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Brown's Stages

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As a child's average expressive phrase/sentence increases, so does his or her ability to use new grammatical structures. These structures increase in complexity over time and are separated into stages, known as "Brown's Stages." Roger Brown identified these stages to help understand and predict typical expressive language development in children.

Each stage has an age range (in months), an MLU range, structure types, and examples. MLU stands for "Mean Length of Utterance" – this does not always refer to number of words, but to number of morphemes, or units or meaning, in an utterance. For example, "happy" contains only one unit of meaning, so it is one morpheme. However, "unhappy" is still one word, but has two units of meaning (un-happy) and is two morphemes. "Happiest" is one word, but has two units of meaning (happi-est) and is two morphemes. A speech-language pathologist (SLP) will take a sample of a child's expressive language and analyze it to determine the child's MLU and will also refer to Brown's Stages to identify where the child is in his or her language development.

STAGE I

Age	MLU	Structure	Examples
12-26 months	1.0 – 2.0	50-60 word vocabulary; basic phrases/sentences that show communicative intent	*more water* *no juice* *my toys*

STAGE II

Age	MLU	Structure	Examples
27-30 months	2.0 – 2.5	**present progressive** (-ing verbs)	*jump**ing** off*
		in	***in** cup*
		on	*put **on***
		-s plural (regular plurals)	*my toy**s***
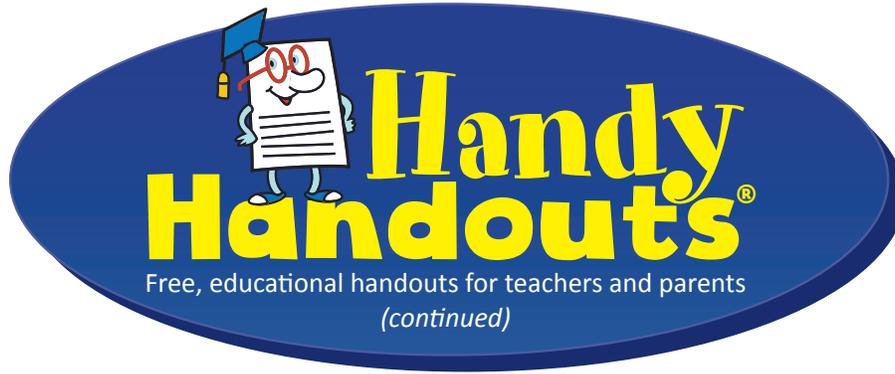
STAGE III

Age	MLU	Structure	Examples
31-34 months	2.5 – 3.0	irregular past tense	me *fell* down
		's possessive	mommy*'s* shirt
		uncontractible copula (main verb; full form of 'to be')	he *was* happy

STAGE IV

Age	MLU	Structure	Examples
35-40 months	3.0 – 3.75	article	in *the* bucket
		regular past tense (-ed verbs)	I laugh*ed*
		3rd person regular, present tense	he *swims* fast

STAGE V

Age	MLU	Structure	Examples
41-46+ months	3.75 – 4.5	3rd person irregular	kitty *does* tricks
		uncontractible auxiliary (helpful verb; full form of 'to be')	Dad *is* laughing
		contractible copula (main verb; shortened form of 'to be')	it*'s* hot outside
		contractible auxiliary (helping verb; shortened form of 'to be')	we*'re* coming over

You can use this chart to understand the development of a child's language skills. For further explanation or specific questions or concerns about a child, please contact a speech-language pathologist.

Resources:

"Brown's Stages of Syntactic and Morphological Development," Speech-Language-Therapy Dot Com, accessed January 10, 2019, https://www.speech-language-therapy.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33:brown&catid=2:uncategorised&Itemid=117

"Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) Chart," Ionia County Intermediate School, accessed January 14, 2019, http://ioniaisd.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/38468819/33MLU%20Chart.pdf

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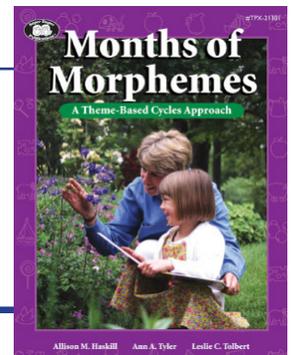
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