# The Developmental Abilities of Thai Children with Intellectual Disability in Storytelling

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## ABSTRACT

Intellectual disabilities, to some extent, play a role in the delay of language development. Research about children with intellectual disability (henceforth, CID) in Thailand has focused on either specific learning skills or basic linguistic knowledge, ignoring overall language development. This study is an attempt to examine the developmental pathway of linguistic features acquired by 29 Thai CID from 9 to 15 years of age. The storytelling technique was employed for data collection using a modified version of the picture book '*Frog, where are you?*'. The children were asked to retell a story, and three aspects of narrative-related features—continuity of events (the use of conjunctions), elaboration of details (NP and VP internal structures), and imagination of narrators (background information and story evaluation)—were used for qualitative data analysis. Results show that, 9- and 13-year-old children's language performances were quite similar. That is, the variation and complexity of language forms were sporadic. In some features, children in the lower age group showed better performance than those in the older age group. However, it is noticeable that at the age of 15, they could produce more varied forms with a higher degree of complexity. Although CID start to acquire language later than typically-developing children, at about 15 years old they can effectively communicate with complex language structures like typical children. Findings from this study can be used as a guideline for CID-directed language learning and teaching.

**Keywords:** children with intellectual disabilities; storytelling; language development; narrative; Thai children

## INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disabilities (ID) are deficits in the intellectual capacity of children that are mainly caused by genetic abnormalities, inborn errors of metabolism, and brain malformations (Patel, Cabral, Ho, & Merrick, 2020). These affect the development of children in many aspects. When assessed by standardized tests, children with intellectual disabilities— referred to hereafter as CID—are those who score lower than 70 on IQ tests and have limited adaptive functions—abilities to manage daily life tasks and social interaction. The levels of ID vary from mild (50-70) to profound (20 and below) based on their IQ. In relation to language, many studies reported effects of ID as either a lower level of language competence or a slower pace of language development than typical children (Kim, Kim, Kim, & Song, 2018; Rodger & Loveall, 2022; Thurman, Edgin, Sherman, Sterling, McDuffie, Berry-Kravis, Hamilton, & Abbeduto, 2021). In relation to the

present study, it has been reported that school age CID exhibit lower performance in storytelling tasks compared to typically developing children. Moreover, they lack higher-level linguistic awareness, such as indirect expressions, references, irony, and metaphor (Kim, Kim, Kim, & Song, 2018). However, with systemic strategies and interventions, CID have the potential to effectively develop language skills (Cure & Yucesoy-Ozkan, 2023; Rodger & Loveall, 2022).

In Thailand, formal education for CID is under the responsibility of schools with special education programs. In addition to lessons and tasks for students, educators are required to conduct research studies to find proper pedagogical solutions to classroom problems. Rungrojsuwan (2020) reviewed research on CID in Thailand and found that most of the research focused on very specific classroom problems with a very limited number of students. Because the studies aimed at solving classroom problems and fulfilling specific students' learning outcomes—such as word spelling and pronunciation—they could not be applied to further practice. It has been noted that, in addition to language problems, understanding children's learning behaviors and language competence might help educators design more appropriate lessons and learning tasks. However, in Thailand, studies on language development are mainly conducted with typically developing children (Ratitamkul, 2010; Rungrojsuwan, 2003; Rungrojsuwan, 2019a; Rungrojsuwan, 2019b; Rungrojsuwan, 2023b; Rungrojsuwan, Burnham, & Luksaneeyanawin, 2004a; Rungrojsuwan, Burnham, & Luksanneyanawin, 2004b; Tuaycharoen, 1995; Zlatev & Yangklang, 2001), with a significant lack of studies on CID. In the comprehension aspect, Rungrojsuwan (2023b) explored how well Thai CID understand plots in a storytelling task. It is reported that CID aged 9 to 13 years exhibit a wide range of individual differences. In other words, some younger children could comprehend the story much better than those in the older age groups. However, the range of variation of CID tends to decrease by the age of 15. In relation to language production, although it is true that the language competence of CID lags behind that of typical children, it is not clear whether their language competence and the complexity of their language structures develop across ages. Accordingly, the examination of the linguistic competence of CID not only helps us develop a deeper general understanding of the condition but also indicates how far their language abilities deviate from those of typical children. This nature of development could ultimately facilitate educators in developing effective and logical teaching materials and pedagogical methods for CID.

