Speech-Language Pathologists' Assessment of ASL Across Educational and Clinical Settings

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THEORY & PRACTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Introduction

This exploratory research investigates the assessment tools and practices that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) use to assess receptive and expressive American Sign Language (ASL) abilities with deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) children. Within schools and clinical settings, accurate assessment tools are important components in determining whether a DHH student has language deprivation due to reduced language input during early development or if they have a language disorder (Henner et al., 2018).

More assessments for ASL are being added every year; however, there remain relatively much fewer assessments available for ASL than for spoken languages (Haug, 2005; Mann & Prinz, 2006). Practitioners who do not have access to standardized or normed tests likely rely on informal measures of eliciting and analyzing language abilities in DHH children. Further, SLPs are trained to assess speech and language across a number of areas and may not have an extensive working knowledge of the subspecialty of ASL assessments. This the first investigation to look at SLPs' knowledge and use of these specialized assessment tools.

Research questions
1. What assessment tools do SLPs use to assess ASL expressive and receptive abilities in DHH students?
2. What methods do SLPs use to assess signers' language samples?

Participants

- 22 school-based SLPs working with DHH children who use sign language
- Participants practiced in 14 states and the District of Columbia (AZ, CA, CO, DC, FL, IA, KS, MA, MO, NE, NJ, NY, SC, VA, WA)

Methodology

- Participants were recruited using flyers posted to social media and word of mouth
- Online survey consisting of 17 questions asking about their clinical experiences, their assessment tools and practices with DHH children, and their satisfaction with the available tools

Results

- Most SLPs reported using a wide-variety of assessment tools
- The three most frequently used ASL-specific assessment tools across settings were:
    1. Visual Communication and Sign Language Checklist (VCSL, Simms, Baker, & Clark, 2013)
    2. Social Communication Skills – Pragmatics Checklist (Goberis et al., 2012).
    3. Kendall Conversational Proficiency Levels (P-Levels)
- The most common adapted English-based assessments include:
    - Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test – 4th edition (EOWPVT- 4)
    - Receptive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test – 4th edition (ROWPVT- 4)
- SLPs in specialized settings for DHH students had higher levels of satisfaction with the receptive and expressive ASL test options

Setting	Average Number of ASL Assessments Available	Average Satisfaction: Receptive ASL tests	Average Satisfaction: Expressive ASL tests
Public School	2.5	1.3	1.3
Residential School for the Deaf	4.8	2.9	2.7
Day School for the Deaf	3.1	2.8	3.3

Satisfaction scores on a 7-point Likert scale

ASL-specific Assessments	Number of SLPs	%
Visual Communication and Sign Language Checklist (VSCL)	12	57
Social Communication Skills – The Pragmatics Checklist	12	57
The Kendall Conversational Proficiency Levels (P-Levels)	9	43
Carolina Picture Vocabulary Test (CPVT)	7	33
SKI-HI Language Development Scale	6	29
ASL Receptive Skills Test (ASL-RST); ASL Communicative Development Inventories (ASL-CDI)	5	24
ASL Assessment Instrument (ASLAI)	3	14
Story Grammar Marker/Mind Wing; Rhode Island Test of Language Structure (RITLS)	2	10
ASL Expressive Skills Test (ASL-EST); ASL Proficiency Interview (ASL-PI)	1	5

Adapted English-based Assessments	Number of SLPs	%
Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT-4)	15	71
Receptive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (ROWPVT-4)	14	67
Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language – 2 (CASL-2); Oral and Written Language Scales – 2 (OWLS-2)	10	48
Preschool Language Scale – 5th edition (PLS-5); Test of Narrative Language – 2nd edition (TNL- 2)	5	24
Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – Preschool 2nd Edition (CELF-P2)	4	19
Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – 5th edition (CELF-5); Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)	3	14
Boehm Test of Basic Concepts (BOEHM-3); Expressive Vocabulary Test (EVT); Language Processing Test: Elementary, Montgomery Assessment of Vocabulary Acquisition (MAVA)	2	10
Test of Language Development – Intermediate, 5th edition (TOLD-I5); Communication Matrix; Test of Auditory Comprehension of Language (TACL); Test of Problem Solving (TOPS); The WORD Test 3: Elementary (WORD); WIIG Assessment of Basic Concepts	1	5

Language Samples:

- 90% of SLPs reported using elicited and/or observational language samples
- Common books used for eliciting language sample:
    - Good Dog Carl (by Alexandra Day)
    - Pancakes for Breakfast (by Tomie dePaola)
    - Goodnight Gorilla (by Peggy Rathmann)
    - The Snowmen (by Raymond Briggs)
    - Chalk (by Bill Thomson)
    - Korgi (a graphic novel series by Christian Slade)

Informal Language Sample Materials	Number of SLPs
Wordless Picture Books	8
Story Grammar materials	5
SLAM cards; ESL noun/verb picture cards, interview, Pixar videos, therapist-made checklists, sentence-level picture description	1 each

Discussion

- Characteristics of the most widely used ASL assessments:
    - Freely available
    - Easy to share (i.e., minimal materials)
- Characteristics of the most widely used English-based assessments:
    - Quick measure of vocabulary
    - Relatively straightforward to adapt for ASL (aside from the issues of whether or not it is appropriate to adapt for ASL)
- SLPs in specialized settings for DHH students were more satisfied with their available assessment tools than SLPs in public school settings
- Language Samples are frequently used due to insufficient amount of standardized tools

Conclusion

SLPs are using the tools they have available and their clinical training to do the best assessments possible but:

- More varied assessment tools are needed that are available to practitioners at affordable costs
- Information about available assessment tools needs to be more widely disseminated

Limitations and Future Directions

- As this research was exploratory in nature, the number of participants may not have been large enough to detect smaller group differences or trends in the data. Additional studies are necessary.
- Future studies must address methods of disseminating knowledge of and access to high quality ASL assessments to practicing SLPs.

References

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