Test of Narrative Language
(TNL)

Publisher/Date:

Purpose:
- Norm-referenced, Individually-administered oral language measure, for ages 5-00 through 11-11 years, of a child’s ability to listen to, understand, and use narrative.

Provides:
- Two subtest scores are derived (Narrative Comprehension, and Oral Narration), which comprise the overall Narrative Language Ability Index. The test measures the child’s ability to answer literal and inferential comprehension questions, and measure how well children use and comprehend language in functional narrative discourse. The test utilizes three narrative formats: No Picture cues (answering comprehension questions and retelling the story), Sequence Picture cues (answering comprehension questions and telling a story that corresponds to ordered pictures), and Single Picture cues (answering comprehension questions and telling a story from visual cue). Audiotape-analysis is required.

Standardization Issues:
- Norms were based on 1,059 children from 20 states representing four geographic regions, and roughly representative by gender and race/ethnicity of 2001 school-age data from the Statistical Abstract of the United States. Family income (SES) estimates were from the 2000 Sourcebook America. Several disability groups were included.

Reliability and Validity Issues:
- Internal consistency and inter-scorer reliabilities exceeded minimal criteria of .80 for the overall group, as well as by individual groups of gender and race. Test-retest reliabilities were not reported by different age-groups, and the data that is reported is based on a small, non-representative group, and may be problematic for clinical decision-making. Several forms of validity evidence are reported (content, criterion, construct, and factor-analytic) but there were concerns raised with some of the bases from which the evidence was cited.
Additional Points:

- The TNL may compliment other structured measures assessing the child’s knowledge of the components of language, through its assessment of the child’s engagement in functional discourse.
- Appropriate caution should be used with the test’s use in children representing cultural differences/social dialect variations. An inherent difficulty in basing test formats on a limited-range of narrative types is that children from “mainstream” experience will be favored over the child with a different form of socialization and/or different narrative experiences.
- Mean scores for African-American and Hispanic children are 1/3 standard deviation from the mean (and 7 and 8-points lower, respectively, from the Caucasian group’s)
- Little information regarding the development of specific test items is presented in the manual.
- Age-groups by year are not equally-represented in the norming group. The 5-year old group (n=83) was small and almost ½ of the number represented in the other age-groups. Also, “upper-income” children are slightly overrepresented in the final sample. This “could” be problematic given that children from more “advantaged backgrounds” tend to possess higher language abilities.
- The test is not recommended for children with hearing-impairments and/or unintelligible speech—despite their apparent inclusion in the norm sample.
- Given concerns expressed with the test, it would be best suited as a complement to a comprehensive evaluation, and its use as an indicator for special education eligibility may not be supported.