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## Assessing Pragmatic Language Skills in Pre-School Hearing-Impaired Children and Their Hearing Peers: The Questionnaire

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### Abstract

Pragmatic impairment is the main cause of communication difficulties in hearing-impaired children and it is obvious that there should be a way to assess their difficulties in order to find out suitable teaching strategies to teach them pragmatic skills as well. It seems pre-school children need to get familiar with these skills to communicate in a reasonable manner. But, most of the pragmatic assessment tests are in forms of checklists that should be filled by their parents or clients and of course, they are not a reliable way to do such an important issue. So, the authors of the present article aimed to work on a pragmatic assessment questionnaire to observe children in a real context and examine their pragmatic abilities to find out their difficulties.

Keywords: hearing-impaired; pragmatic skills; pragmatic assessment questionnaire

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## 1. Introduction

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context (Yule, 2000) and people communicating in a society analyze the real meaning of their utterances and are aware of '*speaker's intended meaning*' as Yule (2000) claimed. It is clear that these meanings express between speaker and listener, so it seems hearing-impaired people face some difficulties understanding and interpreting what people mean in a particular context (2000b). Generally, it is believed that pragmatic impairment is the main cause of communication difficulties in hearing-impaired ones (Salehi, Shirazi, Darui, & Dolatshahi, 2013) so, it better to find out these difficulties as soon as it is possible and teach them with the scientific strategies in order to conquer this big obstacle in the way of their communication. Therefore, it is essential to design a questionnaire to find out their difficulties as reliable as it is possible and in a real context that children themselves were involved. Unfortunately, most of the pragmatic assessment questionnaires are in the forms of checklists that should be filled by their parents or clients. Here is a list of these assessment tests:

- Pre-assessment questionnaire (Gallagher, 1983)
- The pragmatic profile of early communication skills (Summers & Dewart, 1988)
- Children's Communication Checklist (CCC 1 & 2) (Bishop, 1998, 2003)
- Orion's pragmatic Language Skills Questionnaire
- Pragmatic Protocol (Prutting & Kirchner, 1987)

So, it is aimed to create a new and different questionnaire to observe children in a real context and examine their pragmatics abilities to find out their difficulties. Assessing pragmatics among pre-school children aged 4-6 has been recognized as difficult and complex task since there are various pragmatic skills that influence the way children communicate. Therefore, among all the pragmatics issues, speech act of complaining, requesting, refusing and denying and also politeness that have not been assessed yet, were selected. The present questionnaire (this questionnaire is inspired by the work of (Roth & Speckman, 1984) is assessed the speech act production (request, complain, refusal and denial) and politeness of pre-school aged 4-6 hearing impaired and their hearing peers. It is a comparison between these two group to know if it is the matter of hearing-loss of these children that they face difficulty in their daily communication or no. In the following section this questionnaire will be presented and explained.

## 2. The Questionnaire

Studying pragmatic difficulties and gaining reliable results needs to assess the supposed pragmatic features in a real context and to observe children's real responses, which is meant '*language in use*'. Here is the questionnaire, as shown in Table 1, which is supposed to assess speech acts production (request, complain, refusal and denial) and politeness of pre-school hearing-impaired children and their hearing peers. This questionnaire is in the form of a checklist which is filled by the responses of the children (from now on it is better to say participants) during the test. The items in the checklist were designed to be naturalistic and child directed and attempted to involve activities and tasks that pre-school participants encounter on a daily basis (Simmons et al., 2014). At first, it is important to inform all participants parents and to explain them about the test. In order to check the responses later, it is advised to record everything before the participants enter till they leave the room. All participants should complete standardized measures of IQ (for this kind of participants Wechsler Preschool & Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) is advised) and language functioning. The examiner and the participant should seat across from each other in a place where the participants are familiar with.

**Table 1. The questionnaire to assess the speech acts production (request, complain, refusal and denial) and politeness of pre-school hearing-impaired and their hearing peers**

