
Comparing morphosyntactic abilities in a group of TD, Dyslexic and Bilingual Children

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Abstract

SLI and Dyslexia are both developmental disorders: the first one affects the acquisition of oral language and it is often characterized in terms of problems with morphosyntax; the second one is a specific impairment in the acquisition of reading and spelling skills despite normal or above-average intelligence. The purpose of this study is to discuss data on the production and comprehension of a set of particular syntactic agreement configurations and functional items, such as clitics pronouns, in different group of children so as to assess their oral language skills. 203 children took part in the experiment, all children were recruited from Primary Schools in the Milan area: 108 TD children, 29 children with developmental dyslexia (DD), 44 First Graders and 22 TD bilingual children (BG). All children were born in Italy but, at home, they speak the family's language: 9 Arabic, 1 Arabic/ French, 3 Spanish, 2 Chinese, 1 Filipino, 1 Russian, 1 English, 1 Albanian, 1 Croatian, 1 Romanian, 1 French. Groups' data analysis showed that Clitic/Past Participle was the most problematic agreement configurations (consistent with Moscati e Rizzi 2012). The most interesting data was the common tendency to correct sentences with clitic-pp agreement without manipulations (E.g.:After hearing 1) *il ragazzo lo ha raccolto*, some children judged the sentence ungrammatical and they corrected it with: 1b) *il ragazzo ha raccolto*, omitting the object clitic). In the light of some unexpected data, we made an individual analysis of each group. Analysis revealed a subgroup in (S)DD (about 30%) group and in BG (about 20%) that show more difficulties than their peers in agreement test and clitic production. Production of clitic is a clinical marker of SLI in Italian and in other Romance languages at the age of 5 and, as data shows, it can persist beyond 5 years. This study shows that a fine-grained linguistic analysis can be really useful to identify possible cases of atypical development: both agreement and object clitic assessments indicate that the presence of morphosyntactic difficulties expressed in terms of Cl/Pp agreement and in object clitic production. These data might well indicate that some child in (S)DD group and in BG presents a latent SLI syndrome that can not be diagnosed using conventional tests.

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