

sentence diversity priming task

Examiner's Manual

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Purpose

The Sentence Diversity Priming Task (SDPT) is a structured protocol designed to assess sentence diversity in 30-48-month-old children. The SDPT is a child-friendly, efficient measure of children's best performance. The SDPT provides multiple opportunities for children to produce 3rd person (3P) sentences with high levels of support. It is presented as an interactive animated picture book consisting of 24 prime-target 3P sentence pairs. This picture book format, in which an adult and child take turns describing animations, was chosen to simulate a common adult–child shared reading activity. The SDPT can be administered remotely or in a clinical/research setting, with the child's parent or a clinician/researcher serving as the child's communication partner. The average administration time for the SDPT is approximately 10 min⁵. Children with a wide range of language abilities, from single-word users to sentence producers, can produce task-related responses on most of the items without becoming frustrated⁷.

Background

The Sentence Focused Framework developed by Hadley and colleagues provides a simple view of early language development, emphasizing continuity from words to diverse sentences. The Sentence Focused Framework recognizes the sentence as a basic unit of syntax that serves as the foundation for later-developing grammatical structures. Sentence diversity reflects a child's ability to combine a variety of different subjects and verbs in simple sentences. This lexical flexibility within simple sentences is interpreted as evidence of a strong mental representation of basic sentence structure, allowing the child to express a diverse variety of messages. Simple subject-verb (SV) and subject-verb-object (SVO) sentences typically emerge between 24-26 months of age, with almost all children producing SV and SVO sentences by 30-32 months. Limited sentence diversity at 30 months, especially with 3P subjects, is indicative of elevated risk for developmental language disorder (DLD) at 36 months^{2,3,9}.

The SDPT is a structured elicitation protocol created to efficiently elicit multiple SV and SVO sentences. The standard delivery across administrators and time points allows for comparison between toddlers and measurement of growth over time for an individual child. Compared to language sample analysis, the SDPT elicits SV and SVO sentences in a shorter time while providing comparable results⁵.

Multiple supports have been built into the SDPT to help children produce 3P sentences (Figure 1). These supports activate the target sentence structure, lexical verb, and subject noun to help children produce a variety of sentences with 3P subjects^{1,4,5,6,8,10}. Following administration of the third prompt, the sentence structure, verb, and subject noun are all available to the child. Children who cannot produce diverse sentences, given the maximum support provided on the SDPT, likely have a weak representation of sentence structure in their mental grammar. As such, the SDPT is a measure of toddlers' best, but not necessarily their typical performance.

Structural Priming

The adult's description of the first animation within each item set serves as a prime sentence, activating the underlying SV or SVO sentence structure and facilitating the child's use of that same structure in their target description. The prime sentences are less likely to facilitate production of SV or SVO sentences in children with a weak mental representation of the underlying sentence structure.

Verb Overlap

Within each item set, the lexical verbs in the adult prime sentences match the intended verb in the child target sentences. This overlap activates the verb in the child's mental lexicon and increases the child's likelihood of producing a variety of verbs throughout the task. Children with a small verb lexicon will likely benefit less from the support provided by the verb overlap and use fewer unique verbs in their target descriptions.

Prompting Hierarchy

For each target description, the adult follows a standardized prompting hierarchy to support the child's production of an active declarative SV or SVO sentence with a 3P subject:

- 1. First, the adult points to the target animation, looks expectantly at the child, and waits 3-5s for the child to produce a spontaneous description. This initial pause provides a natural cue for the child to take their turn. For children with a strong mental representation of sentence structure, the pause as a prompt is sufficient.
- 2. If the child does not provide a scorable response (see definition below) during the pause, the adult provides the second prompt (*What's happening here?*). The open-ended nature of this prompt creates a natural discourse context for an SV or SVO response, prompting the child to use an SV or SVO sentence in their target description.
- 3. If the child still does not provide a scorable response, the adult provides the third prompt (*Tell me about the NOUN*). This prompt activates the target noun, supporting its use as the subject in the child's target description.