The assessment of first language development can be done using various methods, ranging from in-depth yet labor-intensive techniques—such as the traditional parental diary (Benedict, 1979; Ingram, 1989; Tuaycharoen, 1995) and videotaped parent-child interactions (CHILDES: Child Language Data Exchange System, 2023; Rungrojsuwan, 2003)—to those that cover a large number of children but provide quite limited information—such as a checklist questionnaire (Bates, Dale, & Thal, 1995; Fenson, Dale, Reznick, Bates, Thal, & Pethick, 1994; Rungrojsuwan, 2003; Rungrojsuwan, 2004a). In addition, the use of narrative is an alternative research method that elicits a sufficient amount of linguistic information for the postulation of a developmental pathway (Reese, Sparks, & Suggate, 2012). One of the most popular narrative methods is the use of the picture book *Frog, where are you?* drawn by Mayer, 1967 (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Ratitamkul, 2010; Reese et al., 2012; Rungrojsuwan, 2019a; Rungrojsuwan, 2023a; Rungrojsuwan, 2023b; Strömqvist & Verhoeven, 2004; Winskel, 2007; Zlatev & Yangklang, 2001). Through the book, participants are required to tell the story using their imagination and linguistic competence. While the pictures function as controlled factors, researchers can implement comparative and developmental studies of children of different ages and cultures. Assessing language performance via narratives indicates two internal intellectual aspects: 1) macrostructure—to what extent children understand and are able to narrate the story's plot—and

2) microstructure—the types of linguistic devices children have acquired. Additionally, because storytelling is a familiar and interactive children's activity, the data collection process is child-friendly. Consequently, this allows studies to acquire data more naturally. As a pioneer in language development of CID in Thailand, the present study aims to examine the development of linguistic competence of Thai CID through the investigation of some specific linguistic devices related to storytelling.

## METHOD

### SCOPE, DATA, AND PARTICIPANTS

Approval to conduct this research was obtained from the Mae Fah Luang University Ethics Committee in July 2021 (EC 21086-10). Following a qualitative approach, this study analyzed the narratives of Thai CID and proposed the nature of their language development. The data comprised of the narrative discourses of 29 students with mild ID in the primary level (Grades 3 and 5, i.e., 9 and 11 years old) and the secondary level (Grades 7 and 9, i.e., 13 and 15 years old) from Chiang Rai Punyanukul School—a school with special education programs for various types of CID in the northern-area provinces of Thailand. The students with a medical report indicating various levels of intellectual disability and other related symptoms are recruited and are housed at the school for an entire semester. They are placed in different grades according to their age and are closely supervised with a teacher-student ratio of 1:10. All participants were coded accordingly: [child + age + no.]. For example, C11n5 refers to the fifth (n5) child (C) in the 11-year-old group (11).

### INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION

To elicit narrative discourses, the picture book *Frog, where are you?* by Mayer (1967) was chosen as the instrument. This book has been widely used for narrative studies across various languages (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Ratitamkul, 2010; Reese, Sparks, & Suggate, 2012; Reilly, Losh, Bellugi, & Wulfeck, 2004; Rungrojsuwan, 2019a; Strömqvist & Verhoeven, 2004; Yangklang, 2003; Zlatev & Yangklang, 2001). The narrative revolves around three protagonists—a boy, a dog, and a frog—living in a house. One day, the frog runs away. The boy and the dog go out, searching for the frog in many different places. They meet many obstacles and finally find the missing frog, bringing it back home. To accommodate CID who have a limited attention span, only 13 out of the 24 pictures, covering the three key plot components—introduction, problem, and resolution—were selected for the current study. Additionally, audio scripts were created to guide the storytelling process. Subsequently, tape recordings were made for data collection purposes.

      The retelling technique—one of the most reliable data collecting methods in narrative study (Reese, Sparks, & Suggate, 2012, pp. 135-139, 144)—was used in data collection. After a warm-up activity to create familiarity between the research assistants and the participants, the process started as follows: First, the pictures and corresponding scripts were shown to the participants. This was to introduce the overall story plot and to help create some ideas about the story before retelling it themselves. Second, each participant was asked to tell the story in Thai using the same set of pictures, and the retold stories were tape-recorded. In cases where they had no idea about some particular pictures, the assistant helped them by asking guided questions—such as, 'What

happened then?'—to stimulate their response. Lastly, all recorded files were transcribed and used for data analysis.