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1. Check GREETING : as child enters the room
  2. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT : hand child a piece of paper and no pencil to draw something
  3. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT : give child a pencil with broken point
  4. Check DENIAL : tell child the pencil-sharpener is in your bag
  5. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION : let the child to open your bag which is locked
  6. Check DENIAL : broken pencil-sharpener
  7. Check ACKNOWLEDGING : give child the right pencil-sharpener
  8. Check COMPLAIN : ask child if he/she wants to draw with pencils or watercolor & hand the child the opposite of what he/she chose
  9. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION : hand child the tightly closed watercolor box
  10. Check ACKNOWLEDGING : open the watercolor box
  11. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT : hand child the watercolor without any brushes
  12. Check DENIAL : ask child to pick up the brush that is out of his/her reach
  13. Check ACKNOWLEDGING : hand child the brush
  14. Check COMPLAIN : hand child the watercolor without a glass of water
  15. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION : hand child an empty glass
  16. Check ACKNOWLEDGING : give child a glass of water
  17. Check COMPLAIN : ask child to let you draw a sun on his/her painting paper & choose black color to draw the sun
  18. Check DENIAL : ask child to tear his/her painting paper
  19. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT : hand child a puzzle with a missing piece
  20. Check ACKNOWLEDGING : hand child the missing piece
  21. Check COMPLAIN & DENIAL: give child a torn piece of paper as a gift
  22. Check COMPLAIN & DENIAL: give child a crushed ball
  23. Check DENIAL : ask child to pick up a pocket of orange juice that is out of his/her reach
  24. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT : hand child the pocket of orange juice without straw
  25. Check ACKNOWLEDGING : hand child the straw
  26. Check DENIAL : ask child to pick up a balloon that is out of his/her reach
  27. Check COMPLAIN : ask child what color of balloon he/she wants & hand him/her the opposite color of what he/she chose
  28. Check ACKNOWLEDGING : hand child the right color balloon
  29. Check DENIAL : ask child to pop his/her balloon
  30. Check COMPLAIN : tell child that his/her balloon is yours
  31. Check DENIAL : ask child to wear a pair of socks that is not his/her size and it is not the same; one of them is boyish & the other one is girlish
  32. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION : hand child a tightly closed jar within a chocolate in it
  33. Check CLOSING: as child leaves the room
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The participants should be checked and recorded by the examiner and it is better for the examiner to concentrate on the test and after finishing the test, the examiner can watch the videos and fill in the checklist, shown in Table 2., according to the participants responses.

**Table 2. The check list of participant responses**

Full Name: HI/H Video Code:	Verbal Response		Nonverbal Response	Politeness		Wrong Response	Participant Response
	Direct	Indirect		Polite	Impolite		
1. Check GREETING							
2. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT							
3. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT							
4. Check DENIAL							
5. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION							
6. Check DENIAL							
7. Check ACKNOWLEDGING							
8. Check COMPLAIN							
9. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION							
10. Check ACKNOWLEDGING							
11. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT							
12. Check DENIAL							
13. Check ACNOWLEDGING							
14. Check COMPLAIN							
15. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION							
16. Check ACNOWLEDGING							
17. Check COMPLAIN							
18. Check DENIAL							
19. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT							
20. Check ACNOWLEDGING							
21. Check COMPLAIN & DENIAL							
22. Check COMPLAIN & DENIAL							
23. Check DENIAL							
24. Check REQUEST FOR OBJECT							
25. Check ACNOWLEDGING							
26. Check DENIAL							
27. Check COMPLAIN							
28. Check ACNOWLEDGING							
29. Check DENIAL							
30. Check COMPLAIN							
31. Check DENIAL							
32. Check REQUEST FOR ACTION							
33. Check CLOSING							

On the top left side of each checklist, the information of each participant such as: his/her full name, if he/she is hearing-impaired (HI) or hearing (H) and a video code which is belonged to each of them, should be written by the examiner. Then, the examiner should write each participant responses on the supposed column and check the right box. For each response there are 4 main choices, if participants answer the questions verbally or non-verbally; for example NO.2: if participant just points the pencil's point, it will be checked as a non-verbal response. If he/she answers verbally, it should be considered whether it is a direct response or indirect one; for example if NO.9 is answered as: *please, open it*, it is checked as a direct polite response; *open it*: a direct impolite response and *would you mind opening it*: an indirect polite response. And finally it is possible that participants do not answer the questions correctly, so they are checked as incorrect responses; for example, if a participant on NO.29 accepts to

pop his/her balloon, it is considered as an incorrect response, because the child was supposed to deny. Checking all the checklists, an interrater reliability should be established.

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The present questionnaire/checklist was examined among 30 children, 15 hearing-impaired and 15 hearing ones. All the participants completed standardized measures of IQ and language functioning and all of them were checked and videotaped. But the checklists are underworking to be completed.

### 3. Conclusion

Since, most of the assessment pragmatic questionnaires are in the form of checklists that should be filled by the children's parents, the present study suggests a questionnaire to assess the pragmatic skills of hearing-impaired and their hearing peers, aged 4-6 in a real context where children are involved and their responses are recorded and checked. Among all the pragmatics issues, speech act of complaining, requesting, refusing and denying and also politeness that have not been assessed yet, were selected to find out the language difficulties of hearing-impaired children and to suggest the suitable teaching methods to solve these difficulties.

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