Test of Receptive and Expressive Language Abilities – Preliminary data of Greek preschool age children

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Abstract

Introduction and aims of the study The Test of Receptive and Expressive Language Abilities (Vogindroukas, Grigoriadou 2009) is an evaluation test for young children and pupils with language and communication difficulties. The goal of the test is to determine specific problematic developing language issues in children with communication disorders and to use the results in order to plan a therapeutic schedule. The structure of the test follows the developmental stages of typically developing children and it consists of six developmental parts. The first part is the Preverbal stage which focuses on play and social communication abilities, the second part is the One Word stage, which focuses on cognitive abilities regarding the functional level of the child, the third part is the Two Words stage, which focuses on the receptive and expressive language level, the next part is the Three Words stage and the last two parts are the Early Grammar stage and the Advance Grammar stage which focus on the specific features of Greek Grammar and on fields of language such as pragmatic and narrative abilities. A number of cognitive abilities such as the knowledge of colors, sizes, the classification of concepts and reasoning skills are also included. **Methods:** The Test of Receptive and Expressive Language Abilities was used with a group of typical developing children. The group included 160 children with an average age of 58 months. **Results:**. In general all the items of the test are succeeded by the sample of the study. Difficulties were found in the story sequencing, passive voice expression, the use of "beside" and "between" and in the use of third declination of singular number of nouns.

Conclusions: The benefits of the test are discussed.

Introduction

Child language development is one of the most crucial fields of human communication sciences. The specific ways which are used by the children in order to develop   language is in the interest of a great number of researchers all over the world. There are a huge amount of tests used in this field. The Greek language is one of the   least researched languages due to lack of University Departments specifics in the field of human communication sciences,but this was the case until 1999. Over the last decade, though, different teams of researchers have tried to adapt or even to create specific tests on the development of Greek language. Examples of such tests are the "Phonological and Phonetics Tests" (Research Team of Panhellenic Association of Logopedics 1999), "Anomilo 4" (Research Team of Panhellenic Association of Logopedics 2005) , "METAPHON" (Giannetopoulu, Kirpotin 2007) , Test of Speech and Language (Oikonomou, Mpezevegkis, Milonas, Varlokosta 2007) "Test of Expressive Vocabulary" (adaptation of Word Finding Test, Renfrew 1995) (Vogindroukas, Protopapas, Sideridis 2009) and the "Test of Receptive and Expressive Language Abilities" (TRELA) (Vogindroukas, Grigoriadou 2009). The reasons why these tests are useful, in each language, are well known. Their use permits the specialists to diagnose the impairments, to evaluate the level of language for each child and to plan the therapeutic program, accordingly. TRELA has been structured with this aim in mind. It consists of an evaluation test   for children with language and communication difficulties. The goal of the test is to determine the problematic   developing language aspects of children with communication disorders and to use the results in order to plan the most precise and individualized therapeutic schedule for each child. The structure of the test follows the developmental stages of typically developing children and it consists of six developmental parts.

 The first part consists of the Preverbal stage which focuses on the play abilities and social communication abilities. The second part is the One Word stage, which focuses on cognitive abilities regarding the functional level of the child. The third part is the Two Words stage, which focuses on the receptive and expressive language level. The next part is the Three Words stage and the last two parts concern the Early Grammar stage and the Advance Grammar stage. These two focus on the specific features of Greek Grammar and on the fields of language which are regarded as pragmatics abilities and narratives. Through the different stages referred to   there are inserted some cognitive abilities such as knowledge of colors, of sizes, classification of concepts and reasoning skills. TRELA evaluates the receptive and expressive ability in all six stages. For each stage there are protocols provided with the appropriate information for the examiner and instructions for the evaluation. It is up to the examiner to choose the appropriate protocol which will be used through the clinical observation. If, for example, a child has no speech at all or its speech is extremely poor, then

the examiner should use the first and second protocols that focus on play development, non verbal communication and behavior and on the one word stage, respectively. But if the child has well developed speech then the examiner should use the Advanced Grammar stage which evaluates personal pronouns, possession, pragmatics abilities and narrative. The application of the test covers the age range of between 12 months and 6 years in typically developing children and can also be used for all ages if there is a developmental disorder. The first stages use materials that include different sets of toys, single objects and single pictures of objects and verbs. From the two words stage the examiner uses the picture book which presents each item of the test on a different page. Each page contains four pictures. The examinee is asked to listen to and point at the designated picture (two pictures are asked for) in order to assess the receptive ability. The expressive ability is assessed immediately after by asking the child to name the other two pictures. At the end of the assessment the examiner fills in the Ability Profile, where all the pass, failed and emerged items are to be collected and noted. In this way the examiner has all the appropriate information about the examinee's skills and failures on the levels that language has been assessed. Collected information helps the examiner to first clarify if the difficulty of the examinee lies in social communication problems, cognitive problems or language problems. Secondly, he gets information on the level of the examinee's functioning (object, picture, abstract language level). The third point is to evaluate the emerging abilities and skills in order to use them in the therapeutic program and fourth is to help him to determine which adaptations have to be made for the specific difficulties of a child (level of attention, way of learning, alternative ways of communication for better understanding, the way of presenting the materials e.t.c). Recently, the receptive scale of TRELA has been used in comparison to the Preschool Language Scale -3 (PLS 3), in order to determine the adequacy of TRELA in the assessment of language skills. The results show a great correlation between the two instruments and the researchers conclude that TRELA is an appropriate instrument for the assessment of receptive language skills in the Greek language (Xanthou, Fountoulaki 2010).

