Charlie Lewis and colleagues (1994) found that narrative fluency is correlated with success at false belief tasks (see figure below). Children who could answer demanding control questions about a false belief story, or who could retell the false belief story fluently, were significantly more likely to pass false belief tasks. Lewis thinks this shows that young children fail false belief tasks because of general linguistic difficulties. However, the fact that children can handle equally complex narratives about pretence rather than false belief rules out this interpretation (for the contrast between pretence and false belief, see Custer (1996); Gopnik and Slaughter (1991)).

In more detail, the experiments used a picture book describing a story about a false belief. In all the tests, the experimenter first told the subject the story using the picture book. There are three main findings. First, in one test, some children were told the story twice and others were encouraged to tell the story themselves on a second run through. Those children who retold the story themselves did significantly better in answering a test question on false belief than those who were simply told the story twice (ibid., 467 and fig. 21.1). Second, in another test, children were first told the story and then encouraged to retell it. They were then asked very demanding control questions to test their understanding of the narrative. This excluded 57% of the group (27/47). All but one of the remaining children (19/20), fourteen of which were under three-and-a-half years, passed a standard false belief test. Third, children's attempts to retell the false belief story were graded according to their narrative fluency. A linear relationship between narrative fluency and success at the false belief task emerged. Children who could tell the story fluently and confidently did much better than average narrators who in turn did better than poor narrators (see figure 1; ibid. 476 and fig. 21.2). In short, it seems that there is a high correlation between narrative understanding of situations involving false belief and an ability to solve false belief tasks.

How should these results be interpreted? Lewis suggests they show that young children fail false belief tasks because of an inability to 'schematise the premises' of a false belief narrative and to 'reconstruct the protagonist's mental state'. Further, he claims that these are "domain-general problems concerning the recall of interlinked events" (ibid., 477), and that young children "fail to grasp the causal texture of false belief narrative" (ibid., 462).

I disagree with Lewis' explanation of his findings. Their problem with false belief tasks cannot be caused by a general problem with extracting and remembering information from a narrative because young children can solve tasks which are structurally similar to false belief tasks but involve misperception or pretence rather than belief.

Lewis (1994, 472) also claims that "young children's failure in the false belief task lies in a specific problem they have in *reconstructing* the protagonist's mental state from memory." This cannot be quite their difficulty, because children who fail third-person false belief tasks have similar problems with their own recent false beliefs, and here there seems to be no need for them to

"reconstruct" the belief. Lewis (1994, 472) also claims that "young children's failure in the false belief task lies in a specific problem they have in *reconstructing* the protagonist's mental state from memory." This cannot be quite their difficulty, because children who fail third-person false belief tasks have similar problems with their own recent false beliefs, and here there seems to be no need for them to "reconstruct" the belief.
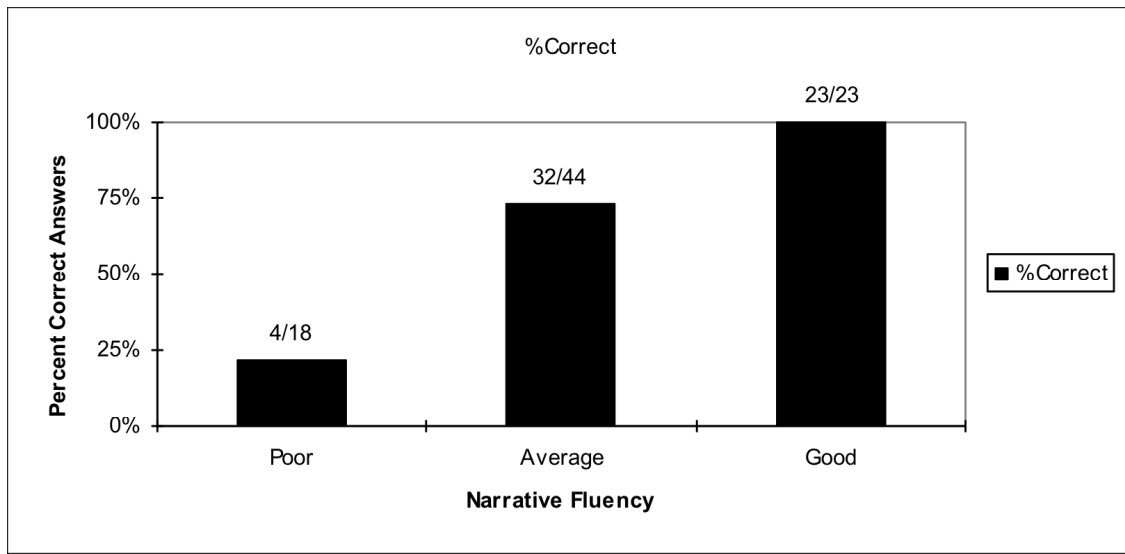
figure 1 *Charlie Lewis [1994] told children a story based around a mistaken belief using a picture book. Children were then asked to retell the story using the picture book. They were then asked a false belief question based on the story. The results reveal a linear relationship between narrative fluency and success at the subsequent false belief task.*