



The SCALES team



Newsletter 2015

What is SCALES?

The Surrey Communication and Language in Education Study (SCALES) is the first population study of language development from school entry in the UK. It is a four year, longitudinal study funded by the Wellcome Trust and based at Royal Holloway, University of London. This study will trace children's language, educational and developmental progress from school entry to Year 3.

What is the purpose of the study?

There is considerable variation in children's language development and how children use language to learn and communicate with others.

We want to understand why these variations occur, and how language skills are related to school and social success over time. To do this, we needed to sample the language and communication skills of a large and diverse group of children. We then traced the language development of some of these children in more detail and over a longer period of time.

We hope this information will tell us how many children starting school need extra help with language, and what factors make it easier for some children to develop talking and listening skills than others.

What has happened so far?

In 2012 all Surrey schools (mainstream, special and independent) were invited to take part in the study.

Stage 1

- Reception teachers completed a questionnaire for over 7,500 children in 188 schools across Surrey in Summer 2012.

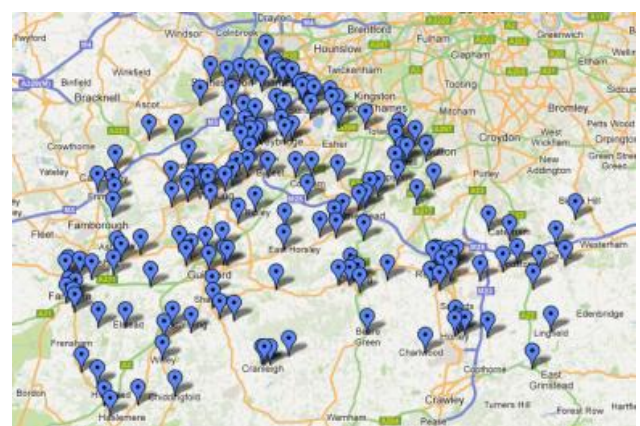
Stage 2

- 600 children were randomly selected to take part in the longitudinal follow-up study.
- Children were seen once in Year 1 for an in-depth assessment of language, reading, learning and social abilities. The research assessment took place at the child's school and was conducted by a trained member of our research team.
- Teachers and parents were asked to complete a few questionnaires about the child's language and behaviour skills.

What have we been up to this year?

This year we have seen all of the children involved in the SCALES follow-up study again while they were in Year 3:

- We have visited 195 schools all over Surrey and some schools further afield, such as the Isle of Wight and Devon!
- We have assessed an amazing 562 Year 3 pupils who are involved in the project.
- Our team of 8 assessors has spent a combined time of over 1,124 hours in schools assessing all the children involved in the project.



Map of SCALES schools

Parent & teacher questionnaires

So far, 52% of parents and 67% of teacher have returned SCALES questionnaires this year. This information, together with the information collected during the research session, will provide us with a clear picture of children’s abilities at home and at school.

Thank you to everyone who has spent the time completing the questionnaires - we really appreciate it! **We are hoping to have a few more questionnaires returned before the end of the year so please pop them in the post if you haven’t yet done so!**

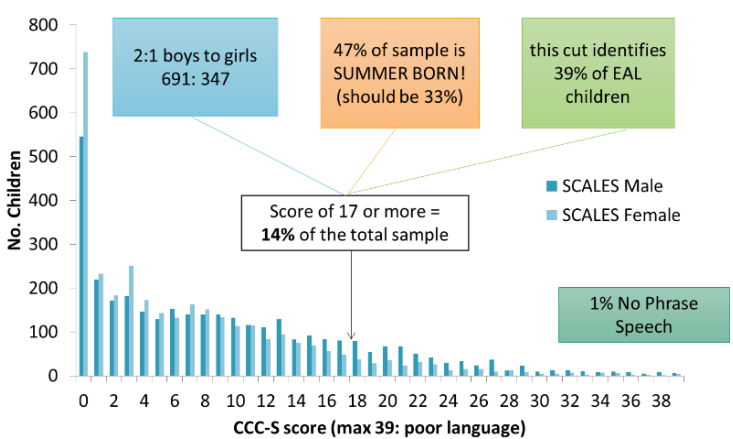
How have we assessed language skills?

