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ABSTRACT

Two lower socioeconomic groups (one black and one white) from the inner city and a third group of white children from a middle socioeconomic suburban area of Chicago were studied to delineate and compare the usage of selected language structures among children of different social and ethnic backgrounds. Usage of each of the test structures was assessed on each of three speech elicitation tasks--spontaneous speech, structured open-ended responses, and sentence repetition. Phonological structures were assessed on a fourth task, single word picture naming. The findings revealed (1) the copula, single negative transpositions, and postvocalic consonant clusters were used in a similar way by both black and white low socioeconomic children that differed from the pattern of usage evidenced by the middle socioeconomic white children; (2) nonstandard performance on the postvocalic /r/, postvocalic /l/, morphological "s" markers, and certain negative constructions was found to be unique to the low socioeconomic black children; and (3) test structure usage was generally consistent across the different modes of speech elicitation for the three groups, except for a higher incidence of grammatical-syntactic transpositions by the black group on more spontaneous elicitation modes. In addition, sentence repetition procedures were found to be a more powerful tool for displaying dialect forms. (HOD)

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Usage of Selected Phonological and Grammatical Structures by Three Preschool Groups of Different Ethnic and Socioeconomic Backgrounds

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USAGE OF SELECTED PHONOLOGICAL AND GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES BY THREE PRESCHOOL GROUPS OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

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Usage of selected phonological and grammatical structures by low and middle socioeconomic preschoolers was investigated. Two lower socioeconomic subject groups, one black and one white, were drawn from two geographically separate inner city areas which had been racially and dialectically homogeneous for a minimum of ten years. The third group of subjects were white children drawn from a middle socioeconomic suburban area. Usage of each of the test structures was assessed on each of three speech elicitation tasks; spontaneous speech, structured open-ended responses, and sentence repetition. The phonological structures in addition were assessed on a fourth task, single word picture naming. The major findings of this study revealed that certain language structures were encoded in a unique form by the black subject group while other structures reported as black English forms in the literature were found to be characteristic of both black and white low socioeconomic inner city children. In addition, sentence repetition procedures were shown to be a powerful tool for displaying the characteristic dialect forms of different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Nonstandard performance on the following test structures, postvocalic /r/ and /ɔ/, postvocalic /l/, morphological /s/ markers and certain negative constructions was found to be characteristic of the low socioeconomic black children but not of the two white subject groups. Supporting previously described empirical observations, there were also a number of structures used in a similar way by both the black and white low socioeconomic children that differed from the pattern of usage evidenced by the white middle socioeconomic children. The test structures involved in these contrasts were copula is, certain negative constructions, and postvocalic consonant clusters. In general, for all subject groups the form of test

structure usage was consistent across the differing modes of speech elicitation which emphasized differing degrees of spontaneity of response ranging from imitative to spontaneous utterances.

Language differences among differing ethnic and socioeconomic groups are a major consideration for speech and language pathologists, language arts specialists, linguists, and educators. Baratz (1969, 1970), Labov (1967, 1970a, 1970b), Houston (1969, 1970) and Stewart (1970) have stressed the need for greater understanding of language variability across differing racial and ethnic groups by speech and language pathologists, teachers, and text writers. A crucial need, long evident to practicing speech and language clinicians, is for the delineation of phonological and grammatical constructions employed by children of different ethnic backgrounds, geographic areas, and social classes. A differentiation of nonstandard language structures naturally reflected in low socioeconomic communities from those constructions which deviate from the primary linguistic code of the typical child in those communities, is vital to prescriptive management of speech and language problems. The dialect variations of many low socioeconomic white children have been largely neglected in the literature.

Current research pertaining to the study of low socioeconomic, black dialect usage (Labov, 1967, 1968, 1970a, Baratz, 1970, Fasold and Wolfram 1970) may be summarized in that it generally (a) supports the theory of a characteristic black linguistic code, and (b) disagrees with hypotheses suggesting that black English variability is the result of an inappropriate language learning environment. Furthermore, Stewart (1970), and Bailey (1966) suggest that specifics of language performance of the majority of blacks in this country can be traced to African and Caribbean origins.

The selected phonological structures employed as dependent measures in this investigation were reported by Labov (1968) to be encoded in a characteristic

fashion by black speakers in New York. He described five major black English phonological structures: r'lessness, l'lessness, simplification of consonant clusters, weakening of final consonants, and vowel variations. Baratz (1970) and Menyuk (1970) in their consideration of black English phonological usage enumerated some findings of Labov's and emphasized the consistent usage of distinctive phonological rules which have been acquired by children on the basis of sound usage in their social and speech communities. Nonstandard usages are not haphazard but are rule governed. Houston (1969, 1970), in addition, discussed other aspects of black English phonology such as breath and volume dynamics, syllable stress, pitch variations, and agreed with Labov's earlier work on the sound patterning of black children.