There are few studies on language development in preschool age Greek speakers. Some of them give useful information about the specific features of Greek language development. Regarding morphological development, it is well known that Greek preschool age children have a great number of morphemes which are used correctly, although it is clear that Greek children during this period are not able to recognize and separate the morphemes in the word (Kati 1992). According to a relative study (Vogindroukas 2000), in Greek preschoolers from the age of 30 months to the age of 54 months, morphemes of regular and irregular verbs in active and passive voice have been observed, in all persons and in Simple Present, Simple Past and in Future tenses. Concerning nouns, morphemes in all declinations and in all

numbers have been noted. There are also definite and indefinite articles, morphemes related to adjectives in all genders, adverbs, causative conjunctions and personal and possessive pronouns. Difficulties, though, appear with the third person of plural in male and female gender of possessive pronouns. The study of Theofanopoulou-Kontou (1973), underlines a difficulty in the development of the plural in the male gender. Reference is made to the fact that the Greek children may develop this type of morpheme in some cases at the age of 78 months. Related results are also referred to in the study of Porpodas (1999), that show that the Greek preschoolers develop at about 72 months of age the numbers of the nouns and the verbs, the declinations and the personal pronouns.

In relation to syntaxes the phrases appear simple and early in life, they developed in paratatctic axis in the beginning and later they became anaphorical (Kati 1992, Pita 2001). In the same period the negative sentences appear and there is a difficult point regarding the use of negatives in grammar. In Greek, two words, "den" and "min" are used to refer to the notion of the negative but in a specific structured way . The Greek children replace the word "den" by the word "min" which is not correct and that shows the difficulty they experience in understand this specific syntactical rule (Pita2001).

According to Pita (2001) the development of syntax is not completed until 72 months of age in Greek preschoolers. Until this age the development of grammar rules for agreement subject predicate and the declination system of personal pronouns are not yet completed.

Two studies on pragmatic abilities in Greek language focus on the preschool age of development (Nisioti 1994, Vogindroukas2002). Both studies show the same results according to pragmatic abilities in children with a mean age of 66 months. Difficulties in the development were found at the levels of greetings, conversation, humor and trading. In comparison to related results in other civilizations there are differences in the use of 'thank you" and "please". Greek children at this age don't use the above words systematically.

The aim of this paper is to present the preliminary results of TRELA, used in two groups of Greek children with typical development at preschool age. The used stages go from the "Two words stage" to the "Advance grammar stage". The preliminary results are expected to further the understanding of the acquisition of Greek language.

Method

<u>Participants</u>

The Test of Receptive and Expressive Language Abilities was used in   a group of typically developing children. The   group included 160 children with the   average age of 58 months. 80   of them were boys and 80   were girls, from kindergartens in   Thessaloniki. For all participants in the test,   there are ethical approvals, consent of parents and teachers while they don't seem to   appear with any developmental or sensory disorders through to clinical observation and parental and teacher information.

Assessment

The Test of Receptive and Expressive Language Abilities (Vogindroukas, Grigoriadou 2009) was used for the evaluation of the language abilities of the participants. The RAVEN TEST and more specifically the coloured progressive matrices – Sets A, A_B, B (J. C. Raven 1998) were used in order to evaluate the Intellectual Quantity of the participants.

Results

Table 1 presents the correct answers of the participants in the chosen items from the Test of Receptive and Expressive Language Abilities. The results   are presented in the form of percentages.

Table 1

Correct answers

Items	*Receptive Abilities*	*Expressive Abilities*
Nouns	100%	97.5%
Active Verbs	99.2%	95.4%
Passive Verbs	79%	74.6%
Adjectives	100%	100%
Adverbs	98.2%	70%
Personal Pronouns A	100%	46.7%
Personal Pronouns B	85.6%	60.9%
Possessive Pronouns	92.9%	100%
Noun Declinations	100%	87.7%
Single and Plural Nnumbers	100%	100%
Verb Tenses	86.3%	67.6%

Pragmatic Abilities	72.7%	0
Story Sequencing	23.2%	0

Difficulties with nouns are noticed in the expression of the item "thermometer".

 Concerning the active verbs, there are some difficulties in the receptive abilities of the items "cut" and "going up" and in the expressive abilities in the items "read" and "write".