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework developed by Rungrojsuwan (2023a) was used for data analysis. The framework—synthesized from past studies on narratives (Aksu-KoÇ & Nicolopoulou, 2014; Berman & Slobin, 1994; Bliss et al., 1998; Gorman et al., 2016; Justice et al., 2010; Pinto et al., 2016)—took significant functions and components of narratives from the previous studies into account and proposed three major types of information usually appearing in narratives: 1) continuity of events—relating events in different manners; 2) elaboration of details—providing detailed information about characters and events; and 3) imagination of narrators—showing the creativity of a storyteller by providing additional information about the story apart from what can be seen in the pictures. The three components are realized through different types of linguistic features (Table 1).

TABLE 1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

| NARRATIVE COMPONENTS > Local Information | LINGUISTIC FEATURES |
|---|---|
| 1. Continuity of events > types of event relations | The use of 4 types of conjunctions to connect events in different manners. 1.1 Sequential, 1.2 Simultaneous, 1.3 Cause-and-effect, and 1.4 Contradictory |
| 2. Elaboration of details > character and event description | The internal structures of 2 types of phrase structures 2.1 Noun phrase (NP) for character description, and 2.2 Verb phrase (VP) for event description |
| 3. Imagination of narrators > background information and story evaluation | 3.1 Background information including any information depicting additional scenarios beyond what is illustrated in the picture. 3.2 Story evaluation involving information describing the judgment, viewpoint, or attitudes of the narrators or protagonists about the story. |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### CONTINUITY OF EVENTS: THE USE OF CONJUNCTIONS IN NARRATIVES

The component "continuity of events" deals with how well a narrator sees and is able to join two or more events together by employing an appropriate linguistic device. The language indicator to demonstrate this component is conjunctions. According to a narrative study (Rungrojsuwan, 2023a), four groups of conjunctions indicating four different event relations were reported among typical children. These were also found in Thai CID as follows:

#### SEQUENTIAL RELATION

Clauses and sentences depicting events that occur in sequential order are linguistically connected by sequential conjunctions. From the data, sequential conjunctions were the most common conjunctions found in the children's narratives. All sequential conjunctions can be classified into three types according to their internal structures: simple, compound, and complex.

Regardless of the number of syllables or form, simple sequential conjunctions comprise only one total conjunction, as in examples (1) and (2). Compound sequential conjunctions are composed of two or more simple conjunctions, as in examples (3) and (4). Lastly, complex sequential conjunctions are conjunctions whose elements are split into two separate parts between two events, as in examples (5) and (6).

*(1) lúk    kʰîn   lǽːw   mɔːŋ paj tʰîI kʰɔ̌ːnmáːj jàj  (C9n7)*
   stand up    then    look go at log          big
   '(the boy) stood up and looked at the big log.'

*(2) paj cɘː  kòp tua   nìŋ kʰǎw kɔ̂ː  càp    man ma:   líaŋ wáj  naj lɔ̌ː (C11n6)*
   go find  frog CLF one he   then catch  it    come feed stay in  jar
   '(the boy) found a frog. Then, he kept it in the jar.'

*(3) kwaːŋ wîŋ paj tʰîː nâːpʰǎː  lǽːw kɔ̂ː  brɛ̀ːk kratanhǎn (C11n6)*
   deer    run go at cliff     then         stop suddenly
   'The deer ran to the cliff and stopped suddenly.'

*(4) lǽːw lǎŋcàːk nán kɔ̌ː  dɘːn dɘːn  ma:   hǎː  naj tônmáːj kɔ̂ː  mâj cɘː: (C15n5)*
   after that              walk walk  come find in   tree      also not  find
   'After that, (the boy) came to find (the frog) in the tree but did not find it.'

*(5) lǽːw  dàːŋ  kàp pʰon kɔ̂ː  cɘː:  fǔːŋ   kòp (C13n6)*
   then  Dang and Phol then find group frog
   'After that, Dang (the dog) and Phol (the boy) found a group of frogs.'

