Expected Speech/Language Milestones by Age

Age	Syntax	Semantics	Morphology	Pragmatics

3 –4	- Averages 4- words per sentence
	- Uses mostly complete sentences
	- Uses mostly nouns, verbs and personal pronouns
	- Uses negation (e.g.: "I don't want it")
	- Uses clause coordinating devices (i.e.: and, because)
		- Labels most things in environment
		- Relates experiences and tells about activities in sequential order (e.g.: we went to the store. We bought some apples and then we came home)
		- Understands some common opposites (little/big, fast/slow)
		- Can sing a familiar song (twinkle, twinkle little star)
		- Answers questions such as Which one, where is, what do you have
		- Understands agent/action (e.g. tell me what flies, swims, bites)
		- By 48 months can complete opposite analogies (daddy is a boy, mommy is a _____)
		- Understands most preschool children's stories (by 48 months)
		- Understands concepts empty/full, big/little, more/less, in front/in back, next to)
		- Uses pronouns I, me, you, they, us
			- Uses third person singular, present tense (e.g., he runs)
			- Consistently uses simple (regular) past and present progressives (is running)
			- Uses is (he is happy), are (we are happy), and am (I am happy) in sentences
			- Uses regular plural forms correctly
			- Uses possessive markers (e.g.: "The boy's clothes")
				- Uses communicative functions including:
				  - Requesting (can I have juice, where is mommy)
				  - Protesting (I don't' want that)
				  - Greetings
				  - Role playing
				- Responds with structures such as yes, no, because
				- Engages in conversation for at least 3 exchanges

4 – 5	- Averages 5-6 words per sentence (e.g., I have that at my house) - Understands and uses complex sentences (e.g., I hurt myself because I fell down) - Uses future tense (e.g., she will go to the store)	- Uses most pronouns including possessives - Can name items in a category (e.g., food, animals) - Uses why and how questions - Answers wimple when questions (e.g., when do you sleep) - Can define common words (e.g., what is a hat) - Identify object by use and function (e.g. what do you cut with) - Asks meaning of words - Can give whole name	- Uses morphological markers for plurals (shoes), possessives (mommy's) ad tense markers (jumped, jumping, jumps) - Uses comparatives (big, bigger, biggest) - Uses irregular plurals fairly consistently (mice, teeth)	- Modifies speech as a function of listener age - Maintain topic over successive utterances for more than 3 turns

Age	Syntax	Semantics	Morphology	Pragmatics
4- 5	Averages 6 words per sentence Speaks in complete sentences by 5 Can use future tense (e.g., "She will go to the store") Can use *if, so* in sentences	Uses concrete meanings and words, but responds to some abstract ideas appropriately Can point to categorical items (e.g., point to all the fruit) Can name 3-4 items in a category (e.g., food, animals). Can use most pronouns, including possessives (e.g., *mine, his, her*) Can use *why* and *how* for an explanation Can use what do/did in questions Answers simple "when" questions like "when do you sleep) Retells simple, 3-sequnce stories Can give first and last name Can identify 10 common words by use and /or function (e.g., if directed, "Show me what tells time," "Show me which one gives us milk) Can define 10 common words by function	Uses comparatives (e.g., bigger, nicer, taller) Can use *could, would* in sentences Uses regular plurals with general consistency	Can maintain topic of their choosing over successive utterances Often uses egocentric monologue (this monologue does not communicate information to the listener) Begins to tell jokes and riddles (around 5 years)

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5 – 6	Can use present, past and future tense Uses the conjunction 'and' to string words together (e.g., "A bear and a wolf and a fox") Can use auxiliary *have* correctly at times (e.g., 'I have the cookie')	Follows novel directions containing spatial relations and prepositions such as *on top, behind, far, near* (e.g., "stand behind the chair") Can distinguish *alike, same, different* Can given most of address Identifies most common opposites (e.g., *hard-soft, fat-thin, high-low*); understands "opposite of" (e.g., "What's the opposite of cold?") Can defines objects by use and composition (e.g., "Napkins are made of paper; you wipe your mouth with them") Can tell stories; retells tales of past and present events Can answer "What happens if…?" questions Understands concepts such as yesterday-tomorrow, more-less, some-many, several-few, most-least, before-after, now-later (e.g., what happens after lunch?) Can state simple similarities and differences of objects when presented with pictures Comprehends *first, last* Can name position of objects: first, second, third (emerging) Can name days of the week in order Knows functions of body parts	Can identify some indefinite pronouns including *any, every, both, few, many, each* and others emerging Use of irregular plurals emerging Can use possessives and negatives consistently Uses all pronouns consistently Can use superlative *–est* (e.g., *smartest)* Begins to use adverbial word endings (e.g., *-ly)*	Understands humor, surprise Can recognize a socially offensive message and reword it in polite form when cued Begins to use and understand formal levels of address (e.g., *Mr., Mrs.)* Can differentiate 80% of the time between polite and impolite utterances Uses expressions such as "thank you" and "I'm sorry" Often asks permission to use objects belonging to others Contributes to adult conversation with familiar adults

