

## *Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (CASL)*

The Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999a) is a norm-referenced, individually administered test designed to measure expressive, receptive, and retrieval skills in oral language. It contains 15 subtests that assess four categories of spoken language: lexical/ semantic, syntactic, supralinguistic, and pragmatic. Subtests are categorized as core, supplementary, or not required to be administered according to the age of the examinee. Thus, not all subtests are administered to each individual. Table 24.4 illustrates the ages at which subtests are administered and their correspondence to each of the four language categories. The CASL is intended to be administered to individuals between the ages of 3 and 21 years. Students provide verbal responses or respond to items by pointing; no student reading or writing is required. Testing time typically ranges from 15 to 60 minutes. The author of the CASL states four purposes for the test: (1) identification of language disorders, (2) diagnosis and intervention in spoken language, (3) monitoring of growth in language skills and knowledge, and (4) conducting of research on oral language skills.

### *Subtests*

Each of the subtests includes examples given prior to the test items.

***Comprehension of Basic Concepts*** This 43-item subtest measures knowledge of words deemed necessary for children to succeed during the first few years of school. The

student points to a picture that best represents the meaning of a word given by the examiner.

***Synonyms*** This 61-item subtest requires students to choose which one of four words has a meaning similar to that of the stimulus word given by the examiner. The student can respond either by stating the word or by nonverbally indicating a choice.

***Antonyms*** This 55-item subtest requires students to express words that are opposite in meaning to those posed by the examiner. An open-ended format is used: The student must search, retrieve, and recall individual word answers.

***Sentence Completion*** This 61-item subtest requires students to provide words that appropriately complete sentences read by the examiner. Each item consists of a sentence with one missing word at the end of the sentence.

***Idiomatic Language*** This 49-item subtest consists of common idioms that students must complete. The student is instructed to "tell what has been left out" in a sentence that includes meaningful use of an idiom.

***Syntax Construction*** This 56-item subtest measures the oral expression of words, phrases, and sentences and the degree to which students use appropriate rules in formulating and expressing sentences. Young children are required to imitate and formulate simple phrases and sentences, whereas adolescents must develop more complex sentences. Each item is presented with a picture.

***Paragraph Comprehension of Syntax*** This subtest comprises eight paragraphs, with five to seven questions per paragraph, all of which are read by the examiner. Sentences in the paragraphs are of increasing syntactic complexity. The student responds to questions by pointing to one of four pictures that best illustrates the correct answer to the question.

***Grammatical Morphemes*** This 60-item subtest consists of analogies for which students must recognize semantic relationships between words to provide a correct answer.

Pictures accompany the first items for young children.

***Sentence Comprehension of Syntax*** Each item in this 21-item test is composed of two pairs of sentences. The first sentence in each pair is the model sentence. The student must determine whether the second sentence has the same meaning as the model sentence.

Sentences differ only in terms of syntactic structure (word order, clause construction, and so forth).

***Grammaticality Judgment*** This 57-item subtest requires students to indicate whether grammatically correct and noncorrect sentences presented by the examiner are "the correct way to speak in class." If the student indicates that a sentence is not grammatically correct, he or she must fix it by changing only one word and not the meaning of the sentence.

***Nonliteral Language Test*** This 50-item subtest comprises sentences read by the examiner that include figurative, indirect, or sarcastic language by the speaker. After reading the sentence(s), the student is required to explain what was meant by the nonliteral language.

***Meaning from Context*** This 48-item subtest includes sentences that contain one unknown or difficult word. After the examiner reads the sentence, the student must articulate what he or she thinks the target word means given the context of the sentence.

***Inference Test*** This 52-item subtest includes episodes of two to three sentences read by the examiner that require utilization of background knowledge to comprehend. A

question accompanies each episode; the student answers each question in her or his own words, based on an understanding of the sentences.

***Ambiguous Sentences Test*** In this 43-item subtest, the examiner reads a sentence that has two potential meanings. The student is required to explain the two possible meanings of the sentence.

***Pragmatic Judgment*** This 60-item test is made up of a series of stories describing everyday life situations. After listening to these vignettes, the students must either judge the appropriateness of the language used by those in the story or suggest language appropriate for the given situation.