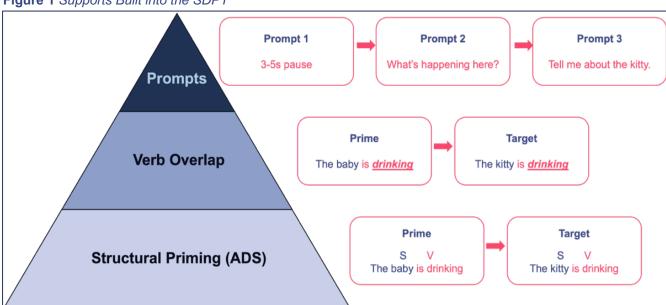


Figure 1 Supports Built into the SDPT

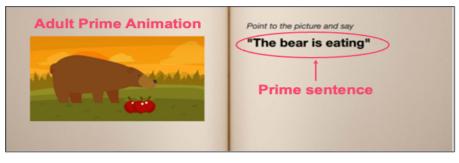
General Instructions

The SDPT is presented as an interactive picture book in which an adult and child take turns describing animations. Each item consists of an adult prime animation and a child target animation (Figure 2). On the first page of each item, the adult points to the adult prime animation and reads the prime sentence. On the next page, the adult points to the child target animation and follows the prompting hierarchy to support the child's description of the target animation. Although the animations, primes, and prompts were designed to support children's production of diverse 3P SV or SVO sentences, there are no correct responses or targeted vocabulary words on the SDPT. Record any SV or SVO sentence or verb phrase related to the animation and immediately move to the next item. If the child does not produce an SV or SVO sentence or verb phrase related to the animation after hearing all three prompts, move to the next item. To avoid child frustration, do not administer additional prompts.

Additional Administration Guidelines

- ✓ Proceed through the task as you would during a shared book reading activity.
- ✓ Administer items in the order in which they appear in the book.
- ✓ Read the script exactly as written in the book.
- ✓ Do not change the prompts or make additional comments related to the picture.
- ✓ Item sets may be repeated if the child is not attending to the task or in the event of a software glitch.
- ✓ Within an item set, Prompt 2 and Prompt 3 may be repeated one time each.
- ✓ The adult may request a repetition if they cannot hear the child's original response.
- ✓ To avoid child frustration, provide sufficient time for the child to respond (3-5s per prompt), but avoid extraneous conversation and prompting.
- ✓ If the child requires a brief break during administration, begin the break after completing a full item or readminister the entire item after the break.
- ✓ The adult may provide general encouragement, such as, "Great job."
- ✓ Turn the page and move to the next animation as soon as the child provides an SV or SVO sentence or verb/verb phrase related to the target animation.

Figure 2 SDPT Item Administration Overview





Administration

The SDPT may be administered remotely or in person. We recommend administering the task via the screensharing function of video chat software, regardless of administration context (remote or in person). This allows the clinician to record the entire session for later scoring. For optimal website functioning, the clinician should administer the task from a laptop or desktop.

Remote Administration

During remote administration, a caregiver serves as the child's communication partner. The caregiver reads the prime sentences and prompts while the clinician controls progression through the task. The child and caregiver should use a device with a tablet-sized screen or larger. The clinician should:

- ✓ Explain the task to the caregiver and walk them through the practice items.
- ✓ Remind the caregiver to read the prime sentences and prompts exactly as written.
- ✓ Assure the caregiver that there are no correct or incorrect responses. The child will have several opportunities to talk about the animations in the book.
- ✓ Instruct the caregiver to begin the first item once it is clear they understand the task.
- ✓ Turn to the next item as soon as the child provides an SV or SVO sentence or verb/verb phrase related to the target animation.
- ✓ During administration, encourage the caregiver to follow the prompting hierarchy. If needed, instruct the caregiver to avoid additional prompting or conversation with the child.

In-Person Administration

During in person administration, the clinician serves as the child's primary interactive partner and controls progression through the task, as described above.

Prompting Hierarchy

Follow the prompting hierarchy for each of the child's target descriptions.

- Prompt 1: Pause for 3-5s while looking expectantly at the child
- o Prompt 2: Point to the animation and say, "What's happening here?"
- o Prompt 3: Point to the animation and say, "Tell me about the NOUN"

Move to Prompt 2 if the child:

- o does not respond after 3-5s of pause time
- o responds with an unrelated or unintelligible response
- o responds with only a noun (kitty) or noun phrase (the kitty)

Move to Prompt 3 if the child:

- o does not respond to Prompt 2 after 3-5s more
- o responds with an unrelated or unintelligible response
- o responds with only a noun (kitty) or noun phrase (the kitty)

Turn the page and move immediately to the next item if the child responds with:

- o an SV or SVO sentence related to the animation
- o a verb or verb phrase related to the animation

Getting Started

- 1. Open the website and choose "Administer the SDPT".
- 2. Enter full-screen view of the online picture book.
- 3. Once the child is seated and ready to begin, point to the screen and say,
 - "Let's talk about some pictures together."
- 4. Turn to the first practice item.
- 5. Two practice items are included to familiarize the child and ensure they understand the task. For practice items only, do not use Prompt 1.

