Identifying age related acquisition of ASL in DCDP and DCHP and identifying profiles of deaf language learners using the American Sign Language Assessment Instrument (ASLAI)

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▰▰▰ Abstract

There are no commercially available wide-ranging assessments of American Sign Language (ASL) that identify both age-related language acquisition targets and language learning differences in the Deaf student population. To this end, the ASLAI has developed age-related norms that are based on over 200 Deaf Children of Deaf Parents (DCDP) and over 350 Deaf Children of Hearing Parents (DCHP). These norms allow us to establish baseline age-related acquisition categories for ASL language components such as vocabulary depth and extent, simple and complex syntax, and ASL text comprehension.

Language learning difficulties in Deaf students have been typically diagnosed using materials based on spoken language. It has been particularly difficult to identify those students who may have language deficits and/or learning disabilities. The ASLAI has been designed to identify profiles of Deaf students who belong to the following groupings:

on target with respect to same-aged peers

delayed with respect to same-aged peers: issue of delay in language exposure but functioning normally

displaying potential language deficit: ie. Possible neurological issue, incorrect use of space, memory for spatial constructs, etc.

displaying potential learning disability.]: ie. Possible inability to sequence statements logically.

ASLAI data have been collected on over 500 Deaf students and have enabled us to formulate profiles of students who fit the above categories. Additional data (such as reading scores and teacher questionnaires) will be used to more clearly establish whether our profiles are adequate or accurate. An adequate profile is one that requires further analysis to determine if the student has a language issue. An accurate profile is one that is verified by other factors, such as medical and other language testing. Age-related adequate and accurate profiles of the different subtests of the ASLAI will be discussed in this paper.

The ASLAI is potentially an extremely reliable tool for use in identifying Specific Language Impairment (SLI) in Deaf subjects. The ASLAI test covers the inclusionary criteria, as it tests different aspects of ASL: phonology, lexical-semantic knowledge, syntax, morphology and pragmatics.

The ability to establish discrete language profiles for Deaf students will enable both educators and researchers to more accurately identify Deaf children who are on target for learning and those who are not, and to provide those who have language issues with timely services and intervention.

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