

1

Language Delay and Disorders

*Every utterance is an event, and no two events are precisely alike.
The extreme view, therefore, is that no word ever means the same thing twice.*
—Louis B. Saloman

CHAPTER PREVIEW

This chapter explores human language and the numerous disorders and deficiencies that can delay or disrupt its development. The definition of language is discussed, and its cognitive, linguistic, and social-communicative aspects are delineated. There is an overview of learning disabilities and of reading and writing disorders, as well as an examination of language delay and disorders related to attentional deficits, autism, and fetal alcohol syndrome. Case studies are presented of individuals with language delay and idioglossia (twin language), autism, reading and writing problems, intellectual disability, and suspected child abuse in a child with language delay.

OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGE DELAY AND DISORDERS

Before the middle of the 20th century, some anthropologists considered language to be one of the behaviors separating humans from so-called lower animals. They thought that humans were fundamentally different from the lower species and that the ability to use and understand complex language was an inherently human trait. Although they recognized that lower animals could use and understand call signals, anthropologists believed they were unable to engage in abstract symbolic thought and to generate and understand complex language constructs.

Washoe, a chimpanzee named after a county in Nevada, helped change this erroneous belief. We have long known that chimpanzees do not have the articulatory apparatus to produce complex