Practice Item 1





- 1. Turn to the animation of the baby drinking.
 - Point to the baby and say, "I'll tell you about this picture. The baby is drinking."
- 2. Turn to the animation of the kitty drinking.
 - o Point to the kitty and say, "Now it's your turn. What's happening here?"
- 3. Prompt the child with, "Tell me about the kitty," if the child:
 - o does not respond.
 - o provides an unrelated or unintelligible response.
 - o responds with only a noun (kitty) or noun phrase (the kitty).
- 4. Turn the page and move immediately to the next item if the child responds with:
 - o an SV or SVO sentence related to the animation.
 - o a verb or verb phrase related to the animation.

<u>For Practice items only:</u> If the child still does not respond with an SV sentence, point to the animation and say, "*The kitty is drinking,*" then turn the page to the next item set.

Practice Item 2







- o Point to the baby and say, "I'll tell you about this picture. The bear is eating"
- 2. Turn to the animation of the bunny eating.
 - o Point to the bunny and say, "Now it's your turn. What's happening here?"
- 3. Prompt the child with, "Tell me about the bunny," if the child:
 - o does not respond.
 - o provides an unrelated or unintelligible response.
 - o responds with only a noun (bunny) or noun phrase (the bunny).
- 4. Turn the page and move immediately to the next item if the child responds with:
 - o an SV or SVO sentence related to the animation.
 - o a verb or verb phrase related to the animation.

<u>For Practice items only:</u> If the child still does not respond with an SV sentence, point to the animation and say, "*The bunny is eating*," then turn the page to the first item set.

Once the child is familiarized with the task, turn to the first item set and say,

o "Great job! Let's talk about some more pictures."

Test Items

The test consists of 24 test item sets with two animations each; an adult prime animation, and a child target animation. See Appendix B for a list of all test item pairs.

- 1. On the first animation within an item set:
 - o point to the adult prime animation while it plays.
 - o read the description exactly as written in the book.
 - turn to the child target animation.
- 2. On the second animation within the item set:
 - o follow the prompting hierarchy as described above.
 - turn to the next page as soon as the child provides an SV or SVO sentence or verb/verb phrase related to the child target animation.
 - do not provide additional prompts or comments related to the picture.
- 3. If, after ~10 seconds on a page/animation, the child has not responded to the combination of all 3 prompts with any verbal communication:
 - o record the child's response as "NR" on the recording sheet.
 - turn to the next animation.

When you reach the final page, thank the child for participating:

o "Wow that was so much fun! Thanks for talking about this book with me!"

Recording Child Responses

We recommend screen-recording the entire session for later scoring. Stopping to write child responses during administration may cause some children to become distracted or frustrated with the task.

After administration, use the recording form to track the child's responses and the level of prompting required for each item. In the appropriate column on the recording form:

- ✓ Cross out words and morphemes the child does not say.
- ✓ Circle words the child does say.
- ✓ Insert words the child substitutes above the target sentence.
- ✓ If preferred, write the child's full response in the appropriate column.
- ✓ Write NR above the target sentence if the child does not respond to a prompt. If the child does not respond to any prompts, circle 'NR' in the last column.
- ✓ If the adult does not administer a prompt, cross out the box for that prompt.

Example 1

Adult: the ball is rolling in.

Adult: {turns page} {pause}.

Child: apple roll in.

= child responds during the pause (Prompt 1)

	Child Response after 3-5s pause	Child Response after "What's happening here?"	Child Response after "Tell me about the"	
1.1	The apple is rolling (n)	The apple is rolling in	The apple is rolling in	NR

Example 2

Adult: the ball is rolling in.

Adult: {turns page} {pause}.

Child: {NR} (no response).

Adult: What's happening here?

Child: it's rolling in.

	Child Response after 3-5s pause	Child Response after "What's happening here?"	Child Response after "Tell me about the"	
1.1	The apple is rolling in	tt's The apple is rolling in	The apple is rolling in	NR

Example 3

Adult: the ball is rolling in.
Adult: {turns page} {pause}.
Child: {NR} (no response).
Adult: What's happening here?

Child: basket.

Adult: Tell me about the apple.

Child: roll in.

