

Critical Review:
Which elements of morphosyntax act as reliable clinical markers of SLI in French-speaking school-age children?

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This critical review examines evidence regarding morphosyntax impairments that distinguish French-speaking school-age children with SLI from their typically developing peers. Study designs included eight case control designs and one case study. Overall, the review's results provide suggestive evidence that object clitics, tense marking and frequency and variability of complex forms are reliable clinical markers of SLI in this population. Clinical implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Introduction

Delays in morphological and syntactic development are a characteristic feature of children with specific language impairment (SLI) in English (Bedore & Leonard, 1998). These findings have since been extended to several other languages, including Spanish (Bedore & Leonard, 2001) and Greek (Stravarakaki, 2010). While difficulties with grammatical morphology appear to be a consistent finding cross-

difficulties deviate from normal peers and can be used as a diagnostic indicator.

Results indicated that the older SLI group rarely used ungrammatical non-finite forms or omitted subjects, and consistently used subject clitics in obligatory contexts. However, similar to the preschool group, they seldom used object clitics. Given the study's limitations, particularly its inability to fully address the research question of interest, it only provided somewhat suggestive evidence for expressive object clitic performance as a clinical marker of SLI in the school-aged population.

Jakubowicz, Nash, Rigaut and Gérard (1998) studied the elicited production and comprehension of

Stavrakaki, Chrysomallis and Petraki (2011) investigated the subject-verb agreement, object clitic and wh-question productions of a 9-year-old simultaneous French-Greek bilingual. The measures used to confirm his SLI diagnosis were described in

Clinical Implications

Based on the results of this review, it is recommended that speech-language pathologists examine object clitic and tense marking performance when assessing the expressive language abilities of French-speaking school-age children. Forming impressions of the overall grammatical complexity of children's utterances may also be of benefit. Because there is insufficient evidence to suggest these factors alone can accurately identify French children with SLI, they should be used in conjunction with standardized tests.

References

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