

Speech and Language Assessment Tool for bilingual Maltese Children

The Invention

A majority of the world's population is to some extent bilingual. This is certainly the case for the population of the Maltese Islands a majority of Maltese locals are able to speak both English and Maltese, albeit to various degrees. However this brings with it, its own challenges. Speech language pathologists are often asked to identify whether a child with speech and/or language difficulties has an impairment or whether this is due to their bilingual exposure.

Standardised speech and language assessment tools are widely available for practitioners in English speaking countries however no such protocols were available for the Maltese population. Whilst practitioners based in the Maltese islands could utilise such tools, it is vital that a standardised speech and language assessment would be available for practitioners in order to identify children who have speech and language disorders in. A team of University of Malta researchers together with international experts in the field have developed a set of tools specific to the Maltese scenario. These tools were standardised for use with monolingual Maltese-speaking children as well as Maltese children who are exposed to both Maltese and English from early on. Two of these assessments include a speech test and a verbal language test.

NOVELTY

Prior to the introduction of assessment tools, a bilingual child may have been misdiagnosed as requiring treatment whereas the apparent delay or disorder in their development was simply due to the fact that they were bilingual. All children substitute sounds up to a certain extent. As a bilingual child would be processing two different languages sequentially, the developmental errors would be specific in the case of bilingual acquisition. Therefore, Maltese children can have errors unique to the Maltese language and other errors because they are bilingual leaving the speech language pathologist with the difficult task of differentiating between a disorder and different acquisition as a result of bilingual exposure.

The tools developed are specific to the Maltese scenario and the tests devised reflect local language usage. This would allow a child living in Malta to be tested in Maltese and/or English depending on which language/s that child would be exposed to. The tools are also time and cost effective in that bilingual children do not need to go through two different tests in order to check the proficiency of speech and language skills.

APPLICATION FIELDS

The tools were specifically designed to assist speech language pathologists in their observation and assessment of children in the local scenario.

The development was executed at and supported by the University of Malta, sole owner of the rights. The university's IP is managed by its Knowledge Transfer Office. Inquiries shall be submitted to knowledgetransfer@um.edu.mt, or further information may be obtained on +356 2340 3466.

IP STATUS

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COMMERCIAL INTEREST

The tool will be available for purchase via an online platform. We are looking for clinicians or clinics who may be interested in purchasing the material.

LEAD INVENTOR



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