The ability to use a language is one of the most important abilities a child has to acquire before he or she can join modern society. However, many children deviate from the normal path towards mastery of the language or languages spoken in their environment. Deviations can be caused by a variety of factors: accidental variation among children, lack of exposure to some properties of the adult language, a multilingual environment, a physical disorder in hearing or speech production, a general cognitive disorder that may be due to environmental (for example, psychosis or brain injury) or genetic factors (for example, Williams and Down syndrome), or Specific Language Impairment.

**Specific Language Impairment (SLI):** Children only deviate in their language development from the normal development (other terms for the same disorder are “Developmental Dysphasia” and “Language Disorder”). Experts have estimated that about 7% of children exhibit Specific Language Impairment while the percentage of children exhibiting any language problem regardless of its cause may be as high as 25%. The numbers show that language problems are not an issue affecting only a few individuals, but have socioeconomic consequences for the society as a whole.

**European Challenges:** Research in Language Acquisition has identified stages children go through when acquiring their native language or languages. In some countries, results of this research have been used to create standardized tests to identify and classify individuals with language problems. Similar developments exist across Europe, but are at a much earlier stage because of three challenges:

1) The linguistic diversity of Europe requires easily translatable tests, but many test methods are tied to features of a specific language.

2) Local dialects that diverge significantly from the standard language exist in many European regions. Children acquiring a dialect may exhibit a harmless deviance from the standard language.

3) Multilingualism occurs frequently in border regions, immigrant populations, and families of mixed nationality. Multilingualism can cause a harmless language delay.

**Goals and Structure:** The broad goal of this project is to coordinate and harmonize European efforts to advance the understanding of the language acquisition process in children and to apply such results to the detection of language impairment. Our particular focus is to develop test methods that are less sensitive to the language or languages and dialects a child is exposed to. Initially we consider five to six-year old children, but we plan to extend the project to younger children at a later point. Several European research groups already started with the creation of similar tests for specific languages. This project seeks to coordinate these developments and to spread them to all European languages. Though no area of linguistic competence is excluded, the project pays special attention to semantic and pragmatic competence. The work is structured in the following five working groups:

1 - Binding (Coordinator: Spyridoula Varlokosta, Rhodes, GR)
2 - Tense and Aspect (Coordinator: Angeliek van Hout, Groningen, NL)
3 - Questions (Coordinator: Na'ama Friedman, Tel Aviv, IL)
4 - Passive (Coordinator: Sharon Armon Lotem, Bar Ilan, IL)
5 - Quantifiers and Implicatures (Coordinator: Ken Drozd, Aarhus, DK)