

Pragmatics

Question: Why should speech pathologists assess pragmatics in children with language disorders?

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Pragmatic abilities, also referred to as social communication, refers to how we use language for different reasons, how we change language depending on the listener or situation, and/or what rules we need to follow when holding conversations or telling stories (<https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/social-communication/>). Although a language assessment should include assessment of a child's structural language skills (i.e., morphology, syntax, vocabulary), a complete language assessment should also include appraisal of the child's pragmatic language skills, so that we get a better understanding of the association between the child's structural language abilities and communicative competence (i.e., the ability of using language as an effective instrument to interaction with different persons in different contexts). Language disorders may relate to pragmatic abilities in different ways. Difficulties with structural language skills sometimes reduce the ability to convey meanings and intentions. When it is difficult to understand what a child says, it can be very hard to understand the intent or the feelings expressed. When a child does not understand what is said, it may be very hard for him/her to make inferences and suppositions that help build the notion of who the interlocutor is, and how to use his/her communicative abilities to express the intent, meanings or intentions.

In pragmatic language impairment, pragmatic competence may be the main difficulty. Even when the child has good abilities in grammar or vocabulary, there are difficulties with language use and the social restraints of language. These difficulties may be persistent and sometimes are associated with neurodevelopmental disorders like attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

References:

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