	Child Response after 3-5s pause	Child Response after "What's happening here?"	Child Response after "Tell me about the"	
1.1	NR	basket		
1.1	The apple is rolling in	The apple is rolling in	The apple is rolling in	NR

^{*}Alternately, you may choose to transcribe each of the child's responses

Scoring Child Responses

After completing the recording form, transfer the child's scorable responses to the score sheet.

Scorable Responses

For each item, identify no more than one scorable response that meets all the following conditions:

- 1. The response is related to the target animation.
- 2. The response is produced in response to a *valid* prompt from the prompting hierarchy.
 - a. Prompts that do not follow the written script and prompting hierarchy (e.g., what's that, what's it doing?) are invalid.
 - b. Do not score child responses to invalid prompts.
- 3. The response is complete and intelligible.
- 4. The response contains at least a lexical verb/verb phrase.

Multiple Child Utterances on a Single Item

Children occasionally produce several utterances related to a single item. This is more likely to occur when the adult administers invalid or additional prompts. To avoid multiple child responses to a single item, (1) advance to the next item as soon as the child provides an SV or SVO sentence or verb/verb phrase related to the target animation, and (2) encourage the caregiver to follow the prompting hierarchy and avoid additional prompting or conversation with the child.

If the child does produce multiple utterances for a single item, record their first **complete and intelligible** utterance that contains at least a **lexical verb**.

Examples

Adult: What's happening here?	Adult: What's happening here?
Child: rolling. Scorable response.	Child: xx roll xx.
Adult: Tell me about the apple.	Adult: Tell me about the apple.
Child: it rolling.	Child: apple roll. Scorable response.

If the child immediately revises their response to a more advanced utterance without any intervening adult utterances, record the child's second utterance.

Examples

Adult: What's happening here?	Adult: What's happening here?
Child: apple.	Child: rolling.
Child: roll. Scorable response.	Child: apple's rolling. Scorable response.

No Scorable Utterances on an Item

If, following all three prompts, the child does not produce a scorable response or does not respond to any prompts, draw a line through the entire item on the score sheet, and/or circle NR for no response in the last column of the scoring sheet (see Appendix C).

Examples

Adult: {turns page}{pause}.	Adult: {turns page}{pause}.
Child: NR	Child: NR
Adult: What's happening here?	Adult: What's happening here?
Child: apple.	Child: NR
Adult: Tell me about the apple.	Adult: Tell me about the apple.
Child: xx in.	Child: NR
Draw a line through this item on the score sheet	Circle NR for this item on the score sheet

Recording Subjects and Verbs

After recording each of the child's scorable responses, identify and record all **lexical verbs** and **3P subjects** in the appropriate columns on the score sheet.

Lexical Verbs

Record all **verbs** produced by the child for each item (e.g., *rolling* in) in the **Verb** column on the score sheet. Draw a line through the verb column if the child did not produce a lexical verb for that item (see Appendix A for an operational definition of lexical verb). If the child produced the same verb in multiple items, cross out all but the child's first production of the verb (see Appendix C for sample score sheet).

3P Subjects

Record each **3P** subject used in an SV or SVO sentence(e.g., *apple* roll) in the **Subject** column on the score sheet. Draw a line through the subject column if the child did not produce a 3P subject for that item (see Appendix A for an operational definition of subject). If the child produced the same 3P subject in multiple items, cross out all but the child's first production of the subject (see Appendix C for sample score sheet).

Recording 3P Sentences

For each item, write **yes** or **no** in the **Sentence?** column to indicate whether the child's response was a simple, active declarative SV or SVO sentence with a 3P subject (see Appendix A for an operational definition of sentence). Remember that single words, phrases, questions, imperatives, and sentences with an *I/you* subject are not active declarative 3P sentences.

Recording the Level of Prompting Required

Using the recording form, determine the level of prompting required to elicit each of the child's scorable responses, and then circle the appropriate letter in the *Prompt* column on the score sheet as follows:

D: Child produced a scorable response during the 3-5s pause, or *delay*.

W: Child produced a scorable response following the What's happening here prompt

T: Child produced a scorable response following the Tell me about the NOUN prompt

Examples

Adult: {turns page}{pause}.	Adult: {turns page}{pause}.	Adult: {turns page}{pause}.
Child: apple rolling.	Child: apple.	Child: NR.
	Adult: What's happening here?	Adult: What's happening here?
	Child: apple rolling.	Child: apple.
		Adult: Tell me about the apple.
		Child: apple rolling.
Circle D for this item	Circle W for this item	Circle T for this item

Scoring the SDPT

After recording all scorable subjects, verbs, and 3P sentences produced by the child, calculate the child's verb diversity, subject diversity, and total number of 3P sentences (see Appendices A & C).