The selected syntactic and morphological structures, copula is, specific negative structures, and possessive noun markers, employed as dependent measures in this investigation were reported by Baratz and subsequent general confirmation has been provided by Fasold and Wolfram (1970), Labov (1968, 1970a, 1970b), Bailey (1968), Stewart (1965, 1970) and Taylor (1972).

Information on the influence of different types of speech elicitation procedures on the language of lower class children from differing ethnic backgrounds is critical to psycholinguistic research in lower class communities. The influence on the form of language structure usage by the method of speech elicitation for phonological and syntactic analyses has been a variable given substantial consideration by Templin (1947), Snow and Milisen (1954), Siegal, Winitz and Conkey (1963), Johnson and Darley (1956), Dickerson (1971), Ham (1958), Menyuk (1963, 1964), Miller and Isurd (1963) and Luterman and Bar (1971). The research of both Templin and Ham revealed no systematic

differences in sound structure production between spontaneous and imitative types of speech tests in white preschool and kindergarten children. In contrast, Snow and Milisen (1954), Carter and Buck (1958), and Siegal, Winitz, and Conkey (1963) found that an imitative speech sound test facilitated accurate speech sound usage in white elementary school children.

Descriptions of the influence on children's syntactic encoding from different stimulus methods are inconclusive across age levels (McNeil, 1970, Menyuk, 1963, 1969, Miller and Isurd, 1963, Luterman and Bar, 1971). The thrust of the most recent research indicates that children use their primary linguistic code on either a spontaneous or a sentence repetition task. Recent clinical studies have placed heavy reliance upon techniques based on sentence repetition procedures to provide an opportunity for the child to display his typical usage of specific language structures, Lee (1969), Luterman and Bar (1971). This reliance on subject repetition of examiner models is based on the assumption that the child will display his typical usage rather than the less familiar adult model in cases where there is a discrepancy in these codes. This assumption may be particularly misapplied with lower socioeconomic children. Baratz and Povich (1967), Cazden (1970), and Labov (1970c) have stated that the low socioeconomic black child's language performance might be influenced by the degree of spontaneity of formulation afforded him by the speech elicitation task. One reviewer of child language development research, (McNeil, 1968) however, concluded that preschool children encoded using the primary linguistic code of their particular speech community regardless of speech stimulus presentation mode.

Any study of the phonological or syntactic characteristics of a particular ethnic group must necessarily center on full description of typical usage of individuals within that group. There is value, however, in multiple ethnic group pattern comparisons as demonstrated in studies of other human behaviors by psychologists and educators. It is the authors' belief that the development of communicative processes will be better understood by applied analyses of language in multi-ethnic settings. Empirical observations have formed the basis of major writings of the past decade on the phonology and syntax of black Americans, Spanish Americans, and various ethnic groups making up the low socioeconomic class of American society. Almost without exception these studies have dealt with a single homogeneous subject group. More objective quantification of specific language structure usage in various ethnic and socioeconomic groups is needed. Much useful information will arise from pattern comparisons across ethnic and subject classifications.

Speech pathologists and educators in urban locales have for some time noted great similarities in the language of both black and white low socioeconomic children. An analytical appraisal of the similarities or unique differences of the language structures used by these populations is overdue.

The primary purpose of this study was to accurately delineate and compare the usage of selected language structures among children of different social class and ethnic backgrounds within the Chicago metropolitan area. Furthermore, the question of whether or not a particular form of speech elicitation task influences performance in children from differing social and ethnic backgrounds was studied.

METHOD

Subjects

Each of the three subject groups selected from neighborhood preschool centers was composed of 12 boys ranging in age from 4 years 1 month to 4 years 7 months, with a mean age of 4 years 4 months. Lenneberg (1967), Menyuk (1969), McNeil (1970), Lee and Canter (1971), and Koenigsknecht and Lee (1971) have concluded that by the fourth year of life a normally developing child has become proficient in both understanding and uttering well-formed sentences. Preschool subjects were selected, in addition, because they had less formal contact with language forms outside their regular speech community. Only male subjects were included in this study in order to control for developmental language differences by sex. The two lower socioeconomic subject groups, one black and one white, were drawn from two geographically separate inner city areas which had been racially and dialectically homogeneous for a minimum of ten years. The black children were from the Lawndale area of Chicago, while the white inner city children were from the Near North section of Chicago. The third group of subjects were white children from a middle socioeconomic suburban area, Glenview, Illinois. All subjects had normal hearing sensitivity, language and articulatory proficiency typical of preschool children in their community and evidenced no unusual psychological or medical history.

Examiners

Four white female speech and language clinicians, who hold masters degrees in speech pathology were trained in testing procedures and carried out the data collection in a period of 3½ weeks. Race and sex of the

clinicians were held constant in an effort to control for examiner variability.