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6 – 7	Begins to use cause and effect (e.g., If I do my work, I get a sticker) Uses reflexive pronouns (e.g., himself, myself) Can use passive voice Emerging use of embedding (e.g., "The girl *who bought the dress went to the party*") Can use adverbial conjunctions now, then, so	Understands the seasons of the year and knows what you do in each Distinguishes right and left in self, but not in others	Uses most morphological markers fairly consistently (e.g., The two boy**s** walk**ed** to the store) Emerging use of irregular comparatives (*good, better, best*) Continues to improve correct use of irregular past tense and plurals Begins to produce *gerunds* (a noun form produced by adding –*ing* to a verb infinitive, e.g., *fish, fishing* – Fishing with my dad is fun) Acquires use of *derivational morphemes*, in which verbs are changed into nouns (e.g., *catch* becomes *catcher*)	Becomes aware of mistakes in other people's speech Is apt to use slang (e.g., "that's cool")
7 – 8	Can use conjunctions to elaborate on sentence structure (e.g., and, but, or, because)	Makes a prediction about stories Understanding and use of figurative language emerging Uses details in description (e.g. "I see a black cat sitting on the round table") Creates conversation suggested by a picture Enjoys telling stories and anecdotes Retells a story, keeping 3+ events in sequence	Uses most irregular verb forms, although with some mistakes in irregular past tense (e.g., "yesterday he broked the vase") Uses superlatives (*biggest, prettiest* – "the biggest dog won the race") Uses adverbs regularly (e.g., "He ran quickly")	Initiates and maintains conversation Is able to role-play, to take the listener's point of view Determines and uses appropriate discourse codes and styles (e.g., informal with friends, formal with adults) Uses nonlinguistic and nonverbal behaviors – posture, gestures – appropriately Can sustain a topic with an individuals or small group through a number of conversational turns, but topics tend to be more concrete

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8-9	Comprehends and uses *tell* and *promise*	Has generally completed most of syntagmatic-paradigmatic shift Begins to interpret psychological states described with physical terms (*cold, blue*) but misinterprets	Uses –*er* suffix to mark initiator of an action (*teacher*) Uses full passives (80% of children)	Sustains concrete topics Recognizes nonliteral meanings in indirect requests Begins considering others' intentions Is able to judge grammatical correctness separate from semantics Sustains topics through several turns Addresses perceived source of breakdown in repair Produces all elements of story grammar
10-11	Comprehends and uses *ask* Comprehends *because* consistently Understands differences between *definitely, probably,* and *possibly* Creates *much* with mass nouns Comprehends *if* and *though*	Comprehends *in* and *on* used for temporal relations Comprehends most familial terms Creates abstract definitions Has all elements of conventional adult definitions Understands psychological states described with physical terms	Uses pronouns to refer to elements outside immediate sentence Uses –*er* for instrument (*eraser*)	Sustains abstract topics in conversation

Age	Syntax	Semantics	Phonology/Met linguistics	Pragmatics
11-12	Understands IF-Though (e.g. If the bus is late, I will be late for school. I like you though my mother doesn't)	Can explain relationships between meanings of multiple meaning words (e.g. I ate the sandwich, The acid ate the metal) Most common idioms understood (e.g. Don't count your chickens before they hatch)	Metacognitive skills emerge (e.g. define words, edit another's writing)	Understands jokes and riddles based on lexical ambiguity (e.g. The golfer said duck and I said "where")
12-14	Use of perfect aspect (e.g. have/had + verb) increases (e.g. He had been to the park before)	Can explain meanings of proverbs in context (e.g. A chain is as strong as it's missing link) Abstract dictionary definitions given for words	Knowledge of stress rules (e.g. yellowjacket vs. yellow jacket) is acquired	Understands jokes and riddles based on deep structure ambiguity (e.g. It was raining cats and dogs and I stepped in a poodle)
15-18	Full adult range of syntactic constructions reached (e.g. all verb tenses, transition words, adjectives and adverbs, etc)	Average vocabulary size of high school graduate is 10,000 words		Language is used to maintain social bonds (e.g. just talking)

Sources:

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