

DEVELOPING A SENTENCE REPETITION TEST FOR THE EVALUATION OF DEAF CHILDREN'S USE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

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THESIS

ENGLISH ABSTRACT: This study creates the first sentence repetition test (SRT) for South African Sign Language (SASL). The test can be used to measure the proficiency of a participant and track their progress over time. The test is easy to administer and score but needs to be adapted to the context within which it will be used. The aim of the test is to provide deaf schools with a language testing instrument, as there is currently no such instrument readily available. The test provides an opportunity to begin creating an image of what deaf children's SASL language acquisition looks like, of which there is currently very little information. The main research questions of this study were concerned with establishing the most important features necessary for this test and the relationships between the participants' scores and other variables, such as age and exposure to SASL. An SRT was created with 20 sentences, which were organised into three categories: Simple, Moderate, and Complex. These categories reflected the grammatical complexity of the sentences, as an SRT tests the grammatical knowledge of the participants. This study used data from 40 deaf children between the ages of seven- and nine-years-old. These children had had a minimum of one year of exposure to SASL and were from two schools for the deaf in the Western Cape. The results showed that lexical variation is vital feature influencing language testing. Appropriate grammatical features needed to be used, keeping the age groups of the participants in mind. It was concluded that the age of the children and their lengths of exposure had significant effects on their test results. The older the child and the longer their length of exposure, the higher they scored on the test. The results also found that participants from different schools scored differently on the test, which is possibly a result of the familiarity of language testing and the participant's familiarity with the administrators of the test. Sentence length had an effect on the results, and the categorisation of the sentences was found to be relatively accurate, with some adjustments necessary for future use of the SRT.

AFRIKAANSE OPSOMMING: Hierdie studie skep die eerste sinherhalingstoets (SHT) vir Suid-Afrikaanse Gebaretaal (SAGT). Die toets kan gebruik word om die taalvaardigheid van die deelnemer te meet en hul vordering oor tyd te volg. Die toets is maklik om te administreer en te bepunt, maar dit moet aangepas word by die konteks waarin dit gebruik sal word. Die doel van die toets is om 'n taaltoetsinstrument aan doweskole te verskaf, aangesien daar tans nie so 'n instrument vrylik beskikbaar is nie. Die toets bied 'n geleentheid om 'n beeld te skep van dowe kinders se taalverwerwing van SAGT, waarvan daar tans baie min inligting beskikbaar is. Die hoof-navorsingsvrae van hierdie studie het gefokus daarop om die belangrikste eienskappe wat nodig is vir die toets en die verhouding tussen die deelnemers se punte and ander veranderlikes, soos ouderdom en blootstelling aan SAGT, vas te stel. 'n SHT is geskep met 20 sinne, wat in drie kategorieë ingedeel is: eenvoudig, matig en moeilik. Hierdie kategorieë weerspieël die grammatikale kompleksiteit van die sinne, aangesien 'n SHT die deelnemers se grammatikale kennis toets. Hierdie studie het data van 40 dowe kinders tussen die ouderdomme van sewe en nege jaar gebruik. Hierdie kinders het 'n minimum van een jaar se blootstelling aan SAGT en is leerders aan twee doweskole in die Wes-Kaap. Die resultate het getoon dat leksikale variasie 'n belangrike eienskap van taaltoetsing is. Gepaste grammatikale kenmerke, wat die ouderdomsgroepe van die deelnemers in gedagte hou, moet gebruik word. Die gevolgtrekking was dat die ouderdom van die kinders en die lengte van hul blootstelling beduidende invloede op hul toetsresultate gehad het. Hoe ouer die kind en hoe langer die tydperk van blootstelling, hoe hoër was die punt wat hulle in die toets behaal het. Die resultate het ook bevind dat deelnemers van verskillende skole verskillende punte behaal het in die toets, wat moontlik 'n gevolg is van die vertroudheid met taaltoetsing en die deelnemer se vertroudheid met die persoon wat die toets geadministreer het. Die lengte van die sin het 'n effek op die resultate gehad en die kategorisering van die sinne was relatief akkuraat, met 'n paar aanpassings wat nodig is vir toekomstige gebruik van die SHT.

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