Speech Elicitation Tasks

Four speech elicitation tasks which emphasized differing degrees of spontaneity of responses were developed. An effort was made to choose speech task items which minimized cultural boundedness. The speech elicitation tasks were:

1) Spontaneous Speech - Subject engaged in spontaneous dialogue with examiner as colorful pictures and toys were presented.
2) Sentence Repetition - Subject repeated immediately the examiner's orally presented stimulus sentences. An equal number of sentences 3, 6, and 9 words in length were presented with each of the selected language structures.
3) Structured Open-Ended Responses - The subject finished the last phrase of a narrative story that was begun by the examiner. The story paragraph portion which was presented to the child introduced the selected target language structures. The child's response in this task was not an immediate repetition of the examiner's presentation of a target structure model. For example, as the examiner displayed a colorful picture of a common life situation she might have read, "Look at all the toys Bob has. He has a ball, a truck, a block, and a gun. Here is Bob, look at his toys. I see Bob's car, I see Bob's block, I see Bob's chair, and I see (Bob's) (ball)."
4) Single Word Naming - The subject responded with the name of a common object pictured on a card. This task was specific only to selected phonological structures. The name of each object pictured contained a selected sound structure.

The children's typical usage of the following phonological structures was assessed with each of the speech elicitation tasks.

1) Postvocalic /r/ and /ɝ/, e.g., car, hammer.
2) /r/ prior to a final consonant, e.g., heart, card.
3) Postvocalic /l/, e.g., ball, bell.
4) /l/ prior to a final consonant, e.g., cold, hold.
5) Postvocalic consonant clusters, (st, sk, mp, nk, nt) e.g., elephant, last.

The children's typical usage of the following syntactic and morphological constructions was assessed with the first 3 of the speech tasks described above.

1) Copula is, e.g., He is tall, The man is big and fast, The new man is fast with a six gun.
2) Negative structures, e.g., They can't work., She does not look old now., Joe is not able to run past the line.
3) Possessive markers, e.g., Joe's finger hurt., It is Bob's rug under Mike., It is David's bird and not a tiny airplane.

Test Administration and Scoring Procedures:

Each of the examiners tested an equal number of children from each of the 3 subject groups. The order in which the children were seen by the examiners was determined by random order procedures. The sequence in which the 4 speech elicitation tasks were administered was counter-balanced within and across subject groups.

The tape recorded children's utterances involving the test structures were phonetically transcribed. Three speech and language clinicians evaluated and scored the tape recorded target structures. For certain of the analyses in this study each target test structure was classified in a binary fashion in which (a) the full standard form was used or (b) some transposition i.e., a non-standard dialect form was noted. Additional analyses were based upon the specific phonetic and grammatical transcriptions of the test structures.

Analyses:

Comparisons between the three preschool subject groups were made separately on all selected language structure categories by applying an analysis of variance procedure for each of the cell mean comparisons. The BMD 08V program for the Control Data Corporation 6400 computer (Northwestern University) was used to accomplish this analysis.

An item analysis computer program (MLI001-Friedman, 1971) was used to judge the confidence which may be placed in the individual speech task items in sampling the usage of selected language structures by the three subject groups.

The Hoyt's reliability coefficients for grammatical and phonological item analyses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 HOYT'S RELIABILITY VALUES FOR PHONOLOGICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ITEM ANALYSES

The item analyses for classification revealed high reliability coefficients. The reliability coefficients were within .07 of each other on the 4 speech elicitation tasks for the phonological items and within .06 of each other on the 3 speech tasks for the grammatical items.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phonological Structures:

Figure 1 displays the pattern of phonological transposition usage by the 3 subject groups across the four speech elicitation tasks.

Figure 1 PERCENTAGE OF PHONOLOGICAL TRANSPOSITIONS FOR THE THREE PRESCHOOL SUBJECT GROUPS ACROSS THE FOUR SPEECH ELICITATION TASKS

For all 3 categories of phonological structures considered in this investigation significant differences in the level of transpositions recorded were obtained not only between the black low socioeconomic group and both

low and middle socioeconomic white groups but also between the white low socioeconomic and white middle socioeconomic children (Table 2).

Table 2 COMPUTED F RATIOS BETWEEN GROUPS FOR ANALYSES OF THE SELECTED PHONOLOGICAL STRUCTURES ACROSS THE SPEECH ELICITATION TASKS

The black low socioeconomic preschoolers encoded the greatest number of nonstandard phonological structures followed next by the white low socioeconomic and the white middle socioeconomic preschoolers. Importantly, there were marked differences in the form of specific nonstandard constructions between the black low socioeconomic preschoolers and the two white experimental groups on some language measures. 76.2% of the black low socioeconomic groups' nonstandard /r/ and /ɚ/ constructions took the form of a central /ə/ schwa (/hæmə/ for hammer, /diə/ for deer/, while 60.3% /ə/ schwa constructions were used for postvocalic /l/ items (/tɝdə/ for turtle and /æpə/ for apple). This consistent trend in the form of nonstandard production was not evident in either white low socioeconomic or white middle socioeconomic subjects. Simplification of the final element of the consonant cluster e.g., /hæn/ for hand, /læs/ for last, occurred 89.2% and 84.7% of the time in the nonstandard productions of the black low socioeconomic and white low socioeconomic groups. No difference in the form of nonstandard production was observable among the three groups for the postvocalic consonant cluster variable.

