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Assessing receptive grammar skills using novel task formats in groups: Findings from construction and piloting with pre-school and primary school children

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

In German-speaking countries, there are hardly any receptive grammar tests that are suitable for use in groups or do not presuppose prior knowledge of the written language. In the existing grammar tests for individual use, grammaticality judgement and multiple choice are the prevailing task formats. If many grammatical structures are to be tested, the problem arises that a single task format is repeated up to 90 times (e.g. multiple choice in TROG-D, Fox-Boyer, 2019). This causes well-documented difficulties for practitioners, e.g., a decrease in the child's attention span as the test progresses (Bailey, 2016), which can be addressed by item reduction and different and interesting task formats.

AIM

We aim at

1. developing an instrument for German-speaking countries that can be used both as individual and as group screening and that does not rely on children's prior knowledge of written language.
2. designing a screening with a storyline and task formats that are both appealing and varied to maintain children's interest.

METHOD

Our screening (Grammatik-Fähigkeiten Gruppen-Screening – GraF GruS) focuses on a little count (German: Graf) who comes from the land of *Grammatika* and who wants to learn German.

First, in the conceptualization of subtests, we integrated novel task formats such as *connecting tasks* (e.g., comparative), *drawing symbols* (as a way of acting out a sentence on paper, e.g., conjunctions), and *choosing a symbol* corresponding to the gender of a noun. However, we also relied on classical task formats such as *grammaticality judgement* (e.g., subject-verb congruence) and *multiple choice* (e.g., perfect tense).

In a second step, we modified our task formats and items on the basis of single-case tests (*n*=10) and interviews with experts (*n*=2).

Third, we piloted the screening with children (*n*=250) from primary schools (first to second grade) and preschools.

RESULTS

The group piloting was used to determine the internal consistencies of the task formats, item difficulties, and selectivity in order to identify the items that had to be excluded or modified.

CONCLUSION

Based on our pilot results, we discuss the potential of a motivating central character and child-friendly task formats to adequately test receptive grammar skills.