 Regarding the passive verbs items there is some difficulty in understanding the verbs "combing her hair" and "wiped" and in the expression of the items "be dressed" and "be painted".

Difficulties in adverbs regarding receptive abilities appear at the item "between" and in the expression of the   items "between" and "by".

Difficulties   in the expression of personal pronouns A,   are present due to the absence of use of the personal pronoun of the third person in plural number, in male and female gender (afti, aftes). The personal pronouns B, seem problematic both in understanding and in expression. This is obvious in the use   of the personal pronoun of the third person, in plural number, in male and female gender (tous, tis).

Regarding the possessive pronouns the difficulties in understanding concern   the third person of the plural number (tous = their).

The declination   of nouns   is also problematic at the male and female gender of the plural number (oi, ton, tous, tis).

The difficulty in the use of tenses relates to the future tense at the receptive as well as to the expressive component.

The difficulties in pragmatic abilities concern the   understanding of items which asses the body posture.

Finally,   as regards   the story sequencing, only 23.2% of the participants were able to pass the item.

Discussion

The results of this study are close to previous studies in the Greek language at the preschool age of   children. In this study the participants are at the age of 58 months and are integrated

in main stream   kindergartens of Thessaloniki.   The finding regarding the naming of "thermometer" is also mentioned and in other related studies (Vogindroukas, Papageorgiou & Gatzori 2001. Koskina & Lazaridou 2006. Vogindroukas, Protopapas & Sideridis 2009). It is possible that   the problem in naming it is not only due to the unknown word (two children are only familiar with it) but also because the picture presents a wall thermometer and not a clinical one with which most of the children are more familiar.

Concerning the difficulties with   Passive Voice   of verbs, at the receptive and expressive ability there is a related finding referring to the study of Koskina & Lazaridou 2006, and Antoniadis & Karagiannis 2007. In the first study the participants were 4.5 years of age and in the second 5.5 years of age. In both studies difficulties with   Passive Voice at the expression and also in the receptive ability are referred to. A difference   is   noticed concerning the percentage of the correct answers in the first study where the correct answers reach 66.5% percentage for the receptive and 69% for the expressive. In the second study the results are different due to the older age of the participants. The results for receptive ability was 91.5% and for the expressive 80.2%. Also, according to Stefany (1981) there are some verbs in passive voice which appear earlier in life while others appear later, and this might depend on the "communication power" of the verb meaning that a powerful verb is a verb used often for the everyday needs of the child and consequently it's appearance is early.

Difficulties with personal pronouns A in expression are present due to the absence of use of the personal pronoun of the third person, in plural number, in male and female gender (afti, aftes). Also the personal pronouns B   cause difficulties   in understanding   and expressing it (the personal pronoun of the third person, in plural number, in male and female gender (tous, tis). These findings agree with the findings of Porpodas (1999). According to him the adequate use of personal pronouns is completed at the age of 72 months. The participants of this study were at the age of   58 months and for this reason half of them encountered problems by using them inappropriately.

The declination difficulties which are present in this study concern the female and male gender in plural number. This finding has been referred to Theofanopoulou – Kontou (1973) and also by Pita (2001), who mention that the declination system in Greek

preschoolers is completed by the age of 72 months. Recently, TRELA has been used in a study with preschoolers aged between 41 months and 52 months (Xanthou, Fountoulaki 2010). The results show a difficulty in understanding the third person declination of male and female gender. In this study the problem occurs at the expression of the declinations but a large number of the participants, 87.7%, have succeeded on this item.

The difficulties with the future tense may depend on the struggle   of the children of this age to understand and to develop the concepts of time, or may be in some cases the problem appears due to difficulties in understanding the items and what the examiner requires as an answer. This comment is based on the findings of a related study (Vogindroukas 2000), according to which the Greek preschoolers from 30 to 54 months of age present morphemes of future tense.

The findings about the pragmatic abilities, regarding the understanding of the body posture are referred to in the studies of Koskina & Lazaridou 2006, and Antoniadis & Karagiannis 2007. There is a difference in the results in these two studies due to the different chronological ages of the participants. In the first study (Koskina & Lazaridou 2006) the percentage of success was 70% and in the second study (Antoniadis & Karagiannis) 75% and these results show that this item is difficult for the Greek preschoolers but it is also obvious that there is an increase of understanding through age development.

Finally, the finding with regard to the story sequencing in the present study shows a success percentage of 23. This result shows that it is difficult for children to sequence a five picture everyday story at the age of 58 months while the same results have occurred in the studies of Koskina & Lazaridou 2006, and Antoniadis & Karagiannis 2007, but with a large difference between the participants. In the first study (Koskina & Lazaridou 2006) the percentage of success was 15.5% and in the second study (Antoniadis & Karagiannis) 31%. The percentage is double in the second study and this finding supports the idea that there is an increase   of this ability due to chronological age development.

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