PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN NORMAL CHILDREN

Thesis
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The protocol of pragmatic assessment was designed in this study in order to be used as measure to standardize pragmatic development in Arabic speaking children with age rang of (2-8) years old. The total score of the protocol of pragmatic assessment is 100. Each child has to achieve a score which lies within the normal for his age in order to be considered pragmatically functioning well. The protocol of pragmatic assessment includes the following skills: Preverbal communication, object function, managing conversation, intentional communication and narrative skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Language refers to the system of spoken symbols organized within the brain. It is a system of communication whereby speakers and hearers, using a set of internalized operations, can relate sounds and meanings **(Bulter et al., 2002).**

Language categories are language content (semantics), language form (syntax), language use in social contexts (pragmatics), phonology (study of phonemes/speech sounds) and morphology (word structure) **(Ritichie et al., 1999).**

A useful frame of reference for describing language is to consider this complex system in term of its content, form and use

Content (semantics) is the meaning of language. It is the knowledge that is acquired about persons, objects, events and relationships between them. It is the linguistic expression of what is in our minds.

Form (syntax) is the arrangement of words in sentences according to the meaning relationships among them. Phonology is the categorization of the sounds of a language. Morphology is the word structure and inflections.

Use (Pragmatics) is the area of language function that embraces the use of language in social contexts (knowing what to say, how to say it, and when to say it-and how to "be" with other people). It is the reason why we speak, write or sign to each other **(Bowen, 2001).**

For a conversation to be successful, each conversational partner should be able to take turn, grasp information, make sense of it, and appropriately respond to and interact with others. He or she should be able to maintain conversation, use skills such as requesting, describing, and negotiating in ways appropriate to the situation **(Adams, 2001).**

McTear and Conti-Ramsden (1989) found that pragmatics involves the three following aspects of language use:

1. The study of discourse and conversational skills.
2. The study of the relationship between pragmatics and other levels of language.
3. The study of the situational determinants of the use of language.

Discourse is concerned with stretches of language, especially spoken language, which go beyond the sentence level and constitute a recognizable communicative event. Pragmatic skills are concerned with discourse. However, not all discourse or conversational skills are pragmatic. Story telling for example is a discourse skill and aspects of telling a story, such as specifying topic and establishing referent, are clearly pragmatic aspects. Other aspects, however, are not pragmatic. These include the ability to focus on a character and the characters, motivation, goals, plans, actions and the use of a concept **(Neville, 1990).**

Bowen (2001) reported that pragmatic skills include:

1. The ability to participate in a conversation by taking turns with other conversational partners.
2. The ability to notice and respond to the non-verbal aspects of language.
3. The awareness of the need to introduce a topic of conversation in order for the listener to fully understand.
4. The ability to know which words or sentences type to use when initiating a conversation or responding to others.
5. The ability to maintain a topic or change it.
6. The ability to maintain appropriate eye-contact during a conversation.
7. The ability to distinguish how to talk and behave towards different communicative partners (formal with some, informal with others).

Numerous researchers agree that pragmatic assessment needs to take place within the framework of a whole discourse, and not within the framework of individual units, such as sentences which have been isolated from context **(Neville, 1990).**

Unfortunately, few researches have been discussed the implementation of pragmatic assessment as a part of full language assessment especially for Arabic speaking children.

AIM OF THE WORK

The aim of this work is to study normal pragmatic acquisition in Arabic speaking children in order to establish a protocol of pragmatic assessment.

PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT

For those working with Individuals who have pragmatic difficulties, it would be very helpful to know the range of normal pragmatic skills demonstrated at different ages. At present no means of reliably profiling pragmatic development exists. Despite numerous studies of particular aspects of pragmatic development, linguists, speech pathologists and psychologists far from understand the overall picture of normal pragmatic development. This is in sharp contrast to knowledge of syntactic and phonological development, where a clear view of the normal progress of children has made possible a principled approach to the remediation of disorders of language development **(Reed, 1994)**.

There are many reasons why comprehensive normative charts are not available currently and why it will be even more difficult to create charts with clinical usefulness. Three main reasons are explored:

1) There is little developmental research in the field of pragmatics. Only pockets of research on specific pragmatic behaviors, such as requests, topic maintenance and eye gaze (including direction, intensity and duration of eye contact) have been done.

