
Towards a diagnostic methodology for Specific Language Impairment in Lebanese Multilingual context : a crossing-tool study.

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Abstract

Accurate identification of SLI in bilinguals is a challenge because the language tests used by speech language therapists (SLT) are not appropriate for this population since they were initially standardized on monolinguals. Moreover clinicians are not always aware of factors interfering in language development in bilingual children.

In Lebanon, a historically multilingual country, tracking SLI is even more difficult due to the recent appearance of the speech language therapy profession and to the lack of standardized assessment tools. ELO-L[1] is currently the only tool available to assess the Lebanese language. For second language assessment, French or English, professionals and clinicians have been using, to date, French or English measures which are initially standardized on monolinguals and consequently, not accurate for bilinguals and for the Lebanese context.

Therefore, for better identification of bilingual typically developing children (Bi-TD) and bilingual children with SLI (Bi-SLI), COST[2] measures, LITMUS[3]3 NWRep, LITMUS SR and a Parental Bilingual Questionnaire (PABIQ), were adapted to the Lebanese language and context, and then validated among Lebanese children. Each one of these tools and the PABIQ was found to be very discriminatory of the two groups of bilingual children and thus to constitute valuable tools in the diagnostic evaluation in the Lebanese multilingual context. However, some children were not correctly identified.

In a second step, information collected from each language measure and from the PABIQ was then compared to the results of the participating children on standardized tests. The aim was to determine cut-off scores. For this purpose, a combination of LITMUS measures and the PABIQ was conducted in order to assess the relevance of these tools when used jointly.

Sixty-nine bilingual Typically Developing (Bi-TD, N= 56; ages, yrs: M= 6;2, SD= 0;3) and 13 bilingual children with SLI (Bi-SLI, N=13; ages, yrs M= 6;7, SD= 0;7), participated in a first study based on LITMUS and standardized tools and parental responses to PABIQ questions. The results of this previous study showed that none of these measures leads to

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entirely reliable diagnosis, but, a cross-tool methodology may be more accurate. Cut-off scores discriminating Bi-TD from Bi-SLI were then determined for NWRep and SR tools. For the PABIQ, linguistic development indexes were calculated to better verify whether each participant really matches his initial group PABIQ indexes are: Early Development Index (EDI) related to first language acquisition and No Risk Index (NRI) which include EDI, positive family history and language abilities as estimated by the parents; Linguistic Richness Index (LRI) including length of exposure to languages, early exposure scores and scores of actual use of languages in the context of the child.

The results were promising. They highlighted various developmental profiles exhibited by children growing up in multilingual contexts such as the Lebanese one, where bilingualism is institutionalized and mandatory at school age. Bilingual profiles depend on the context in which the child is evolving, and on the length of exposure, but more fundamentally, on language use and richness.

A second study is currently being conducted on another group of Bi-TD children (L2 acquisition in progress) and BI-SLI children. Results from 20 Bi-TD children with the Lebanese language as L2, and 10 Bi-SLI children are expected to make it possible to refine and correct cut-off scores for the experimental LITMUS tools and the PABIQ.

1" Evaluation du Langage Oral- Libanais" (Zebib et al. to appear), an adaptation of French ELO (Khomsis et al. 2001), to Lebanese.

2COST Action IS0804: "Language Impairment in Multilingual context: linguistic patterns and the road to assessment"

3Language Impairment Testing in Multilingual settings

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