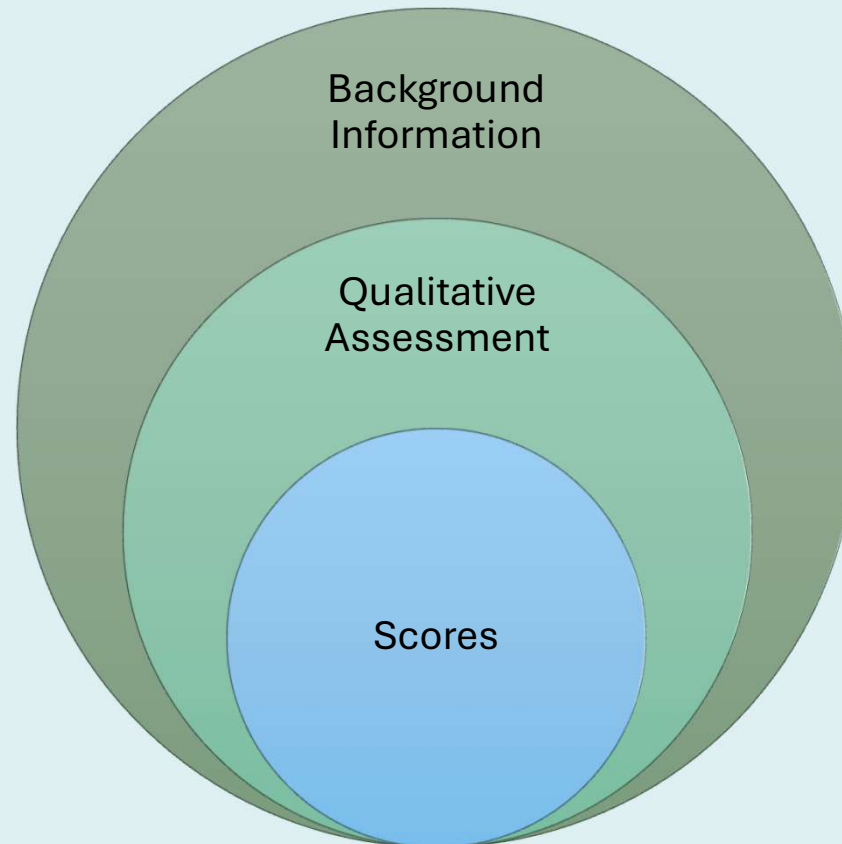
Verbal Reasoning Tests

- **Background Knowledge**
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- Verbal reasoning tests require language to complete, but do not test language in themselves
- Highly dependent on non-linguistic aspects of cognition too
- Weak performance: cannot isolate language factors as the explanation for difficulties
- Strong performance: suggests some secure language skills, but is not a measure of them

From Wasowicz, 2021

Beyond the Scores



Background Information

Hearing

Languages
spoken at
home

Family history

Speech and
language
history

Subtle
developmental
differences

Have
difficulties
resolved?

Evolving Language Difficulties

Word learning and finding
Sequencing narrative
Using complex sentences
and correct grammar
Following instructions

Meeting milestones for talking
Speaking clearly
Putting words together
Use of verbs
Following instructions when
out of routine

Keeping up with conversations
Understanding idioms, jokes and sarcasm
Learning academic/technical language
May seem disinterested when actually lost
Anxiety and fatigue

Relationships
Mental Health
Employment

Harry, aged 12

H: 'I been trying to wait for the park next to our house to be finish.....they's adding like not kind of a like a normal park..... is like park or parking.....park.....'

SLT: Not a normal park? What's special about it?

H: 'Um.....like.....you can do park.....or other stuff'

SLT: What will you be able to do there?

H: It still not finished it is

Think about:

- Receptive vs expressive language
- Form, content and use – and how they affect each other
- The power and limitations of conversation as an assessment tool



Word Finding Difficulties

- Pauses and hesitations
- Fillers (um, er...)
- Using nonspecific language (stuff, thingy, you know what I mean...)
- Repetitions of sounds, syllables or words
- Substitutions/errors – may be phonological or semantic
- New, made-up words
- Circumlocutions (talking around the words)
- Frustration (may be shown in body language and facial expressions)

Observations and Error Analysis

Receptive Language

- Request for repetitions?
- Mismatch between question and answer?
- Slow to respond?
- Lack of response? Not understanding question vs not knowing answer
- Error analysis: difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, abstract concepts/ language? Can test manual support with this?

Observations and Error Analysis

Expressive Language

FORM (Structures used): Short, simple sentences? Difficulties with word endings, verb tenses, prepositions or word order? ‘False starts’?

CONTENT (Meaning conveyed): Did you understand everything? Referential language? Depth and breadth of vocabulary used? Empty language?

USE (Speaker’s goals): Confident/hesitant/clear/organised in expression? Did they ‘lose their way’? Able to ask for clarification? Able to explain/ describe an experience? Feelings about talking in a group/ presentations/interviews?

Integrating Information

What does the **test performance** indicate? Not just language tests

Qualitative analysis of responses essential – errors may not be linguistic

Is there a **consistent** picture?

Scores - error analysis - background history - observations

Contribution to understanding profile / diagnostic decision

Impact of any language weakness identified (present/future)?

What recommendations might help?

Should a referral to a speech and language therapist be made?

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