

How to assess language when there is none: A case of a bimodal semi-bilingual deaf child

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Different types of bilingualism are commonly described in terms of a continuum ranging from balanced bilingualism to partial or semi-bilingualism (Plaza-Pust, 2016). The latter is defined as not having adequate language proficiency in either of the languages used.

The aim of this paper is to present a case of semi-bilingual deaf child's language skills, age 6;3, as well as methodological issues of his language assessment.

The child's parents are both deaf and in everyday communication the family uses Signed Croatian. At the age of four, the boy was enrolled in a mainstream kindergarten with a sign language interpreter who also uses Signed Croatian. Hence, child has not been exposed to a full Croatian Sign Language (HZJ). Also, neither spoken language, nor speech are not developed, despite continuously wearing bilateral hearing aids. Spoken language skills are starting to emerge through written language.

The issue of the boy's language assessment is complex. Firstly, his spoken language skills are inadequate to be evaluated using existing measures of receptive Croatian vocabulary (PPVT-III-HR, Dunn et al. 2009) or grammar (TROG-2:HR, Bishop et al. 2014). Secondly, using any norm referenced test would not yield valid results, as those are standardized on a sample of hearing children. Furthermore, assessing the child's signing skills is challenging due to the limited exposure to sign language and the lack of HZJ assessment tools.

Finally, informal assessment together with selected items of the Assessment of pre-reading and pre-writing skills (predčIP, Kuvač Kraljević & Lenček 2012) and adapted version of the BSL Receptive Skills Test (Herman, Holmes & Woll 1998) were chosen. Challenges in administration and interpretation of results are discussed in the paper.

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