Grammatical-Syntactic Structures:

The selected grammatical-syntactic structures were encoded in a nonstandard manner less frequently than the selected phonological structures in this investigation. This was true for all three subject groups as shown in Figure 2. The highest level of incidence of grammatical-syntactic transpositions was demonstrated by the black low socioeconomic group, the next highest incidence for all grammatical structures was shown by the white low socioeconomic group. Infrequent transpositions on these structures were evidenced by the white middle socioeconomic subjects. Subjects in each group performed similarly within their groups.

Figure 2 PERCENTAGES OF GRAMMATICAL-SYNTACTIC TRANSPOSITIONS FOR THE THREE PRESCHOOL SUBJECT GROUPS ACROSS THE THREE SPEECH ELICITATION TASKS.

The percentage and consistency of nonstandard transpositions of copula is were much less than had been indicated in some current literature. The black and white low socioeconomic groups demonstrated great similarity in percentage and form of transpositions for copula is and single negative constructions. In contrast to the similarity of transposed single negative constructions between the two low socioeconomic groups, the black preschoolers employed four times the number of double negative constructions than did the white low socioeconomic preschoolers. The black preschoolers furthermore evidenced a remarkably high percentage of possessive noun markers in transposed form. A most important finding was that there were significant differences in rate of nonstandard transpositions on all grammatical-syntactic structures between the

low and middle socioeconomic white subjects. The differences in nonstandard production of grammatical-syntactic structures between the three groups may be assessed on Table 3.

Table 3 COMPUTED F RATIOS BETWEEN GROUPS FOR ANALYSES OF THE USAGE OF GRAMMATICAL-SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES WITH TASK MEASURES COMBINED

No differences were found over-all for the comparisons of production of copula is and negative structures between the two low socioeconomic groups, black and white. In both low socioeconomic groups the following nonstandard negative constructions were evident: /do/, /don/, and /dont/ for didn't, and /e/, /en/, and /ent/ for isn't. The two most common double negative formulations were don't have no and don't got no in both low socioeconomic groups. The zero possessive morphological construction was frequently applied by the black low socioeconomic group, e.g., It is Bobby ball, and It ain't Joe block.

Influence of Speech Elicitation Task:

The percentage of phonological transpositions for each of the test structures was consistent across the differing modes of speech elicitation which emphasized differing degrees of spontaneity of response. As may be seen in Figure 3 this pattern held for each of the three subject groups. Table 4 presents the percentage of tranpositions for each of the specific test structures by task. The degree of spontaneity of response ranging from imitative to spontaneous utterances did not substantially influence the frequency of usage of transposed phonological forms.

Figure 3 PERCENTAGE OF PHONOLOGICAL TRANSPOSITIONS USED BY THE THREE SUBJECT GROUPS ON THE FOUR SPEECH ELICITATION TASKS WITH TEST PHONOLOGICAL STRUCTURES COMBINED

Table 4 PERCENTAGE OF PHONOLOGICAL TRANSPOSITIONS FOR EACH STRUCTURE USED BY THE THREE SUBJECT GROUPS ON THE FOUR SPEECH ELICITATION TASKS

As may be seen in Figure 4 the percentage of grammatical-syntactic transpositions for the two white subject groups was fairly constant across the speech tasks. The incidence of transposed grammatical-syntactic test structures for the black children was highest for the spontaneous speech task and lowest for the direct imitation sentence repetition task. As may be seen in Table 5 the more spontaneous the task the more frequent the transposed forms for all three test structure categories. Even on the imitative sentence repetition task the higher incidence of grammatical-syntactic transpositions for the black children was greater than for either of the white subject groups.

Figure 4 PERCENTAGE OF GRAMMATICAL-SYNTACTIC TRANSPOSITIONS USED BY THE THREE SUBJECT GROUPS ON THE THREE SPEECH ELICITATION TASKS WITH TEST GRAMMATICAL-SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES COMBINED

Table 5 PERCENTAGE OF GRAMMATICAL-SYNTACTIC TRANSPOSITIONS FOR EACH STRUCTURE USED BY THE THREE SUBJECT GROUPS ON THE THREE SPEECH ELICITATION TASKS

Conclusions to this study of the usage of six language structure categories by three Chicago preschool groups of differing socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds may be stated as follows: (1) in contrast to former reports in the literature, a number of test structures (copula is, single negative transpositions, and postvocalic consonant clusters) were used in a similar way by both black and white low socioeconomic children that differed from the pattern of usage evidenced by the middle socioeconomic white children; (2) nonstandard performance on the test structures, postvocalic /r/ and /ɚ/, postvocalic /l/, morphological s markers and certain negative constructions was found to be unique to the low socioeconomic black children; (3) of great clinical importance, test structure usage was generally consistent across the differing modes of speech elicitation for the three groups with the notable exception of a higher incidence of grammatical-syntactic transpositions by the black group on more spontaneous elicitation modes. The results of this study support, for those structures examined, the usage of sentence repetition tests and procedures providing embedded language models to children from differing ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds in clinical case selection. Development of tests similar to those used in this investigation may serve as screening measures to display the characteristic language employed by both black and white low socioeconomic children in their daily usage.