2) The difficulty in defining concepts within the field. There is still much debate concerning the definition of pragmatics and what areas can legitimately be included within the field. Clinicians are similarly divided about the use of-the term

'pragmatic disorder' and what constitutes such a disorder ***(McTear and Conti-Ramsden, 1992)*.**

3) The variability of appropriate human communicative behavior. There is considerable variability of what is considered to be appropriate human communicative behavior on different occasions, between individuals, across cultures and over time. **(Leinonen and Smith, 1994).**

Roth and Spekman (1984a and 1984b) usefully described three different aspects of pragmatics: functional or intentional communication, speech acts, conversational management and presuppositional knowledge.

A) Functional (or Intentional) Communication

Functional communication is concerned with what the speaker intends to communicate, how that intention is conveyed in an utterance or gesture and the effect of the utterance on the listener. Not surprisingly, the range and type of intentional communicative act changes with increasing maturity. Children's expanding world knowledge and increasing cognitive maturity mean that they have more ideas to communicate as well as increasingly sophisticated and indirect means of expressing them.

B) Conversational management

Conversational management is concerned with the speaker's ability to take turns in a conversation; to introduce, maintain and switch topics; request and make clarifications (repairing conversations).

1-Turn taking

Turn taking skills develop from a very early age during the first months of the child's life, parents engage in activities with their infant that may form the foundations of early turn taker skills **(Snow, 1995).** Initially, turn taking is a non-verbal activity involving coordination of touching, smiling, looking and feeding, later; it focuses additionally on timing of movements of objects. Still later, vocal and verbal turn taking develops. Three-month-old infants' communication was studied by **Bloom, Russell & Wassenberg (1987).** They found that, when adults responded to their child's vocalizations, the child's speech sounds increase relative to their non-speech sounds.

Sacks et al. (1979) suggest that conversational participants who wish to take the next turn do not wait until the current speaker stops talking, because otherwise there would be regular and noticeable gaps between turns. Similarly, they do not seem to depend solely on nonverbal or prosodic cues of turn completion - such as the speaker directing gaze at the listener or the use of a failing intonation contour - but anticipate the potential completion of the turn and begin at that point. The observation that many overlaps occur at transition-relevant positions- for example, at the point where the speaker's turn consists of a potentially complete syntactic structure, such as subject-verb- object- supports the view that next speakers anticipate the potential completion of a turn with precision timing and start talking no sooner and also no later than the appropriate point.

Garvey and Berninger (1981) found that gaps between turns were longer for younger children aged 2 years, 10 months to 3 years, 3 months) than for older children (aged 4years, 7months to 5years, 7 months) and for adults. They found few overlaps in the data for the younger children. Combining these findings, they concluded that young children may not rely so much on a projection of possible turn completion for deciding when it is their turn to talk as on cues, such as terminal intonation patterns, as well as on a brief interval of silence following their partner's speech. This inability to process the turn in progress also results in more irrelevant next turns, particularly in multiparty talk or when attempting to intrude into an ongoing conversation - both situations which preschool children find difficult **(Ervin-Tripp, 1979).**

By 3 or 4 years, however, children have the ability to repair overlaps by stopping when interrupted or by repeating the overlapped portions when interrupted, while by 4 years, they are already able to make explicit observations about turn-taking procedures and types of talk. Sentence-internal overlaps can be divided into two types: those in which the second speaker begins talking before the current speaker has reached a potential turn completion (in other word, interruptions), and those in which the second speaker projects at the turn completion but the current speaker continues beyond that transition-relevant position (i.e. overlaps) **(Levinxon, 2000).**

Gallagher and Craig (1982) found that the children appeared to project turn completions, because overlaps occurred at positions

where transition was relevant - such as at the completion of structures.

