This chapter will explore in greater depth some of the main issues that arise in researching child communication disorders. In this attempt, the focus will be on research which primarily involves the assessment of children’s language and serves to illuminate both theoretical understanding of language as well as to deepen the understanding of particular communication disorders. By looking at three particular studies in detail (Fisher et al., 2005; Paradis et al., 2003; Thomson, 2005), it will be possible to explore the ways in which different research methodologies can be used to illuminate specific aspects of language. The first of these studies, discussed in Section 4.1, derives its theoretical base from the discipline of psychology in looking at the concept of Theory of Mind and its relationship to the development of language. The other two studies both investigate aspects of SLI from perspectives informed by the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic paradigms. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the psycholinguistic/cognitive paradigm is concerned with questions about the inner workings of language, for example, with how the abstract conception of language develops and is processed within the brain. On the other hand, the sociolinguistic/social-semiotic paradigm is concerned with questions about the outer, interactive aspects of language, as one speaker communicates with another (see Section 1.3). In the present chapter, the second study is informed by the psycholinguistic/cognitive paradigm in looking at issues related to bilingualism and the development of language. The third study looks at SLI from within a sociolinguistic/social-semiotic paradigm, through the application of a SFL perspective. All three studies primarily involve the assessment of children’s language and serve to illuminate both theoretical understanding of language as well as to deepen the understanding of particular communication disorders. The basic concepts which arise in research in the
field of communication disorders will be described as they occur. Readers interested in exploring further into the area of child language disorders are strongly recommended to read some of the comprehensive reference works available (e.g. Owens, 2008; Paul, 2007)

### 4.1 Language and mind

One of the contributions from the discipline of psychology to the area of language development and disorders over recent years has been the construct of Theory of Mind (ToM) – see Concept 4.1. Disorders which have been identified as affecting ToM include autism, and brain damage involving frontal and right cerebral hemispheres. The major work in ToM has been concentrated within what are often described as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), which are disorders ranging from severe autism, high-functioning autism, and including Asperger’s syndrome (Cohen & Volkmar, 1997). The main features of Autism are generally described as including,

- Qualitative impairment in social interaction
- Qualitative impairment in communication
- Restricted patterns of behaviour, interest and activities
- Delays or abnormal functioning before three years

**Concept 4.1 Theory of Mind**

Theory of Mind refers to the ability to recognize the thoughts and intentions of others, and so this is a framework about the way people themselves theorize about the thoughts of others. ToM allows a listener to gauge whether someone means what they say, for example, are they lying or joking perhaps? The ToM allows the speaker to tailor what is said to the needs of their listeners, for example, providing information which the listener is presumed not to know. ToM is acquired over the developmental period during childhood, for example, children’s lies at three years will be fairly transparent, but by four or five years of age may be more skilful! Without ToM a person will take communication very much at face value, and have difficulty interpreting or conveying social nuances. For a very readable overview of the research on ToM see the work of Baron-Cohen (1995), and for an accessible fictional account of what life might be like without ToM, see Mark Haddon’s novel, *The curious incident of the dog in the night-time* (Haddon, 2003).

**Case study 1**

The research of Fisher et al. (2005) provides a good example of research which tries to unravel the relationship between language and ToM in