Calculating 3P Subject Diversity

- 1. At the bottom of page 1, record the *number of different* 3P subjects produced in Block 1.
- 2. At the bottom of page 2, record the *number of different* 3P subjects produced in Block 2.
 - Count only new 3P subjects (i.e., 3P subjects not already produced in Block 1)
- 3. Add totals from Blocks 1 & 2 to calculate the total *number of different* 3P subjects produced.

Calculating Verb Diversity

- 1. At the bottom of page 1, record the *number of different* verbs produced in Block 1.
- 2. At the bottom of page 2, record the *number of different* verbs produced in Block 2.
 - Count only new verbs (i.e., verbs not already produced in Block 1)
- 3. Add totals from Blocks 1 & 2 to calculate the total *number of different* verbs produced.

Calculating Total 3P Sentences

- 1. Record the *total number* of yes responses in the *Sentence?* column for Block 1.
- 2. Record the *total number* of yes responses in the *Sentence?* column for Block 2.
- 3. Add totals from Blocks 1 & 2 to calculate the *total number* of 3P sentences produced.

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Appendix A: Operational Definitions

Words that belong to categories (noun, verb, etc.) have properties that only they share. If a word passes the specified linguistic **TEST**, it belongs to that category of words.

Term	Definition	Example
Noun	A word that refers to an object or idea. TEST: can you put an article (<i>the, a, every</i> , etc) before the word, and/or add a plural -s morpheme? • If yes, the word is a noun	<pre> ✓ the cow ✓ a horse ✓ cats ✓ boxes ✓ the pretty</pre>
Lexical Verb	A word that describes a state or action. TEST: can you add an -ing or past tense -ed morpheme to the word? • If yes, the word is a verb. Note: young children may omit grammatical morphemes. For example, fall is a still a verb if the child says "it fall" instead of "it is falling".	✓ getting ✓ falling ✓ climbed ✓ dropped ★ hungryed, hungrying it fall kitty climbing the ladder him drop the ball
Subject	A subject is the noun or pronoun that appears to the left of (<i>before</i>) the main verb. This is the thing the sentence is about .	it fall kitty climbing the ladder him drop the ball
Object	An object is a noun or pronoun that appears directly <i>after</i> a verb. <i>Only</i> nouns and pronouns can be objects.	him chasing bunny drawing boat
Sentence	A sentence contains at least a subject + a verb. Active declarative sentences take the following forms: subject + verb (SV) OR subject + verb + object (SVO) Note: Sentences can have more parts, but a subject + a verb are necessary to create a sentence.	it fall him chasing bunny
Intransitive Verb	An intransitive verb has a subject but NO direct object. Intransitive verbs form SV sentences. *Note: Sometimes, prepositions (at, on, off) or adjectives/adverbs (wet, dry, open) appear after intransitive verbs. These are not direct objects.	it fall kitty climb up the dog running away
Transitive Verb	A transitive verb takes a direct object. A direct object appears <i>directly</i> after a verb. Transitive verbs form SVO sentences.	kitty climbing the ladder him drop the ball horsie drinking the water
Verb Diversity	Verb diversity refers to the number of different lexical verbs produced by the child. Count lexical verbs used in any context.	Verb Diversity Score = 3 plane go going down get book rolling in she get wagon

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Term	Definition	Example	
Subject Diversity	pject diversity refers to the number of <i>different</i> subjects produced by child. Only count subjects in SV or SVO active declarative tences. Subject should come before the verb. Do not count subjects in (no questions (is the bunny running?), or WH- questions (what is bunny doing?). Subject Diversity Scooping down the lady get book it rolling in lady get wagon		
Structural Priming	Structural priming occurs when the sentence structure of a preceding utterance activates a listener's underlying representation of that same sentence structure, increasing the likelihood of the listener repeating that same structure in their subsequent utterances.		
	For example, an SVO sentence can <i>prime</i> the listener's next production and increase the likelihood that the listener will also produce an SVO sentence.		
	In the SDPT the parent delivers the prime SV or SVO sentence which is designed to activate the child's representation of SV or SVO sentences and support use of the primed structure in their o descriptions.		

