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**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE TERMINOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD
LANGUAGE DISORDERS OF UNKNOWN AETIOLOGY: TOWARDS DLD**

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OBJECTIVE(S) AND METHODS

Objective. To foster discussion of the terminology for childhood language disorder of unknown aetiology in the Baltic countries.

Method. A review of scientific literature in English and Lithuanian was the method used.

Key words: terminology, labels, childhood language disorder of unknown aetiology.



SHORT INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Childhood language disorder is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders. **Approximately 7%** of the population exhibits **significant language difficulties** not secondary to another aetiology (Norbury et al., 2016).
- ❑ There is growing **discussion about which terms should be used** to talk about, and refer to, people with a disability (Monk et al. 2022; Anthony et al., 2025).
- ❑ **Different, inconsistent terms** were used to describe children with language disorders of unknown origin **over the past 200 years**. Across countries, contexts, institutions, functions, and even individual SLPs, terminology may vary (Kornelis et al., 2025).
- ❑ This presentation reviews **the history of the most widely used terms** for primary language disorder of unknown origin.



RESULTS (1)

Table 1. Terminology of childhood language disorder(s) of unknown aetiology (Iverson & Williams, 2025; Leonard, 2014; 2020; Paul, 2020; Reilly et al., 2014, etc.)

First (medical) terms	From medical to more neutral terms	Nowadays terms (from SLI to DLD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>congenital aphasia</i> – 1822 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>hearing mutism</i> - 1866 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>congenital word deafness</i> – 1911 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>developmental aphasia</i> – 1917 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>infantile aphasia</i> – 1947 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>developmental dysphasia</i> – 1963 <input type="checkbox"/> ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>language disorder</i> – 1973 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>language disability</i> – 1976 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>language impairment</i> – 1981 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>specific language deficit</i> – 1981 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>language-learning disability</i> – 1982 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>language-learning impairment</i> – 1989 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>expressive language disorder</i> – 1996 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>receptive language disorder</i> – 1996 <input type="checkbox"/> ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>developmental language disorder</i> – 1961 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>specific language impairment</i> – 1983 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>developmental language impairment</i> – 2000 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>primary language disorder</i> – 2003

*Based on the different authors, some terms may have appeared earlier (later) than the year noted in the table.



RESULTS (2)

References to children with significant yet unexplained deficits in language ability have been part of the scientific literature since the early half of the 19th century (Leonard, 2014; 2020).

Since then, terminology has been inconsistent across the field of speech and language therapy, i.e., terms have changed from a neurological emphasis to those that do not imply a cause for the language disorder (Reilly et al., 2014; Leonardo, 2020).

SLI has been the prevailing term in the research literature from 1981 until 2017 (Iverson & Williams, 2025). In 2017, DLD was the term recommended by the CATALISE expert group from six different English-speaking countries (Bishop et al. & CATALISE-2 Consortium, 2017).

A scoping review of 265 journals between 2017 and 2024 by Kornelis et al. (2025) demonstrates the adoption and implementation of the term “DLD” in ASHA publications.



CONCLUSIONS

While experts from different countries have been discussing the terms “SLI” and “DLD” or have agreed on the term “DLD” for almost a decade, the old diagnostic label “kalbos neišsivystymas” (language underdevelopment) is still used in Lithuania. **Time to move forward.**



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Thank you for your attention!

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