*(6) lǽːw pʰɔː  kʰon nɔːnlàp kòp kɔ̂ː  dâːj    ʔɔ̌ːk paj (C15n4)*
   then         man sleep   frog then PAST out  go
   'After the man slept, the frog went out.'

Table 2 illustrates the types of sequential conjunctions distributed among the four age groups. It can be observed that at 15 years of age, the patterns of conjunctions tend to be more varied and complex. On the other hand, the performance of CID at 13 years of age is obviously below those of the 9- and 11-year-old groups. This might indicate some psychological limitations due to which the 13-year-old participants might have felt uncomfortable interacting with the research assistants during data collection. However, employing the same set of databases, Rungrojsuwan (2023b) explored the story plots narrated by CID and found that, in terms of understanding, 13-year-old children could successfully express a lower percentage of the story's plot than the 9- and 11-year-old subjects. At the same time, the data show a high degree of variation, even among children in the same age group. More findings in the next sections might help clarify this point.

TABLE 2. TYPES OF SEQUENTIAL CONJUNCTIONS

| Types | 9 yrs | 11 yrs | 13 yrs | 15 yrs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Simple | *lǽʔ, lǽːw, con, tɔ̀ɔ ma, tɔ̀ɔ paj* | *lǽːw kɔ̂ː, càːk nán, pʰɔː, sèt lǽːw* | *lǽːw, lǽːw tʰîː ní:* | *lǽːw, kɔ̂ː, pʰɔː, kɔ̂ː lɘːj, lǽʔ, con* |
| Compound | *lǽʔ kɔ̂ː, lǽːw kɔ̂ː* | *lǽːw kɔ̂ː, lǽːw càːk nán, càːk nán kɔ̂ː* | - | *lǽʔ kɔ̂ː, lǽːw kɔ̂ː, lǽʔ lǎŋ càːk nán, lǽːw lǎŋ càːk nán, lǽːw lǎŋ càːk nán kɔ̂ː, tɔːn lǎŋ càːk nán kɔ̂ː,  kɔ̂ː tɔːn sùt tʰáːj, tɔːn sùt tʰáːj nán* |
| Complex | *lǽʔ..kɔ̂ː, lǽːw..kɔ̂ː* | *lǽːw..kɔ̂ː, pʰɔː:..kɔ̂ː* | *lǽːw..kɔ̂ː* | *lǽʔ..kɔ̂ː, lǽːw..kɔ̂ː, lǽːw pʰɔː:..kɔ̂ː* |

**SIMULTANEOUS RELATION**

Simultaneous relation depicts two or more events occurring at the same time. To form a simultaneous scene, Thai CID employed both single conjunctions (*kʰanàʔtʰîː*) and complex conjunctions (*kʰanàʔtʰîː… kɔ̂ː, sùan… kɔ̂ː*) as in examples (7)-(9).

> *(7) kʰanàʔtʰîː nɔ́ːŋ sǐa kamlaŋ nɔːnlàp kàp câw daːˋŋ jùː    nán kòp wîŋ nǐː*
>     while    Sua    CON  sleep   with Dang    CON TOP frog run flee
>     *ʔɔ̀ːk  maː* (C9n2)
>     out  come
>     'While Tiger (the boy) was sleeping with Dang (the dog), the frog ran out.'
> *(8) kʰanàʔtʰîː kʰăw nɔːnlàp nán   kòp nɔ́ːj  kɔ̂ː   nǐː  ʔɔ̀ːk paj* (C11n4)
>     while    he    sleep   TOP frog little then flee out go
>     'While he was sleeping, the frog escaped.'
> *(9) sùnák taːmhă: kòp  sùan   pʰon kɔ̂ː   taːmhă: sɔ̂ːk   kìŋmáːj* (C15n7)
>     dog    search  frog while  Phol also search    niche  tree branches
>     'The dog was searching for the frog while Phol (the boy) was looking into the niche of the trees.'

Note that the patterns of conjunctions expressing the concept of simultaneity are very rare and are not found in the 11-year-old group. This seems to reflect how the children perceive all of the components in a picture. It can be observed that they seem to prefer expressing the actions of protagonists either together—such as the boy and the dog doing the same action—or separately in sequence—such as the boy doing one thing and then the dog doing another.