We used six assessments to assess children’s language abilities; 3 focused on the ability to understand language and 3 focused on speaking skills (the ability to put thoughts into words or sentences in an accurate way):

Understanding	Speaking
Receptive one word picture vocabulary test (ROWPVT)	Expressive one word picture vocabulary test (EOWPVT)
Test for reception of grammar (TROG)	School-Age Sentence Imitation Test-English 32 (SASIT E32)
ACE Narrative: Story comprehension	ACE Narrative: Story re-telling

Findings from the SCALES screen (phase 1)

The graph below shows the distribution of language and communication scores within the SCALES screening sample (N=7532). Children with the weakest language ratings (bottom 14 % of the sample) were more likely to be boys, summer born and/or learning English as an additional language (EAL).



Publications & Dissemination

The first SCALES paper was published in June 2015:



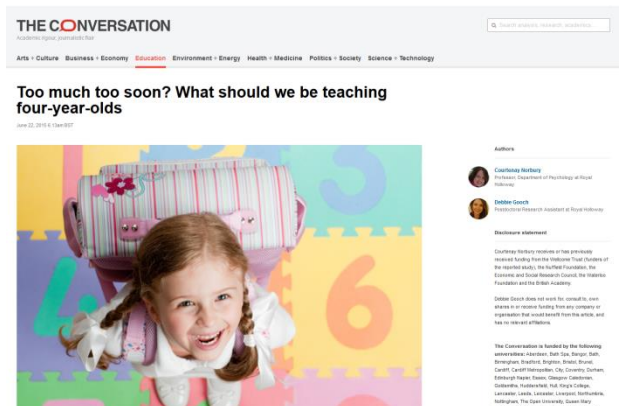
Younger children experience lower levels of language competence and academic progress in the first year of school: evidence from a population study

Courtenay Frazier Norbury,¹ Debbie Gooch,¹ Gillian Baird,² Tony Charman,³ Emily Simonoff,³ and Andrew Pickles³

¹Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, UK; ²Newcomen Centre, St Thomas’ Hospital, London, UK; ³Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King’s College London, London, UK

You can access our paper here or free:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12431/abstract>



<http://theconversation.com/too-much-too-soon-what-should-we-be-teaching-four-year-olds-43210>

Later in July the SCALES team will presenting some of their recent findings at the Child Language Symposium including:

- How children’s language skills affect the correspondence between parent and teacher ratings of attention/behaviour
- Speed of processing and its relationship to language and attention/behaviour
- Predictors of language competence in children learning English as an additional language
- Relationships between parent and child gesture use and language skills

Coming soon...

We are currently working on a paper reporting the prevalence of language difficulties at school entry. This will be the 1st UK based study looking at prevalence of speech, language and communication difficulties and will provide a timely up-date given the recent revisions to LI diagnostic criteria specified for language disorder.

Links to our publications are available on our website:

www.scalestudy.co.uk

Other projects

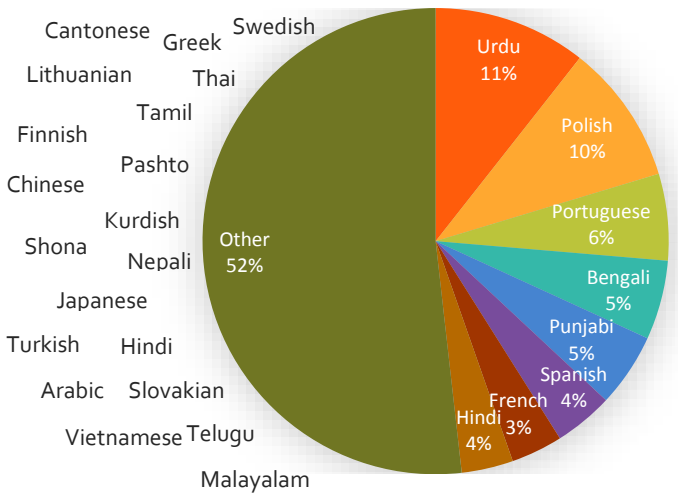


Speech, language and communication skills of children learning English as an additional language (EAL)

Katie Whiteside

Katie is exploring language and cognitive development in children who are learning English as an additional language (EAL). In summer 2012, teachers completed the SCALES questionnaire for 782 children with EAL (11% of the total SCALES sample). Over 64 different first languages were represented in this sample. The pie chart below shows the eight most frequently reported first languages.

