

PROCEDURES TO OBTAIN EXTENDED CONVERSATIONAL SPEECH SAMPLES FOR PROSODY-VOICE ANALYSIS

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Jane McSweeney

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Phonology Project, Waisman Center on Mental Retardation and Human Development,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Research using the Prosody Voice Screening Profile (PVSP) (Shriberg, Kwiatkowski, & Rasmussen, 1990) may require more codable utterances than are typically obtained from a conversational speech sample. One solution is to simply spend a longer period of time in conversation with the speaker. There are also other strategies that can be used to maximize the number of utterances in a conversational speech sample that can be coded for prosody-voice. This paper provides some specific suggestions to obtain a conversational speech sample that includes the maximum number of codable utterances. Many of these suggestions are elaborations of brief guidelines described in the PVSP training manual.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

Position of the Conversational Sample in the Assessment Protocol

The speaker should be comfortable with the examiner so that the sample of conversation is as natural as possible. If the conversational speech sample is part of a larger assessment protocol, it would be best to obtain the conversational sample after the speaker has completed several more structured tasks so that he or she has the opportunity to acclimate to the assessment situation and to the examiner. During the tasks preceding the conversational speech sample, the speaker may offer information that could give the examiner potential topics that could be introduced during the speech sample. Administering several other speech tasks prior to the conversational sample also gives the examiner the opportunity to become familiar with the speech errors made by a speaker with a speech disorder. This helps the examiner to verbally gloss utterances that might be partially or completely unintelligible to someone unfamiliar with the speaker's speech errors.

Examiner's Prosody-Voice

A speaker's prosody-voice can be influenced by the examiner's prosody-voice, and possibly vice-versa. Therefore, it is important that the examiner model and maintain a natural speaking style. It is also important that the examiner avoid speaking in unnatural prosody-voice patterns in response to the content or prosody-voice patterns of the speaker. For example, the examiner should refrain from using exaggerated stress, a character register, play registers, unusually fast or slow speech rate, and so forth.

PROCEDURES TO MINIMIZE UTTERANCE EXCLUSIONS

As introduced above, a conversational speech sample of sufficient length or an extended sample can be more efficiently obtained if efforts are made to minimize the number of speaker utterances that will eventually be excluded from PVSP analysis.

Following, organized by PVSP Exclusion Codes, are suggestions to minimize excluded utterances.

Content/Context

1. While obtaining a conversational speech sample, the examiner should not encourage the subject to recite the alphabet, count, or attempt to evoke any other automatic speech behaviors that would be produced using an overlearned, habitual prosodic pattern.
2. The examiner should discourage the speaker from saying “I don’t know,” “I don’t remember,” and so forth. This can be a challenging task with children who are inclined to use such phrases to avoid talking.
3. The examiner should not ask or encourage a speaker to imitate the examiner's productions. It is important to remember that the purpose of the conversational speech sample is to obtain information on what the speaker does in a normal conversation, rather than to attempt to change or improve his or her speech.
4. The examiner should try not to interrupt or talk over the speaker’s utterances.
5. The examiner should ask as many questions as possible that require a multiword response (i.e., avoid yes/no questions). It is important to remember that the conversational speech sample is just that: a conversation. The examiner should avoid generating a conversational sample that is, in fact, a question/answer session.
6. A conversational speech sample should not include reading.
7. The examiner should not encourage a speaker to sing during a conversational sample.
8. If the examiner understands a speaker’s utterance but thinks it may be partially or completely unintelligible to someone not familiar with the speaker, the examiner should restate the speaker’s utterance so that the utterance can be accurately glossed later. The examiner should attempt to make on-line glossing as unobtrusive as possible.
9. For children who have many speech errors associated with very unintelligible speech, it may be necessary for the examiner to use a book or pictures to obtain a sufficient number of intelligible (i.e., codable) utterances. The books and/or pictures used should depict everyday situations and people so that they can be

used to encourage the child to talk about personal experiences, family, friends, likes and dislikes, and so forth. For example, a picture showing a child with a dog can evoke conversation about pets. Comments on the picture can lead to questions that can be structured so that a child's responses and other comments can be more easily understood. The examiner's comments and questions might be as follows: "Oh, look, here is a boy playing with his dog. Do you have any pets? Do you have a big dog or a small dog? Does he have long hair or short hair? Who feeds him? What does he eat?" and so on. A description of a picture is *not* a codable utterance; therefore, when using pictures or books it is crucial that the examiner use them as a springboard to natural conversation, not as a substitute for conversation.

