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Evaluating Pragmatic Skills in stuttering two-to-five-year olds in Flanders

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Introduction :

As defined by Nino and Snow (1999) pragmatics is the ability to use language for acceptable and efficient verbal interaction with others. Stuttering, on the other hand, is a communication disorder which often has an important impact on the social-emotional development and social interactions of young stuttering children. Because of this influence it is plausible that stuttering may have a negative influence on pragmatic development.

Method :

The provisional form of EPV-3 ("Evaluation of Pragmatic Skills" 3, Cocquyt & Zink, 2010) was used to evaluate pragmatic skills. This questionnaire is based on "The Pragmatics Profile of Everyday communication Skills in Children" (Dewart & Summers, 1995).

The instrument is divided into four parts :

- A/ Communicative intentions
- B/ Reaction on communication
- C/ Interaction & conversation
- D/ Contextual variations

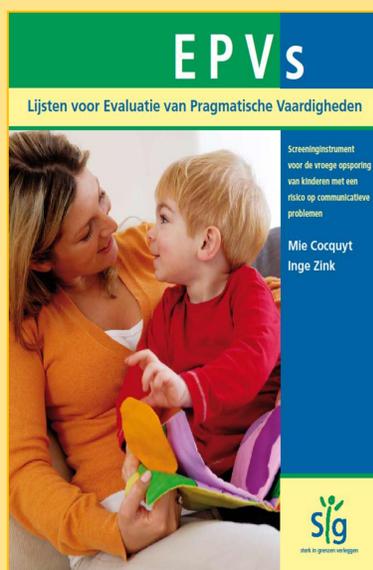
Test group :

8 young stuttering children (YSC) aged between 44 and 61 months, in the early stage of therapy

Control group :

8 young non stuttering children (YNSC) aged between 41 and 54 months, with normal speech and language acquisition

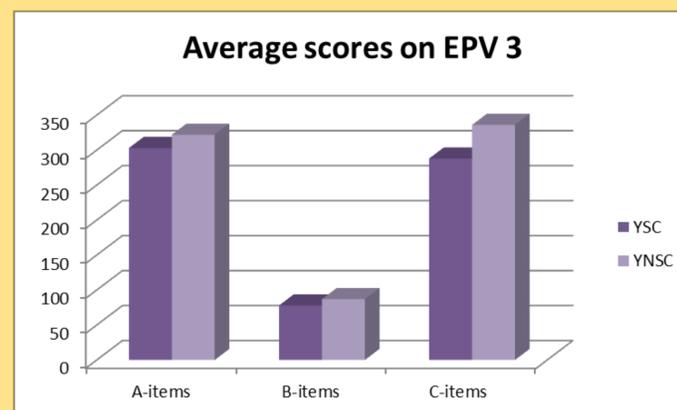
Results were analysed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. A univariate analysis of variance was performed.



How does stuttering influence young childrens pragmatics ?

Results :

Young stuttering children show lower scores on all pragmatic categories and show less non-verbal behaviour during communication (both not significant).



Specific significant qualitative differences ($p < 0.05$) :

- YSC participate less in group activities
- YSC ask more indirectly to get something out of reach
- YSC ask in a more indirect way to do something
- YSC's narrative skills are less developed

Other, but non significant qualitative differences

- YSC use less complex language strategies
- YSC ask less for help

DISCUSSION :

Although no significant differences were found for overall results, the acquisition of some specific pragmatic skills in YSC differ significantly from those of NSYC. These results confirm the findings of Weiss (2004). Clinicians must include some measure of pragmatic competency in their fluency assessments and provide specific training in these skills as part of their therapy plan. The EPV 3 seems to be an adequate instrument to evaluate these skills of YSC in Dutch speaking children. Further investigation with a larger number of participants is required.