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TABLE 1. Hoyt's Reliability Values for Phonological and Grammatical Item Analyses

Speech Tasks	Phonological Items	Grammatical-Syntactic Items
Spontaneous Speech Task	.899	.734
Structured Open-ended Response Task	.894	.720
Sentence Repetition Task	.951	.845
Single Word Picture Elicitation Task	.960	

TABLE 2. Computed F Ratios Between Groups for Analyses of the Selected Phonological Structures Across the Speech Elicitation Tasks

Groups	Phonological Structures		
	Postvocalic /l/	Postvocalic /r/ and /ɚ/	Postvocalic Consonant Clusters
Black Low Socioeconomic Group A White Low Socioeconomic Group B	69.52*	38.95*	75.75*
Black Low Socioeconomic Group A. White Middle Socioeconomic Group C	208.13*	93.05*	29.29*
White Low Socioeconomic Group B White Middle Socioeconomic Group C	9.66*	5.00*	28.65*

*P<.05

TABLE 3. Computed F Ratios Between Groups for Analyses of the Usage of Grammatical-Syntactic Structures with Task Measures Combined

Groups	Grammatical-Syntactic Structures		
	Copula is	Negatives	Possessives
Black Low Socioeconomic Group A White Low Socioeconomic Group B	1.60	0.32	36.56*
Black Low Socioeconomic Group A White Middle Socioeconomic Group C	7.59*	68.43*	198.63*
White Low Socioeconomic Group B White Middle Socioeconomic Group C	5.13*	30.86*	11.46*

*P<.05

TABLE 4. Percentage of Phonological Transpositions for Each Structure Used by the Three Subject Groups on the Four Speech Elicitation Tasks

		Speech Elicitation Tasks			
Groups	Phonological Structures	Spontaneous Speech Tasks	Structured Open-Ended Response Tasks	Sentence Repetition Tasks	Single Word Picture Naming Tasks
Black Low Socioeconomic Children	/l/	88.8	97.2	87.9	85.1
	/r/, /ɚ/	83.3	72.2	55.5	66.2
	Consonant Clusters	83.1	94.4	92.5	82.8
White Low Socioeconomic Children	/l/	36.1	33.8	30.5	23.6
	/r/, /ɚ/	25.0	11.1	12.9	22.6
	Consonant Clusters	27.7	55.5	55.5	41.2
White Middle Socioeconomic Children	/l/	8.3	8.3	11.1	7.4
	/r/, /ɚ/	0.0	2.7	2.7	0.9
	Consonant Clusters	13.8	16.6	7.4	6.9

TABLE 5. Percentage of Grammatical-Syntactic Transpositions for Each Structure Used by the Three Subject Groups on the Three Speech Elicitation Tasks

Groups	Grammatical-Syntactic Structures	Speech Elicitation Tasks: Spontaneous Speech Tasks	Structured Open-Ended Response Tasks	Sentence Repetition Tasks
Black Low Socioeconomic	Copula *is*	33.3	25.0	13.8
	Negative Structures	50.0	55.5	25.9
	Possessive Markers	97.2	52.7	60.1
White Low Socioeconomic	Copula *is*	25.0	5.5	12.9
	Negative Structures	36.1	52.7	30.5
	Possessive Markers	30.5	25.0	26.8
White Middle Socioeconomic	Copula *is*	5.5	5.5	3.7
	Negative Structures	11.1	2.7	3.7
	Possessive Markers	2.7	0.0	14.8