10. Some children become more willing to talk if the examiner offers information about herself, such as what she likes to do, where she's gone on vacations, what pet(s) she has, and so forth. This strategy has been known to evoke some great speech samples! At the same time, the examiner should not monopolize the conversation. Common sense and a genuine interest in what the speaker has to say go a long way in getting a good conversational speech sample.

Environment

Environmental factors can influence whether an utterance is codable for PVSP analysis. Accordingly, the environment in which the conversational speech sample takes place must be carefully considered and, if possible, modified as necessary.

1. Any environmental noise that may distract the speaker or interfere with the conversational sample should be reduced or eliminated if possible. This may require moving to another room or positioning the speaker and microphone as far from the noise as possible.
2. The recorder and microphone used to obtain the sample should be in good working order. A remote microphone should be used, and it should not be placed on the same surface as the recorder. The recording volume should be adjusted manually so that the speaker's voice on the tape will be neither too loud nor too soft. Keep the speaker's lip-to-microphone distance as constant as possible so that valid and reliable judgments of vocal loudness can be made.
3. Some examiners seem to have the perspective that toys are necessary props to obtain a conversational sample from a child. My experience both in obtaining and coding speech samples indicates that playing with toys while getting a conversational speech sample is neither necessary nor desirable for several reasons. First, the noises created by the toys can make it difficult to hear what

the examiner and/or child is saying; importantly, such utterances cannot be coded. Second, playing with toys can encourage a child (and often the examiner!) to use character or play registers that result in uncodable utterances. Third, if the toys are being played with on the floor, associated body movements may interfere with adequate recording of the speech signal. Such situations make it difficult to maintain constant lip-to-microphone distance, in turn invalidating PVSP codes for loudness. Finally, as discussed in the next section, playing with toys encourages the use of sound effects.

Register

Utterances in which speakers use registers cannot be coded for prosody-voice, including *character* register, *narrative* register, *negative* register, *sound effects*, and *whisper*. The examiner should ensure that use of any of these five registers is minimized.

1. As indicated previously, the use of character register and sound effects often is associated with play situations. If a play situation is unavoidable, the examiner should model natural prosody and voice characteristics and refrain from using character registers and sound effects.
2. Narrative register includes comments on or descriptions of pictures and telling stories, such as from a book, television show, or movie. The examiner should easily be able to minimize the use of narrative register. If books and/or pictures are used to evoke conversation, the examiner must be sure to avoid questions that evoke descriptions. Rather, the examiner should evoke utterances that describe how the picture might relate to a child's own experiences. If a speaker begins to tell a story or describe a television show or movie he or she has seen, the examiner should politely but firmly lead the speaker away from the narrative as quickly as possible (without rudely interrupting the speaker or making the speaker uncomfortable in any way). If the speaker insists on continuing with a narrative, the examiner should go with the flow. All stories come to an end eventually!
3. A negative register occurs when a child is uncooperative and does not wish to converse. Negative register includes comments such as "I don't want to!" or "This is boring!" Examiners have various ways of distracting and/or motivating children who do not want to converse. The examiner should do what she can to get the child interested in carrying on a conversation. Parents can sometimes be helpful in coming up with strategies to encourage and reward a child for completing tasks. Toys or food items can be used as a last resort. Although their use typically increases the number of uncodable utterances, they may at least

allow for the collection of some obtainable data. However, the examiner should always question the validity of data associated with frequent negative registers, for both segmental and prosody-voice analyses.

4. Intentionally whispered utterances are not codable because they prohibit PVSP coding of pitch and voice quality. The examiner must discourage a speaker from whispering. Sometimes ignoring the behavior is sufficient. At other times it might be necessary for the examiner to ask the child to talk more loudly so the examiner can hear all the child's "good ideas."

States

Utterances produced by a speaker while there is food in his or her mouth or while he or she is laughing or moving are not codable in the PVSP.

1. The examiner should avoid having food available during the conversational speech sample.
2. The examiner should be able to control laughing to some extent by not allowing too much silliness to creep into the conversational situation, or, if necessary, by diverting the conversation to more serious topics.
3. Body movements can be controlled by manipulation of the environment (such as having the child sit in a chair at a table while engaged in conversation) and by reminding the child to be still so that his or her voice, rather than body movements, will be heard on the tape.

REFERENCE

Shriberg, L. D., Kwiatkowski, J., & Rasmussen, C. (1990). *The Prosody-Voice Screening Profile: Computer version*. Tucson, AZ: Communication Skill Builders.