

Audiovisual Pragmatic Test: A pragmatic assessment instrument for Catalan-speaking children

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Pragmatics, defined as the ability to use language socially (Airenti, 2017), matters enormously in our day-to-day life and plays a predictive role in language development (Matthews et al., 2018). While there are existing tools to evaluate pragmatic abilities in children, very few instruments have been developed for Catalan. Moreover, the majority of the existing tests focus on receptive pragmatic skills and neglect expressive pragmatics and the interface between pragmatics and prosody. Here, we intend to fill this gap and provide the field of empirical developmental pragmatics of Catalan with a new assessment instrument, the Audiovisual Pragmatic Test (APT; Pronina et al., 2019).

The APT focuses on expressive pragmatic uses and takes into account the prosodic form of pragmatic expressions. The pragmatic coverage of the APT is based on standardized pragmatic tools (e.g., CASL-2, Carrow-Woolfolk, 2017). Our tool addresses a broad range of different pragmatic skills required in everyday communication (e.g., to produce a greeting, ask for permission, etc.) and test them in different social contexts (e.g., communication with peers, parents, etc.). The APT includes items that assess the production of a comprehensive range of speech acts (e.g., assertions, requests, and expressive acts) and target the main pragmatic areas of development in the preschool and school years (e.g., politeness, information structure, and epistemic states). The elicitation procedure follows the Discourse Completion Task methodology that has proven to be a powerful research method for exploring pragmatic uses (see Ogiermann, 2018; Vanrell et al., 2018). The APT is suitable for children as young as 3 years of age since the items are presented in a role-play scenario. All responses are assessed on pragmatic and prosodic appropriateness.

It was found that the APT can elicit reliable data in practice. It has been administered to a total of 167 children (68 boys and 99 girls) aged between 3 and 8, who were recruited from four public schools in the province of Barcelona (Catalonia). One hundred and two children were between ages 3–4 years, 34 were 5–6 years, and 31 were 7–8 years. Analyses of the psychometric properties of the APT showed that it is a reliable and validated tool (Pronina et al., accepted). The internal consistency of the whole test was excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Interrater reliability was calculated by 3 raters' scores and was overall high (Fleiss multi-rater kappa of 0.84). The test-retest reliability was strong ($r(8) = .83, p = .003$), with no practice effect ($t(9) = -1.39, p = .199$). Convergent validity was also confirmed by a significant positive correlation between the APT and a narrative task, the Renfrew Bus Story Test (Renfrew, 2006) ($r(103) = .28, p = .004$). Finally, the content validity based on experts' rating of the appropriateness of each item was also high (the mean value was above 4.25 out of 5). Overall, this evidence demonstrates that the APT is a reliable, efficient, and sound instrument for assessing expressive pragmatic abilities in Catalan-speaking children (3–8 years), which can be of utility for practitioners and speech-language therapists.

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