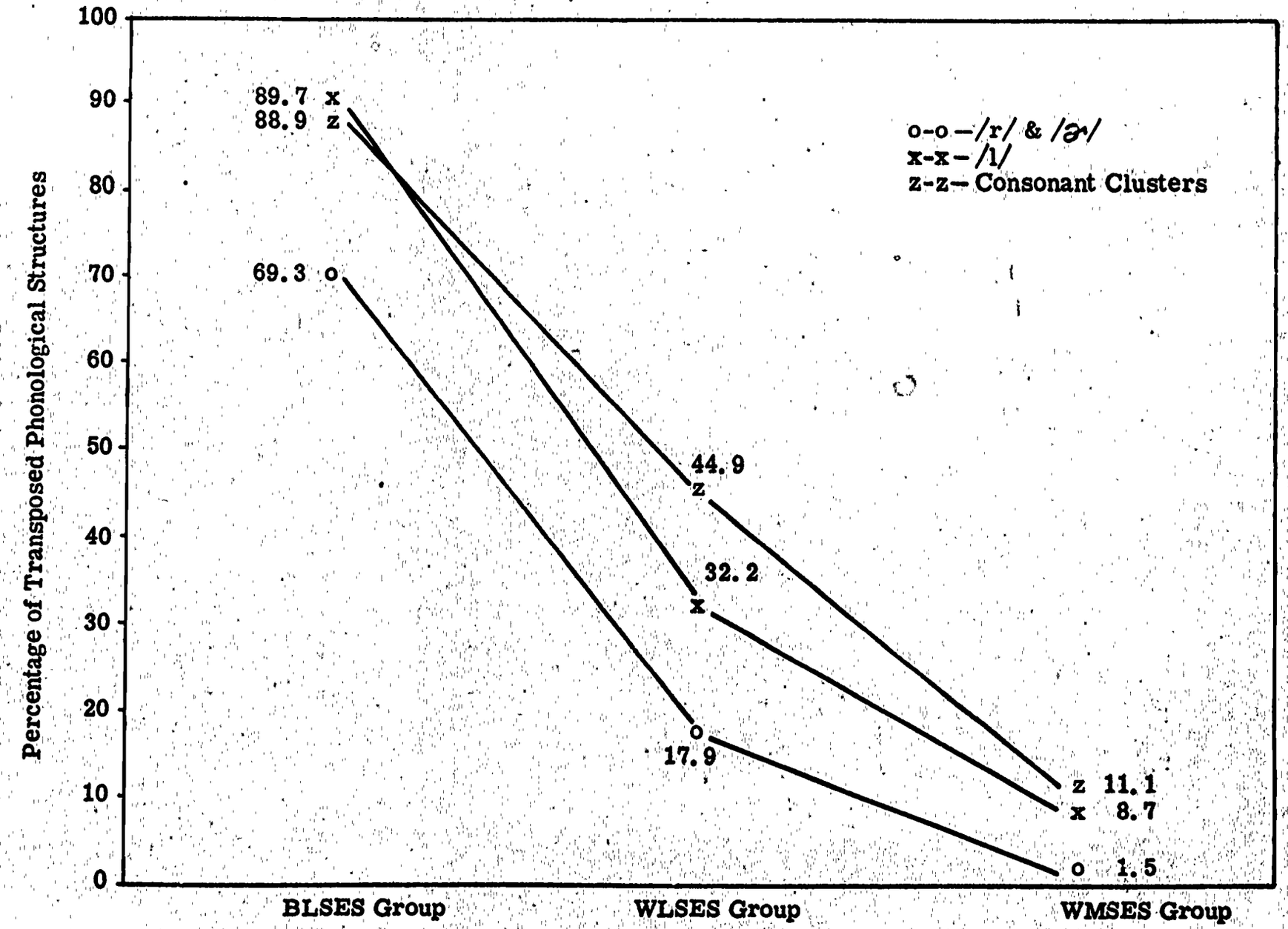

FIGURE 1, Percentage of Phonological Transpositions for the Three Preschool Subject Groups Across the Four Speech Elicitation Tasks