Languages spoken in the SCALES sample



Sixty children with EAL took part in our follow-up study and were visited in Year 1 and again in Year 3. This year we have extended our research and by the end of July, we will have assessed 30 extra children with EAL. Additionally, many parents have completed a questionnaire to tell us about their child's progress in their first language and how their child and their family use English and their first language at home.

We want to know how to identify a child with EAL who may need additional support learning language. We are also interested in highlighting the advantages of growing up learning multiple languages. We would like to thank the Race, Equality and Minority Achievement (REMA) Team at Surrey County Council for helping us organise this project and for administering the parent questionnaires.



Using gesture to support language
Charlotte Wray

This project is exploring how gesture is used at home during parent-child interaction. An amazing 63 families took part in the 1st stage of this project; each family was visited at home and asked to complete different activities such as telling stories and playing charades. We gathered lots of useful information about how parents and children use verbal and non-verbal communication at home and how this is related to children's language. We are extremely grateful to all of the families who have taken part so far for their support and enthusiasm during the project.

The 2nd stage of this project is about to begin. This time we will find out whether gesture could be a useful tool to help children learn new words. We have started to contact families already taking part in this study, however, if you are not already part of the project and are interested in taking part then please let us know!



Genetics of language impairment
Diane Newbury, University of Oxford



We've known for some time that difficulties learning language often runs in families and research suggests that variations in DNA arrangements may play a role.

In previous research we have found that children with language difficulties have more DNA rearrangements than expected. Their family members also had more rearrangements. This was true even when the family members did not have language difficulties themselves. We think this is because it is not only the number of rearrangements that is important but also the location of the rearrangement and the genes that it affects. If we can **find out the location of important genes** then this will help us to understand why some children have problems developing language.



We are currently working with SCALES to collect DNA samples from families to see if there is a relationship between the amount and location of rearrangements and language ability. This will help us to understand our findings across a wider range of language abilities.

The study would simply involve providing a spit sample that we can use for our genetic studies. Please see the video on our website for further information regarding our research:

<http://www.well.ox.ac.uk/scalesinfovid>

Focus groups



On 3rd June we held our first focus group to discuss the next stage of SCALES with teachers, teaching assistants, SENCOs, representatives from behavior and speech/language support teams, speech & language therapists and researchers. Key issues that were raised were:

- Calls for SLTs and teachers to work more closely to plan for, and support, children with speech, language and communication difficulties in the classroom
- Identification of speech, language and communication difficulties in children learning English as an additional language
- Evaluation of changes in SLT service provision; specifically the move towards universal provision.

We are planning to run further focus groups over the coming year to help generate ideas to direct future SCALES research. If you are interested in being involved please contact us.



For more information about language impairment please see the RALLI YouTube channel:

www.youtube.com/user/RALLIcampaign

Acknowledgements

The SCALES team would like to say a **BIG thank you** to all of the children, parents and school staff that have supported this project over the past 3 years. It has only been possible with your help and we truly appreciate the time and effort you have all put in.

We would also like to thank the Wellcome Trust for funding SCALES and Surrey County Council for supporting this project. We would specifically like to thank Jennifer Charters, Virginia Martin and Anne James who were instrumental in setting up SCALES, Miranda Virgo for her help with the educational assessment data, Gabrielle Close, and the Surrey REMA team, specifically Jane Salkeld and Mariana Wallington, for their support with the SCALES EAL project.

Finally, we would like to thank the research assistants who have worked on the SCALES project: Charlotte Wray, Claire Sears, Harriet Maydew, Katie Whiteside, Rebecca Lucas, Natalie Kenney, Caroline Bird, Charlotte Nason, Hayley White, Tanya Hayman, Naomi Swain and Michaela Rea.

Now data collection has finished we are hoping that 2015/2016 will be an exciting year for SCALES as we start use the data to help answer some of the questions we had at the start of the project. New SCALES publications will be made available on our website alongside summaries of our key findings. If you have any questions or comments about SCALES please contact us.

Best wishes,

The SCALES team

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Contact us...

If you have any questions about SCALES please contact:
Prof. Courtenay Norbury (Principal Investigator) or Dr.
Debbie Gooch (SCALES project manager)

Email: SCALES@rhul.ac.uk

Phone: 01784 443704 / 01784 276139

Write: SCALES team, Department of Psychology,
Royal Holloway, University of London,
Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX

www.scalestudy.co.uk