



# PRAGMATIC SKILLS IN CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT AND MENTAL RETARDATION

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## BACKGROUND

- Children with specific language impairment (SLI) seem to have problems in pragmatics, such as in discourse maintenance, use and range of speech acts and narrative abilities.
- Children with mental retardation (MR) also have pragmatic difficulties, mainly in formulating utterances that make their intended referents clear.

## AIM

- The study's aim is to investigate
- how SLI children, as well as MR children "perform" when using language in different pragmatic activities
  - how their performance differs from that of normally-developing children.

## METHOD

- Participants: 10 children with diagnosis of SLI and 10 children with MR, matched for language age comprehension.
- The two groups' performance was compared to that of a normally developing group (10 subjects).
- All children were tested on several tasks testing pragmatic skills: inferential reasoning, problem solving, role-playing, generalizing tasks and a false belief task.

## RESULTS

- In most tasks there were no statistical differences between groups.
- Both groups (SLI and MR) showed significant difficulties in problem-solving (Figure 1) and role-playing (Figure 2), compared to normally-developing children.
- Qualitatively MR children seemed to have more difficulties in most tasks, compared to the other two groups. This is especially apparent in relating personal experiences and in role-playing (Table 1).

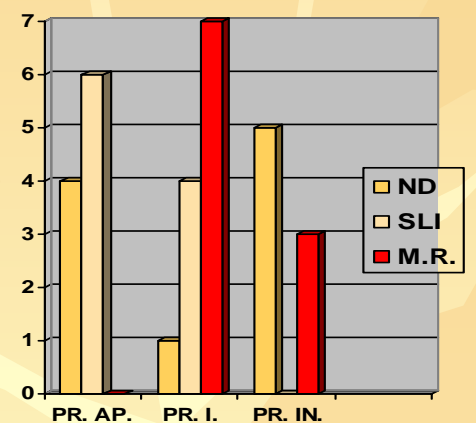


Figure 1: Responses in problem-solving task  
PR.AP.: Pragmatic appropriate answer  
PR.I.: Pragmatic inappropriate answer  
PR.IN.: Pragmatic invalid answer  
ND: Normal Development  
SLI: Specific Language Impairment  
MR: Mental Retardation

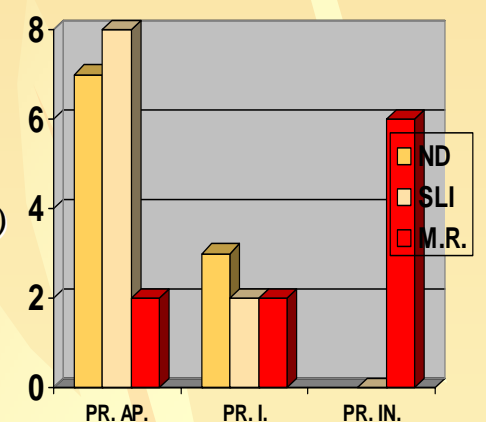


Figure 2: Responses in role-playing task.

	N	MEAN RANK	
<b>Relating personal experience</b>			
■ SLI	10	13,55	p= ,019
■ MR	10	7,45	
■ Total	20		
<b>Role-playing</b>			
■ SLI	10	13,45	p= ,023
■ MR	10	7,55	
■ Total	20		

Table 1: Statistical important answers of two groups, SLI children and MR children.

## CONCLUSION

On the whole, neither the SLI nor the MR groups had severe pragmatic difficulties, but their skills in this area seemed to be determined by their language comprehension age level.

Although SLI children showed some pragmatic difficulties, these were secondary to difficulties in semantics and syntax. These children seemed to have more difficulties when the language demands of the task were too great, although this was not always the case. Furthermore, SLI children had difficulty systematically understanding the appropriate social interaction in various social acts.

MR children performed similarly to normally-developing children in speech acts, especially in familiar contexts with minimal cognitive, linguistic and social demands. However, they showed some delay in the comprehension of speech acts. In the false belief task, MR children, as well as those with SLI, tended to perform similarly to normally-developing peers.

In conclusion, our results point to specific pragmatic areas (problem-solving and role-playing) which could be further explored in SLI and MR children through appropriate intervention programmes.

## REFERENCES

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