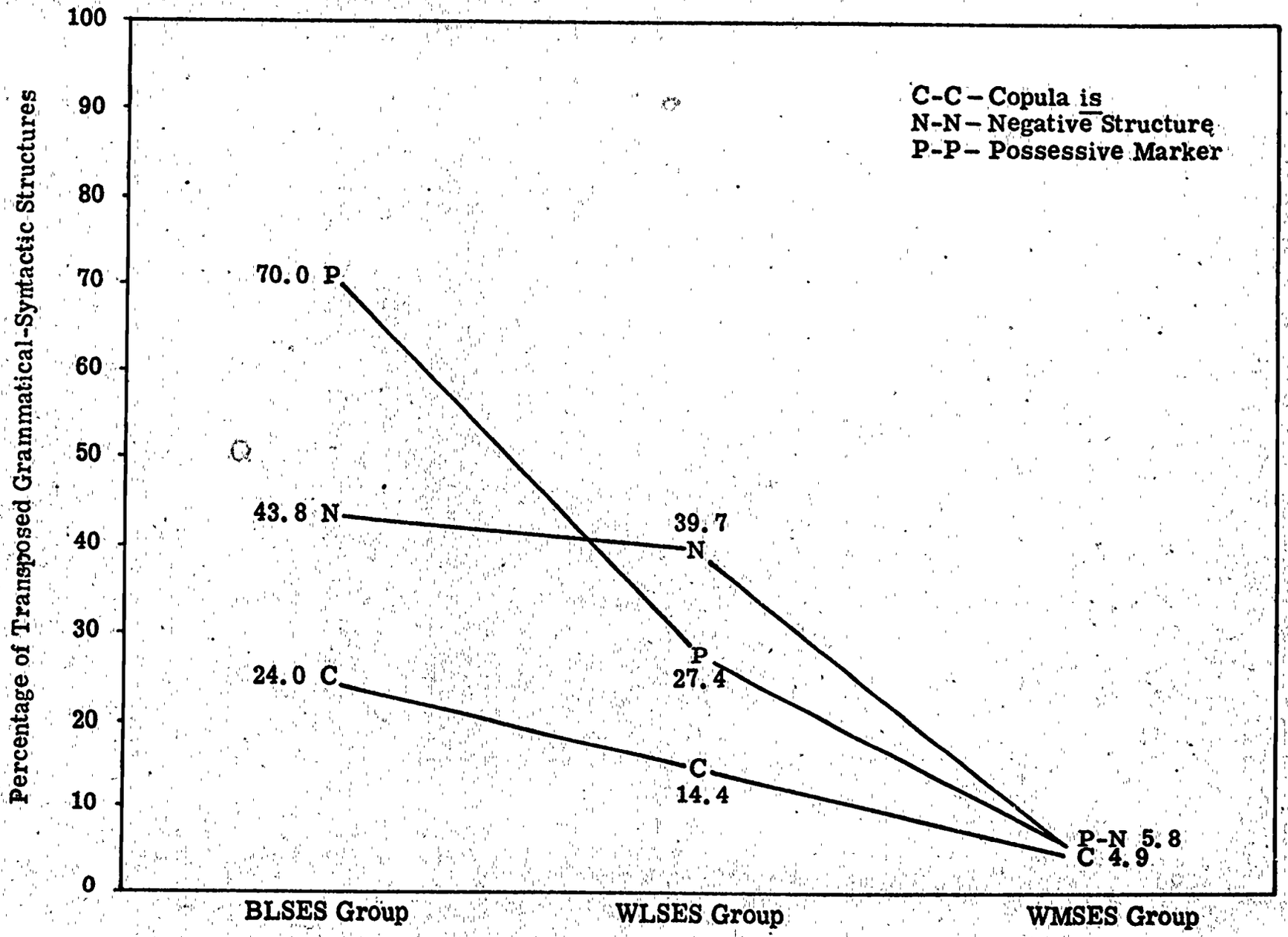

FIGURE 2. Percentages of Grammatical-Syntactic Transpositions for the Three Preschool Subject Groups Across the Three Speech Elicitation Tasks