**CAUSE-AND-EFFECT RELATION**

It can be noticed that the concept of cause-and-effect requires not only the timing relationship between two separate events but also the causal effect of one event on another. Accordingly, it might be claimed that the cause-and-effect relation is more complex than the previous two relation types—sequential and simultaneous. The common conjunctions expressing cause-and-effect in Thai are *pʰrɔ́ʔ* and *pʰrɔ́ʔwâː*. From the children's narratives, there were no cause-and-effect conjunctions found in the youngest group (9 years old), while only *pʰrɔ́ʔwâ* and *pʰrɔ́ʔ* were used by the 11- and 13-year-old groups, respectively. It is apparent that the 15-year-old group is the most productive. They produced up to seven different patterns of cause-and-effect conjunctions, including *pʰrɔ́ʔ, cɨŋ, cɨŋləːj, contʰamhâj, ləːj, ləːjcɨŋ,* and *kɔ̂ːləːj*. Some relevant examples are (10)-(13).

> *(10) kɔ̂ː  tòkjaj pʰrɔ́ʔwâː  doːn  pʰîŋ tɔ̀j* (C11n4)
>     also panic because   PASS bees hit
>     '(the boy) shocked because he was hit by the bees.'
> *(11)* RA: 'Why did (they) fall into the water?'
>     Child: *pʰrɔ́ʔ    kwaːŋ jùt* (C13n1)
>            because deer   stop
>            'Because the deer stopped.'

(12) *kwa:ŋ  dâ:j    jùt   kratʰanhăn  contʰamhâj  kʰon tòk* (C15n5)
　　deer   PAST  stop sudden     CAUSE     man fall
　　'Because the deer suddenly stopped, the man fell down.'

(13) *kʰon dâ:jjin sĭaŋ  ʔaraj ba:ŋjà:ŋ   kʰăw lə:jciŋ paj du: tʰî: lăŋ    sô:k  má:j* (C15n7)
　　man hear   noise what something he    then   go  see at behind niche tree
　　'The man heard something so he went to see behind the tree.'

### CONTRADICTORY RELATION

The sense of contradiction here does not simply refer to two different events; the two events must share the same implication with different expectations. For example, the two sentences 'the boy woke up' (sentence A) and 'the frog was missing' (sentence B) would be related contradictorily when they both imply that the frog was in the room. While sentence A creates the expectation that the frog was still there in the room when the boy woke up, sentence B contradictorily creates the expectation that there is no frog in the room. Accordingly, this makes contradictory relations more complex than sequential and simultaneous relations and results in a very low frequency of occurrence. Moreover, qualitatively, lexical devices that depict this type of relationship are very limited (the Thai language uses the marker *tὲ:*). As a consequence, the discourses containing contradictory conjunctions could only be found in the 15-year-old group, as in example (14).

(14) *lɔ:ŋ hă:    bon tônmá:j tὲ: tʰî:ciŋ   man mâj  cʰâj  tὲ: man pen kwa:ŋ* (C15n2)
　　try   search on  tree     but actually it   NEG right but it   be deer
　　'(the boy) tried to find (the frog) on the tree but actually it is not (the three) but it is the deer'

### ELABORATION OF DETAILS: SIZES AND TYPES OF NPS AND VPS

In storytelling, a narrator normally provides some detailed information about characters and events. Thus, the elaboration of details is viewed as a crucial narrative component that reflects the ability of the narrator. From the perspective of language development, it might be said that the more complex information the narrators produce, the more advanced their development. This study observes this component from the internal structure (size and type) of the noun phrase (NP) and the verb phrase (VP). The number of elements within an NP or VP indicates the size of the information, while the patterns of each size demonstrate its subtypes.

In relation to NPs, Table 3 illustrates the distributions of patterns (types) on the different sizes of NPs describing the three main protagonists—the boy, the dog, and the frog. Regarding size, the NPs contain one to four components. In the two- and the four-component NPs, according to Thai syntactic structure, the noun (N) or a pronoun (PRON) functioning as head of the NP precedes its modifiers, which can be noun (N), adjective (ADJ), classifier + determiner (CLF DET), or verb phrase or clause introduced by a complementizer or a classifier (COMP VP, COMP CL, CLF COMP VP), as in the examples below. Concerning types, the study found that patterns of NPs increase across ages. This obviously implies the significant role that age plays in the language development of CID.

