A Morpho-phonological Past Tense Processing as a Clinical Marker in SLI EFL Learners

Abstract

Background. The clinical marker in Specific Language Impairment (SLI) population is the subject of a considerable debate. A large percentage of children with Specific Reading Disability (SRD) or dyslexia can be classified as SLI (McArthur et al. 2003, Spear-Swerling 2006), that is, the one of the frequently diagnosed atypical language phenomena found among early school-age children. Children with SLI have difficulty applying the Past Tense rule to verbs, even though they can accurately repeat phonologically similar forms of the words (Hoeffner & McClelland 1993).

Method. To compare the differences in production of the Past Tense constructions in the SLI and the age-matched Typically Developing (TD) children, I adopt the experimental designs of the Stem Inflectional Task (directly accessed from phonology) and Picture Inflectional Task (directly accessed from semantics) originally devised for monolingual TD native-English-speakers (Woollams et al. 2009). By implementing these tasks for SLI EFL(English as a Foreign Language) learners, I demonstrate and define the grammatical deficits in the SLI population by studying the generation of both "regular" and "irregular" English Past Tense forms.

Goal. In this talk, I present the analysis of the rates of the correct use of the "irregular" versus "regular" Past Tense forms in SLI population and I discuss the educational and clinical ramifications of my findings. An example of such ramifications may be found in verbs with Internal Vowel Alternation (e.g., *sing/sang*) which have recently been shown to be more systematic both phonologically and semantically than was previously thought (XXX 2011a,b). Elaborating on the model developed in XXX (2013), I demonstrate and explain the differences in the performance on these phonological and semantically based tasks in the SLI and TD populations and how these rates of the correct use of the "irregular" vs. "regular" form may be considered as a clinical SLI marker. That is, this study defines the differences in the grammatical sensitivity in the EFL learners and provides additional essential, innovative and significant insight into the SLI, in general, and its identification in the EFL learners, in particular.

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