

# Fantasy Play and the Language of Emplotment in Greek L1 Children

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## Abstract

Fantasy/symbolic play is central to theories of child cognitive development (Piaget 1962; Pellegrini 1985; Leslie 1987; Francis & Gibson 2022). Most studies suggest that children distinguish pretense from reality by their second year, though the cognitive mechanisms involved remain debated (Leslie 1987). Fantasy play is also linked to language development, including early literacy and metalinguistic awareness (Pellegrini & Galda 1982, 1991; Pellegrini 1984; Orr & Geva 2015). Garvey & Kramer (1989) identify two communicative levels in symbolic play: (i) enactment and (ii) emplotment. This study examines the grammar used by L1 Greek children while setting up scenes and giving instructions. Based on novel naturalistic data from 55 recorded sessions with 14 children (aged 2;7–6;4), we show that by 2;7, children produce counterfactual scenarios with a light verb meaning ‘pretend’. By 5;0, they employ counterfactual morphological marking in symbolic play before using it in other contexts (Amsel & Smalley 2000).