| | |
|---|---|
| N | *mǎ:* |
| | dog |
| PRON | *kʰǎw* |
| | he |
| N N | *lû:k  kòp* |
| | child frog |
| | 'baby frog' |
| N ADJ | *dèk  nɔ́:j* |
| | child small |
| | 'little boy' |
| N DET | *câwmǎ:  ní:* |
| | dog      this |
| | 'this dog' |
| N CLF DET | *dèk  kʰon  nán* |
| | child  CLF that |
| | 'that boy' |
| N CLF N | *kòp  tua  nán* |
| | frog  CLF one 'a frog' |
| N COMP VP | *kòp  tʰî:  nǐ:  caˋ:k  naj lǒ:* |
| | frog COMP run away from in   jar |
| | 'the frog that flee from the jar' |
| N COMP CL | *kòp  tʰî:  kʰǎw nǐ:  ʔɔ̀:k caˋ:k bâ:n* |
| | frog COMP he    run away out  from home |
| | 'the frog that ran away from home' |
| N CLF COMP VP | *kòp  tua  tʰî:  nǐ:  paj* |
| | frog CLF COMP run away go |
| | 'the frog that run away' |

TABLE 3. SIZES AND TYPES OF NP IN CID' S NARRATIVES

| Elements | 9 yrs | 11 yrs | 13 yrs | 15 yrs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ONE** | N<br>PRON | N<br>PRON | N<br>PRON | N<br>PRON |
| **TWO** | N N | N N<br>N ADJ | N N<br>N ADJ<br>PRON DET | N ADJ<br>N N<br>N DET<br>PRON DET<br>NP DET |
| **THREE OR MORE** | - | N CLF DET | N CLF N | N CLF DET<br>N NP DET<br>N COMP VP<br>N COMP CL<br>N CLF COMP VP |

While studying how well CID comprehend all plots of the story through their storytelling, Rungrojsuwan (2023b) found an unclear pathway of development among 9- to 13-year-old children. It was reported, for example, that some 9-year-old children expressed clearer plots than some 13-year-olds. However, in the present study, from a structural aspect, 9-year-old CID

produced fewer types of NP than 13-year-olds. Such contradictory findings suggest the role of age in CID language development and imply an unrelated relationship between plot comprehension and linguistic production. It might be preliminarily hypothesized that linguistic structures develop across ages, but not the understanding of the story. However, more detailed findings on VPs might help clarify this hypothesis.

The internal structures of VP consist of a verb (V) functioning as the head of the VP and (1) optional verb modifiers—or adjuncts; and (2) obligatory modifiers—or complements. The analyses of the VPs of CID focus on two aspects: size and types. The number of internal structures ranges from two to six, which is consistent across all ages. This indicates that CID of all ages have the potential to produce complex verb phrases. Considering the types of VPs, it is noticeable that a significant number of three- and four-component VPs were creatively produced among all ages. This might not reflect the inability to produce larger VPs (a VP with 4 or more components) but rather a preference for VP sizes that might be more appropriate for clear storytelling (Table 4).