Appendix B: SDPT Items

Block 1: Intransitive Verbs

Adul	t	Chi	ld
1.	The balloon is going up	1.	The airplane is going up
2.	The towel is getting wet	2.	The bunny is getting wet
3.	The stroller is coming down	3.	The sled is coming down
4.	The snowflake is falling down	4.	The leaf is falling down
5.	The ball is rolling in	5.	The apple is rolling in
6.	The milk is spilling out	6.	The water is spilling out
7.	The window is closing	7.	The door is closing
8.	The car is stopping	8.	The truck is stopping
9.	The boat is moving	9.	The cloud is moving
10.	The ice is breaking	10.	The egg is breaking
11.	The bread is cooking	11.	The pizza is cooking
12.	The wheel is turning	12.	The fan is turning

Block 2: Transitive Verbs

Adult		Chi	ld
13. 7	The teacher is drinking her coffee	13.	The horse is drinking the water
14. T	The grandma is washing her hands	14.	The grandpa is washing the car
15. T	The lady is riding the motorcycle	15.	The cowboy is riding the horse
16. T	The turkey is driving the car	16.	The cow is driving the truck
17. T	The boy is <mark>drawing</mark> a boat	17.	The girl is drawing a flower
18. 1	The girl is throwing the footballs	18.	The man is throwing the snowballs
19. 1	The man is holding the dishes	19.	The lady is holding the books
20. 1	The monkey is climbing the tree	20.	The cat is climbing the ladder
21. 1	The girl is <mark>building</mark> a snowman	21.	The boy is building a sandcastle
22. 1	The mom is feeding the baby	22.	The farmer is feeding the pig
23. 1	The horse is pulling the sleigh	23.	The mom is pulling the wagon
24. 1	The cat is chasing the squirrel	24.	The dog is chasing the bunny

Note. Subject nouns are highlighted in blue and lexical verbs are highlighted in pink.

Appendix C: Sample Score Sheet

	Child's Scorable Response	Subject	Verb	Sentence?	Prompt	
1.1	airplane going up The plane is going up	airplane	go	yes	D (W) T	NR
1.2	The toothbrush is getting wet			no	D W T	NB)
1.3	The sled is coming down			no	D W 🗇	NR
1.4	leaf's coming down The leaf is falling down	leaf	come	yes	р ∰ т	NR
1.5	The apple is rolling in			no	D W 🗇	NR
1.6	the water falling out The water is spilling out	water	fall	yes	D (W) T	NR
1.7	The door is closing			no	D W 🗇	NR
1.8	The truck is stopping			no	D W(T)	NR
1.9	clouds move The cloud is moving	cloud	move	yes	© w т	NR
1.10	cracking The egg is breaking		crack	no	© w т	NR
1.11	The bread is cooking			no	D W 🗇	NR
1.12	the fan turning The fan is turning	fan	turn	yes	D (()) Т	NR
	Block 1:	# different subjects	# different verbs	5	Total 3P sentences	

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Child's Scorable Response		S	ubject	Verb		Sentence?	Prompt	
2.1	drinking water			drink		no	Dwт	NR
	The horse is drinking water							
2.2						no	D W T	®
	The grandpa is washing his car							
2.3	boy riding horsie	boy		ride		yes	D (W) Т	NR
	The cowboy is riding the horse							Н
2.4	a cow go	cow		go		yes	(D) W T	NR
	The cow is driving the truck			go was i	used in earlier item			Н
2.5	drawing a butterfly			draw		no	D W T	NR
	The girl is drawing a flower							
2.6	man throwing balls The man is throwing snowballs	man			throw	yes	D W T	NR
	girl carry her books							
2.7	The lady is holding the books	girl		carry	yes	D (W) T	NR	
	cat climbing	cat						
2.8	car cambing			climb		yes	D W T	NR
	The cat is climbing the ladder							
2.9							D W 🗇	NR
	The boy is building a sandcastle					no		INIX
2.40	a canadano							
2.10						no	D W T	(NR)
	The farmer is feeding the pig							
2.11	girl is pulling wagon	girl girl was used in earlier item		pull		yes	D (W) Т	NR
	The mom is pulling the wagon					,		
2.12	a bunny walking	bunny		walk		yes	D (W) T	NR
	The dog is chasing the bunny							
	Block 2:	6	# different subjects	8	# different verbs	7	Total 3P sentences	
	Sum of Subtotals:	11	# different subjects	14	# different verbs	12	Total 3P sentences	