2) Clarification requests and the resolution of conversational misunderstandings:

Resolving conversational breakdown depends on an ability to recognize when and in what way a message is inadequate and to know what steps need to be taken to repair the message. **Garvey (1984)** distinguished between different types of clarification requests for example: neutral request for repetition, request for confirmation, and request for specific information. Making a clarification request requires the ability to recognize that communicative breakdown has occurred as well as the ability to produce an appropriate query to elicit a repair. In a study of the emergence of clarification requests in children aged l year, 6 months to 3 years. **Johnson (1980)** found that requests for confirmation emerged at age l year, 6months although the frequencies were small and many examples were unclear because the children appeared to be simply echoing their mother's utterances using intonation and not necessarily attempting to request confirmation. More specific requests were produced only by the older children.

Deffebach & Adamson (1994) found that mothers used teaching strategies such as taking the child's role in a conversation, which may help to develop the child's understanding of turn taking skills.

3-Topic skills

The development of topic skills begins very early. During the child's infancy, parents often interpret what their child may be intending to say. For example, if the child is crying they say: "Are you sleepy, then?" even speaking words for the child: "I know what you're saying. You're saying: 'Mummy, pick me up **(Leech, 1982).**

Children begin to be able to make clear what they are interested in by gazing, making attention-getting noises and even later, by eight months or so, pointing to draw the adult's attention to things that interest them. At four to eight months, they learn to look at an adult when an adult tries to draw their attention to something and then to look at where the adult is pointing or looking to see for themselves the focus of the adult's attention. By nine to ten months (and often much earlier), children are able to convey a message intentionally to another person **(Hobbs, 1990).**

By one year, most children are able to initiate topics by using gesture and single words to label objects: for example, "Sock", accompanied by holding a sock (meaning "Here is a sock"); to request objects: for example, "Bisibic", accompanied by pointing to the biscuit tin (meaning "I want a biscuit now"); to request actions: for example, "Up", accompanied by raised arms (meaning "Lift me up"); and to express emotions or states: for example, "Hot", accompanied by a rapidly withdrawn finger from the cup and a concerned facial expression (meaning "this is very hot") **Garton & Pratt (1990).**

James, (1990) found that twins aged two years nine months and three years nine months were able to maintain topic in their interactions with each other both through repetition of the sounds the partner used and through meaningful utterance repetition. This ability to maintain topic within a conversation improves with increased age and probably with child-centeredness of the topic**.**

Ritichie & Bhatia (1999) found that children up to the age of five or six tend to blame listeners if there is a breakdown in communication because of an inadequate message from the speaker. However seven to eight-year-old children blame the speaker for delivering an inadequate message. But they do not request a clarification from the speaker. That is why clinicians and teachers have to encourage speakers to improve their repair and clarification behavior as part of general social skills training.

4- Self-repairs

Self-repairs occur when a speaker corrects his or her own utterance and thus involves a process of monitoring the utterance in order to prevent potential communication breakdown**.** They can take the form of filled and unfilled pauses, repetitions, corrections, and abandoned utterances. Self-repairs may have various causes: planning errors involving word-finding problems; execution errors such as phonological reversals; and interactional problems, such as making referents not sufficiently clear for a listener **(Evans, 1985)**.

Clark and Andersen (1979) have distinguished between two types of self repair: repairs to the linguistic system, for example, grammatical self-corrections, and repairs for the listener, which are

motivated by the need to be understood. Repairs to the linguistic system provide useful information about children's developing language skill (linguistic competence). Repairs for the listener are interesting in terms of children developing pragmatic skills because they illustrate children's attempts to adapt their message to their perceptions of their listener's needs (pragmatic competence).

5- Interrupting

Mastery of the skill of interrupting continues well into adulthood. Many adults experience difficulties with this skill. This is partially related to the complex maneuvers required for skillful interruption **(Sachs et al; 1990).**

6- Inferences:

Pragmatic inferences are assumptions of what a speaker means which go beyond what was actually said. Children have been shown to use their prior experience and expectations when inferring information from natural oral discourse .The process of inference enables listeners and readers to extract meanings not literally expressed in an utterance **(Levinxon, 2000).**

Studies of the lexicon suggest that early meanings are literal. That is, a child who uses the expression "moo" to refer to a cow as well as to the moon is literally over generalizing the semantic concept of roundness, not drawing inferences about cows **(Nippold et al; 1990).**

The generation of inferences depends initially on the evaluation of an utterance as either literally and/or non-literally intended. Some