TABLE 4. SIZES AND TYPES OF VP IN CID' S NARRATIVES

| Age | Element (no of patterns) | Patterns (total number) |
|---|---|---|
| **9 yrs** | 2 (8) | ADV V, V ADV,V ADVP, V N, V NP, V PP, V S, V V |
| | 3 (20) | ADV N V, ADV V N, ADV V PP, ADV V V, V ADV N, V ADV PP, V comp N, V comp S, V N ADV, V N V, V N VP, V NP ADV, V q comp, V V ADV, V V N, V V NP, V V P, V V part, V V PP, V V V |
| | 4 (15) | ADV ADV V ADV, ADV V V ADV, ADV V VP part, V ADV ADV V, V ADV conj V, V N V V, V N VP NP, V V conj VP, V V N PP, V V N V, V V PP VP, V V V N, V V V NP, V V V PP, V V V V |
| | 5 (5) | ADV V V N part, ADV V V PP part, ADV V V PP ADV, V N V ADV VP, V V V comp S |
| **11 yrs** | 2 (6) | V ADV, V N, V NP, V PP, V S, V V |
| | 3 (16) | ADV V ADVP, ADV V N, ADV V V, V comp S, V comp VP, V N ADV, V N PP, V N V, V N VP, V V ADVP, V V N, V V NP, V V part, V V PP, V V S, V V V |
| | 4 (7) | V N ADV part, V N ADV VP, V N V N, V PP comp S, V V ADV ADV, V V V N, V V V V |
| | 5 (5) | ADV V ADVP part part, V N V V V, V NP V V N, V V V V NP, V V V V PP |
| | 6 (2) | V N V V V PP, V NP V V N V |
| **13 yrs** | 2 (7) | ADV V, V ADV, V N, V NP, V part, V PP, V V |
| | 3 (12) | ADV V N, V ADV part, V comp S, V N ADV, V N part, V N V, V N VP, V V N, V V NP, V V part, V V PP, V V V |
| | 4 (3) | ADV V N VP, V N V V, V V V part |
| | 5 (1) | V V N V V |
| **15 yrs** | 2 (7) | ADV V, V ADV, V N, V NP, V PP, V S, V V |
| | 3 (17) | ADV V ADV, ADV V ADVP, ADV V N, ADV V V, V ADV PP, V ADV V, V comp S, V comp VP, V N PP, V N V, V N VP, V NP PP, V NP VP, V V N, V V NP, V V PP, V V V |
| | 4 (15) | ADV NP V V, ADV V N ADV, ADV V N PP, ADV V N V, V N V V, V N V VP, V V N ADVP, V V N PP, V V N VP, V V NP V, V V V ADVP, V V V N, V V V P, V V V PP, V V V V |
| | 5 (3) | V N V V PP, V NP V V PP, V V V V N |
| | 6 (2) | V N PP PP conj PP, V N V V N Q |

The findings based on these two linguistic features (NPs and VPs) seem to suggest that age partially plays a role in language development (as in Table 3). As discussed in the earlier section concerning the factors affecting 13-year-old children's underperformance in lexical choices of event relation, the NP and VP data seem to insist that this group of children is able to create

complex syntactic structures. However, they might not see the necessity of connecting events using conjunctions but prefer producing sentences independently—which in a sense implies that the following sentences depict events that occur in succession. Such preferences can be considered the linguistic choices of the narrator, as can also be found in the cases of 3- and 4-element VPs ( as in Table 4).

**IMAGINATION OF NARRATORS**

The main task of narrative for good narrators is to create scenarios in the minds of the audience. Through the use of language, they have to make wise and proper linguistic choices that stimulate the audience to conceptualize the story as if the audience is part of the story. In addition to the basic components of the story, narrators might employ their imagination, realized through the way they provide extra details about (1) the background of the story, such as the background of the protagonists and their relationship; and (2) the evaluation of the story, such as the feeling and attitude of the protagonists towards particular events in the story. This kind of information not only helps the audience better understand the protagonists but also helps them understand the causal relationships behind the action, the development of the characters, and the overall plot. Thus, this study expected clauses or sentences depicting some background, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of the protagonists that were not explicitly illustrated in the pictures in response to this narrative component.

From the narrative discourses, it was found that, although less frequent, some CID could creatively provide background information about how the boy met the frog at the beginning of the story and what he did after finding the frog (bringing it back home), as in examples (15)-(19). Moreover, for evaluation, the thoughts and feelings of the protagonists can be evident, as shown in examples (20)-(24).

Examples of background information
*(15) kʰăw ʔɔ̀ːk paj lên dâːnnɔ̂ːk lǽːw kʰăw kɔ̂ː cə̀ː kòp* (C9n2)
    he   leave go  play  outside  then  he  then  find frog
    'He went to play outside and he found a frog.'
*(16) líaŋ kòp pen pʰɨ̂an kàp kòp* (C11n2)
    raise frog  be  friend  with frog
    '(He) raised the frog. (He) was its friend.'
*(17) càp kòp maː líaŋ* (C15n3)
    catch frog come raise
    '(He) kept the frog and raise it.'
*(18) kʰăw bɔ̀ːk kàp pʰɔ̂ː kàp mæ̂ː kòp wâː kʰɔ̌ː kòp tua nán paj líaŋ*
    he   tell  with father with mother frog COMP beg frog CLF that go  raise
    *tʰîː bâːn* (C11n6)
    at   home
    'He asked the father and the mother frogs for having the frog home.'
*(19) ʔaw lûːk kòp klàp bâːn* (C13n4)
    take child frog back home
    '(He) took the frog back home.'

