

Developing an instrument to assess phonological and syntactic awareness in pre-schoolers and primary school children

The development of linguistic awareness (LA) is recommended by Portuguese curricular documents (Silva 2016; ME 2018) and by other reference documents for teachers (Freitas et al. 2007; Duarte 2008) since preschool education. However, we still lack resources that teachers can use to assess LA in their classrooms. LA has been related to early reading and writing skills, particularly at the phonological and the syntactic levels (Demont & Gombert, 1996; Capovilla, Capovilla & Soares, 2004; Oakhill & Cain, 2011; a.o.).

The aim of this study is to present the construction and results of an instrument created to assess phonological awareness (PA) and syntactic awareness (SA) in pre-schoolers and primary school Portuguese children, designed for the educational context.

The instrument includes two parts: Part 1 assesses PA (syllable, rhyme, phoneme, word); Part 2 assesses syntactic knowledge of late acquired structures (passives, object relatives, object wh-questions) as well as SA (word order and agreement). Part 1 contains 16 items and used a picture selection task and a multiple-choice task. Part 2 contains 21 items: 9 items assess knowledge of complex syntactic structures with a picture selection task; 12 items assess SA with an acceptability judgment task (8 ungrammatical sentences). In the construction of the test items, linguistic criteria were carefully taken into account.

The instrument was completed in school context by 479 preschoolers and first and second grade children native speakers of European Portuguese from three different school clusters in the Centre-South of Portugal.

We will discuss the results, considering exploratory factorial analyses consistent with the domains that are being assessed in each part of the instrument. Although some items are problematic, globally the results are encouraging for the use of the instrument in educational contexts, as a means of providing information to educators on the students' development and planning didactic intervention.

References:

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