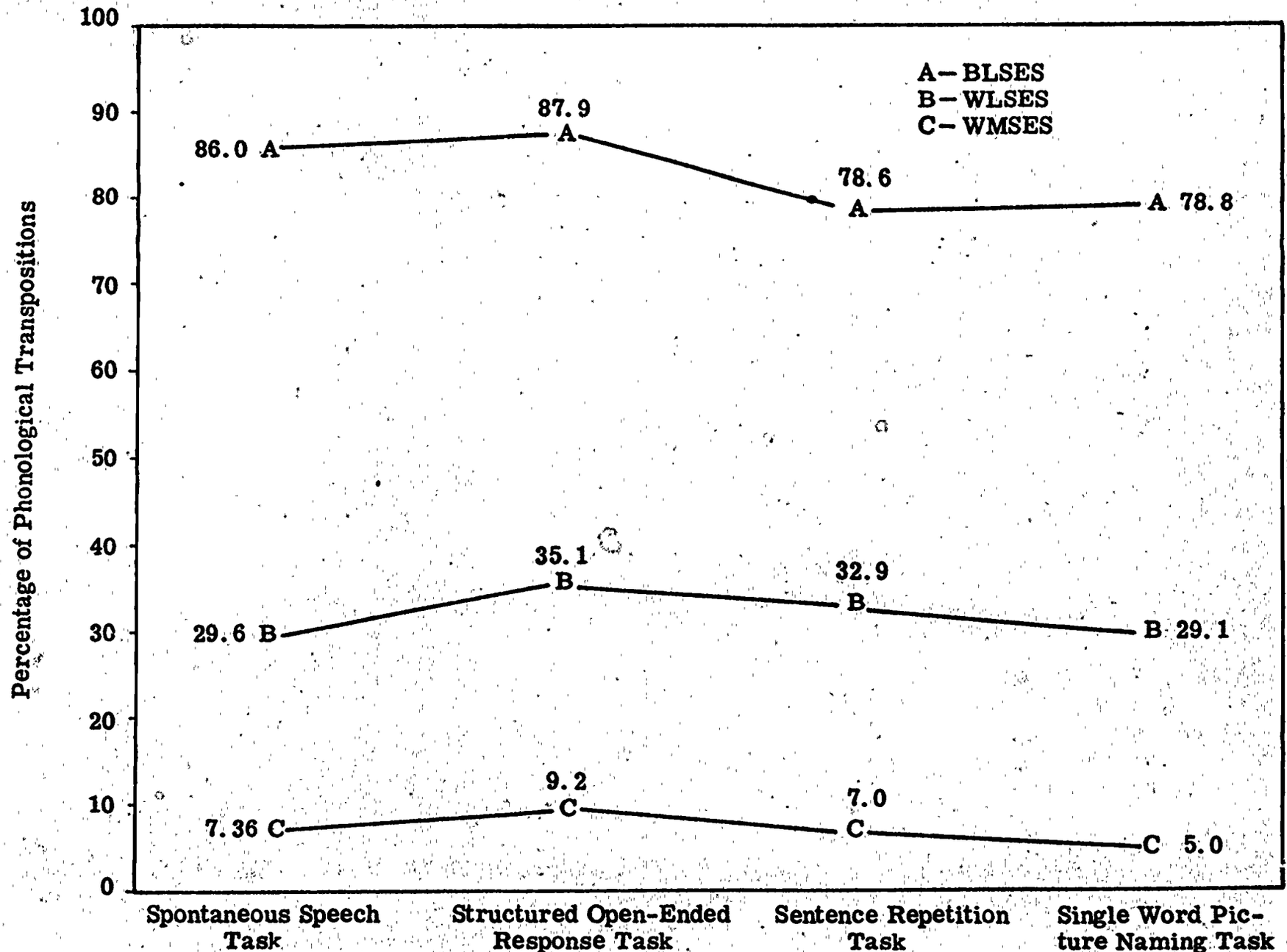

FIGURE 3. Percentage of Phonological Transpositions Used by the Three Subject Groups on the Four Speech Elicitation Tasks with Test Phonological Structures Combined

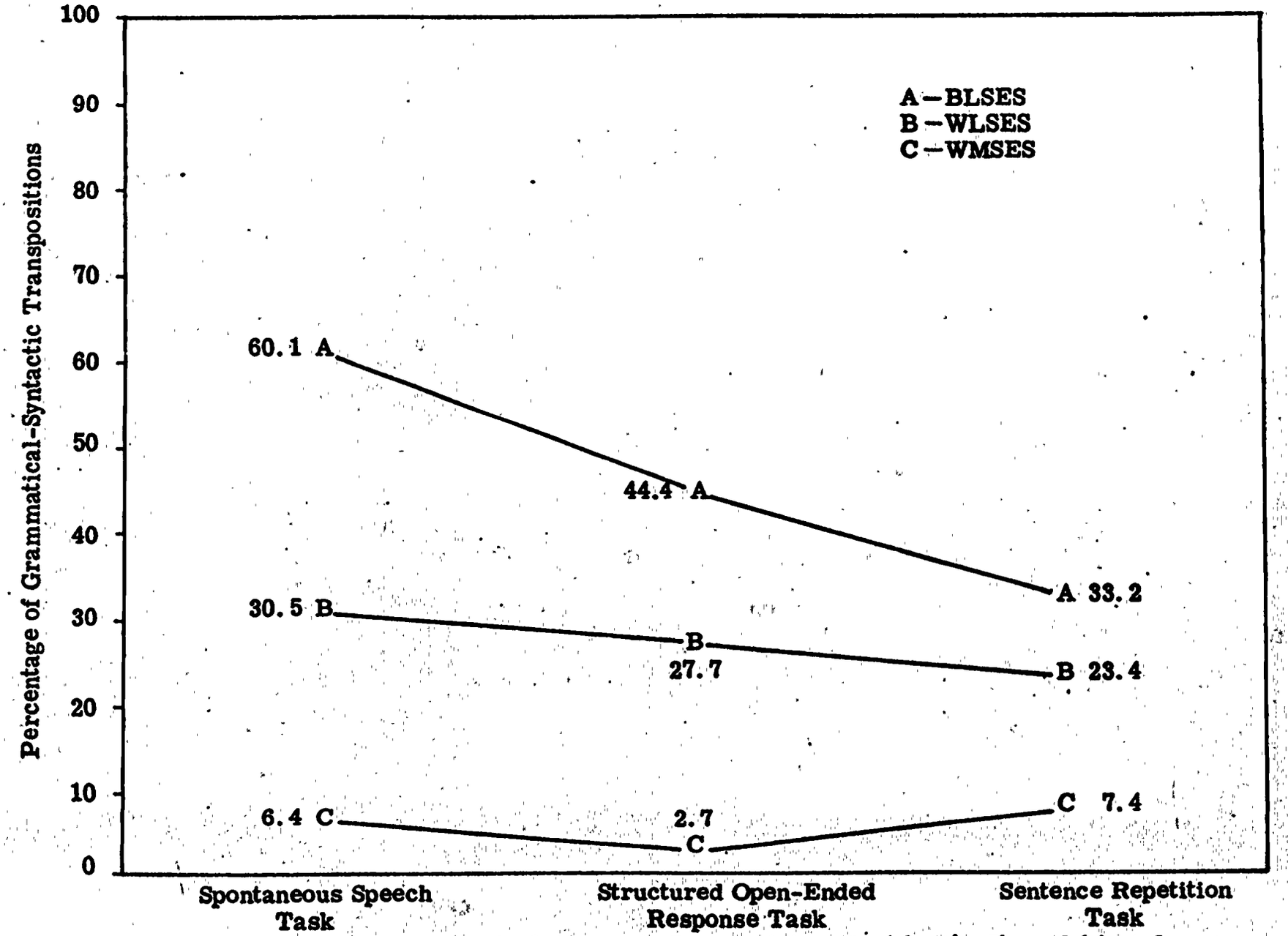

FIGURE 4. Percentage of Grammatical-Syntactic Transpositions Used by the Three Subject Groups on the Three Speech Elicitation Tasks with test Grammatical-Syntactic Structures Combine