### *Scores*

Raw scores are determined for each subtest. Each subtest raw score can be converted into a standard score (mean of 100; standard deviation of 15), percentile, normal-curve equivalent, stanine, and test-age equivalent using the separate norms manual; however, these subtest scores can be obtained only for those ages in which the subtest is determined to be developmentally appropriate (see Table 24.4). Core composite scores can be calculated based on the core tests administered at the student's particular age. This score provides a global measure of oral language and can be converted into a standard score (mean of 100; standard deviation of 15), percentile, normal-curve equivalent, and stanine. Index scores, corresponding to five categories (lexical/ semantic, syntactic, supralinguistic, receptive, and expressive), can also be reported for certain age groups. These scores can also be reported as standard scores, percentiles, normal-curve

equivalents, and stanines. The manual also provides suggestions on collecting additional qualitative information based on student responses.

### *Norms*

The CASL was standardized on 1,700 students, ages 3 through 21 years. The sample was chosen so that there were 200 three-year-olds, 200 four-year-olds, 700 students between 5 and 11 years old (100 per year), and 150 students for the remaining age groups (12–13 years, 14–15 years, 16–18 years, and 19–21 years). The norm sample appears to be representative of the school-age population as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (1994) in terms of gender, race/ ethnicity, geographical region, various disability statuses, and mother's education level. The sample was also stratified according to four age groups for all of the aforementioned variables except disability status (gender was stratified according to 13 age groups). Additional cross-tabulations were displayed for race/ ethnicity by mother's education level, as well as geographic region by race/ ethnic group. No information was included on residence characteristics of the sample (urban versus rural).

### *Reliability*

The internal-consistency coefficients for each of the 15 CASL subtests according to 12 age groups were determined (except for coefficients that correspond to subtests not administered at particular ages). Coefficients ranged from .64 to .94, with 94 of the 114

coefficients equaling or exceeding .80, and 37 coefficients meeting or exceeding .90. Internal-consistency coefficients were also obtained for the core composite and index scores by age. Index coefficients ranged from .85 to .96, and core composite coefficients ranged from .92 to .96. Test–retest reliability correlation coefficients were determined among 148 students in three age groups for the corresponding age-appropriate subtests, indexes, and core composites. These coefficients ranged from .65 to .96, with composite coefficients equal to .92 or .93 for all three age groups.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the core composite score of the CASL appears sufficiently reliable for making important decisions for individual students; use of other scores for this purpose will depend on the age of the student and the particular subtest or index score.

### *Validity*

Considerable theoretical description is provided in the manual explaining why particular subtests and subtest formats were included as part of the CASL. The author argues that these explanations provide evidence of content validity. Item-level analyses were also conducted in order to eliminate gender- and race/ ethnicity–biased test items. The CASL was correlated with subtests and overall test scores across four measures of oral language. Overall test correlation coefficients were as follows: Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language–Revised: .72; Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS) (Oral Composite): .80; Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–Third Edition: .74; and the Expressive Vocabulary Test: .74. The CASL was also correlated with the composite score of the Kaufman Brief

---

<sup>1</sup> Corrected correlations are given; uncorrected correlations are also provided in the manual.

Intelligence Test; the coefficient obtained was .81. The author examined the construct validity of the CASL by showing that CASL scores increase as expected with age (dramatic increase in the early years, and more gradual increase at the later years). Factor analyses were conducted for different age groups to determine whether characteristics of student performance supported the theoretical model of the test. Based on these statistical analyses, modifications in the test were made such that index scores are provided only for 7–21 year olds, and not for younger students (the factor analyses supported a one-factor model for 3–6 years and a three-factor model for 7–21 years).

Finally, scores for students with various disabilities (speech impairments, language delays, language impairments, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, and hearing impairments) were compared to scores for students not receiving special services who were matched on age, gender, race/ ethnicity, and mother's education level. Results indicated that groups of students that were expected to perform significantly lower than students without disabilities on the CASL performed as was anticipated. However, no evidence is provided as to whether the CASL is useful in monitoring growth in oral-language skills and knowledge or in diagnosis and intervention for language disorders. Because different subtests are administered at different ages, it may be difficult to measure an individual student's progress across years.

### *Summary*

The CASL is an individually administered, norm-referenced measure of oral language for use with students between 3 and 21 years. Subtest and composite scores can be

determined for all age groups; various index scores (lexical/ semantic, syntactic, supralinguistic, receptive, and expressive) can be obtained for a more limited number of age groups. The author provides a detailed theoretical explanation of why the test format and subtests were chosen. The standardization sample used for the CASL appears to be generally representative of the 1994 U.S. population in terms of gender, race/ ethnicity, geographic region, mother's education level, and socioeconomic status as reported by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1994). Overall, the composite score of the CASL appears sufficiently reliable for making important decisions for individual students; use of other scores for this purpose will depend on the age of the student and the particular score. The CASL appears to have satisfactory validity.