Language assessment with children who speak non-mainstream dialects: Comparing results of DELV-Screening Test and CELF-CLS

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Introduction

- Accurate diagnosis of specific language impairment (SLI) in children who speak NMAE dialects is difficult.
- Some features which are commonly omitted in children with SLI are produced differently in typically developing children who speak NMAE dialects.
- This leads to a diagnostic conundrum. It can be difficult to determine whether differences in rates of morphological production should be attributed to a child’s dialect use or whether it signals a language impairment.
- To address this problem, some standardized language assessments, such as the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-4; Semel et al., 2003) provide modified scoring for children who speak NMAE dialects.
- However, the criteria for determining dialect status prior to assessment are unclear, making it difficult for clinicians to decide whether performance on a particular item/utterance represents an acceptable dialectical difference or an error.
- The goal of this poster is to compare the results of two language assessments for NMAE-speaking children.

Measures

- Participants completed the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-Core Language Skills sub-tests and the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-ST; Seymore et al., 2003).
- The DELV-S has two parts:
  - Part 1: Language Variation
    - "Strong Variation" "Some Variation" "MAE"
  - Part 2: Risk Status
    - "Lowest Risk" "Low-Medium Risk" "Medium-High Risk" "Highest Risk"

Participants

- 299 second grade students (167 Caucasian, 106 African American, 26 Other races)
- 56.5% qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch; 29.1% Paid Lunch; 14.4% Lunch status unavailable.

Scoring Modifications for NMAE-speaking children

- "Regional and cultural patterns or variations that reflect dialectal differences from Mainstream American English are credited if they are appropriate for the student’s language background. Score these variations as intact sentences according to the structural rules of the student’s dialect." (CELF-4, p. 34)

Decisions prior to scoring:

- Which dialect does a child speak?
- What are the structural rules of the child’s dialect?

Examples of modified and unmodified scoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-test</th>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Unmodified Score</th>
<th>Modified score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concepts and Following Directions</td>
<td><em>Point to the shoes that are circled</em></td>
<td>Points to the shoes that are circled</td>
<td>1/1 point*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Structure</td>
<td>Here the bird____*</td>
<td>Fly</td>
<td>0/1 points</td>
<td>1/1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recalling Sentences</td>
<td>The kindergartner cannot cross the street by himself.</td>
<td>The kindergartner cannot cross the street by himself.</td>
<td>2/3 points</td>
<td>3/3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulated Sentences</td>
<td>quickly</td>
<td>He quickly run outside</td>
<td>1/2 point</td>
<td>2/2 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* receptive sub-tests do not have scoring modifications

Results

Test Outcomes without Scoring Modifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DELV-S Variation Status</th>
<th>CELF-4 CLS Impairment Status*</th>
<th>Lowest Risk</th>
<th>Low-Medium Risk</th>
<th>Medium-High Risk</th>
<th>Highest Risk</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Variation</td>
<td>TL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Variation</td>
<td>TL</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAE</td>
<td>TL</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| * CLS Status = LI if SS < 85 |

| Percentage of NMAE use on Part 1 was calculated by dividing the number of NMAE responses by the total number of scoreable responses. |

| Percent NMAE and CELF-4 CLS SS were strongly correlated for white (r = .482, p = .001) and non-white (r = .479, p < .001) participants. |

| These correlations were not significantly different between white and non-white participants (CELF-CLS, z = 0.03, p = .448 DELV-S, z = 0.92, p = .356). |

Summary and discussion

- Modifying scoring for NMAE children is complex and requires knowledge of the structures of children’s dialects.
- When scoring modifications are not applied, clinicians should be aware of the risk of false positives.
- The moderate association between dialect use and language ability suggests these constructs may be related when dialect use is assessed in formal contexts.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the participants, teachers, and schools who were involved in this study. We thank research assistants from the SCORL Lab at the University of South Carolina for their help with data collection and processing, and to Allison Braendkle and Joanna Scoggins who served as project coordinators. We thank Brooke Mundock and Brooke Chapping for their contributions to this project during their research practicums. This research was supported, in part, by funding from the National Institute of Health (R03DC013399; PI: Adlof).

References


Acknowledgments


Acknowledgments


Acknowledgments