Examples of narrative evaluation

*(20) câwdàːŋ wîŋ nǐː pʰrɔ́ʔ mâj jàːk doːn tɔ̀j* (C9n2)
     Dang     run flee because NEG want PASS hit
     'Dang (the dog) ran away because it was afraid to be hit (by the bees).'

*(21) kʰǎw diːcaj câwkòp diːcaj* (C9n3)
     he delighted frog delighted
     'He was delighted. The frog was delighted.'

*(22) diːcaj ʔaw kòp paj líaŋ* (C13n2)
     delighted take frog go feed
     'He was happy to have to frog (back).'

*(23) loŋ maː náːm náːm tîːn cʰôːkdiː tʰîː man pen náːm tîːn* (C15n2)
     fall come water water shallow good luck COMP it be water shallow
     '(the boy) fell down in the water. It was shallow. It was fortunate that the water
     was shallow.'

*(24) pʰɨ̂ŋ lâj sùnák lǽːw sùnák cɨŋləːj wîŋ sùtcʰiːwít* (C15n7)
     bees chase dog then dog then run desperately
     'The bees chased the dog and the dog ran desperately.'

## CONCLUSION

As intellectual disabilities provide an obstacle to language development, 9 to15 years old Thai CID were assessed based on their linguistic abilities. The story-retelling technique and a modified version of the picture book *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer, 1967) were employed for data elicitation of Thai CID with mild symptoms at Chiang Rai Punyanukul School—a school with a special education program in northern Thailand. Following the analytical framework developed by Rungrojsuwan (2023a), three aspects of narrative components were qualitatively examined in relation to particular key linguistic devices (Table 1). Results found that for the event relation component, the types of sequential components outnumbered other aspects. This indicates the simplicity of sequential relations over others (simultaneous, cause-and-effect, and contradictory). In the elaboration of details, the production of NPs clearly shows a normal path of development, where smaller children produce fewer types of NPs than older children. However, the linguistic behavior of VPs tends to suggest a different view. It was found that 3- and 4-element VP types were found in significant numbers across all age groups. Instead of linearity, this implies the preferences of the children when making particular linguistic choices. Lastly, concerning the imagination of the narrators, the data supports some level of ability to provide extra information, including both story background and story evaluation in some narratives.

Regarding age, the findings do not clearly suggest the importance of age over other factors. This obviously indicates a different pathway of language development for CID compared to typically developing children, as reported in Rungrojsuwan (2023a), where the children's linguistic productivity develops across ages. It was found that older CID produced more complex types of cause-and-effect conjunctions and NPs, but this was not obvious in the cases of sequential, simultaneous, and contradictory conjunctions, and VPs. Accordingly, based upon the findings, it can be concluded that through telling a story, the CID reflected two kinds of performances. First, they occasionally show the richness of their intellect by producing linguistic forms as complex as their age could allow. Second, as telling a story provides them with an opportunity to free their

imagination and creativity, they might prefer particular linguistic choices aligned with the story they are narrating.

The findings of the study shed some light on CID's pedagogical implementation. Although they confront intellectual disabilities, CID progressively show their learning advancement through the production of more complex linguistic structures with age. Note that the children in the present study were classified by their learning ability (mild ID) and age. Integrating these two facts, it is suggested that children with mild ID tend to be able to acquire more complex linguistic knowledge with age while at the same time independently seeking their own distinct linguistic expressions for particular settings. Accordingly, language educators should prepare language lessons based on two viewpoints: First, adding up levels of difficulty (such as more difficult words and more complex structures) for older children would help them develop more complex linguistic understanding and expressions. Second, providing a variety of choices (both words and structures), would open up their creativity in picking up and making use of those choices in various communicative contexts.

For further study, in addition to the qualitative results, a quantitative examination of CID performance could provide an alternative way to support the conclusion of this study and help clearly see individual differences between children of the same age. In addition, a study of psychological factors, such as familiarity, might help clarify how one could approach and gain trust from CID in order to help develop their intellectual and learning abilities. It is believed that findings from the present study would be a foundation and a stepping stone for future research, application, and practice not only in Thailand but also in the international arena.

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