ASSESSING LINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN ACQUIRING SECOND LANGUAGE (LATVIAN) IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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Abstract

In Latvia, amendments to the Education Law (Grožījumi 2018/65.1) provide for a gradual transition to education in the official language, i.e. Latvian in minority educational institutions, therefore it is necessary to evaluate the Latvian language (L2) oral proficiency of those 5-6 year old minority children who acquired their L2 in preschool settings. It is of great importance that the experience gathered in different countries is summarized to find out which methods, techniques, performance measures can be used in the assessment of the language abilities of preschoolers in the language environment that is specific to Latvia. This paper examines the rationale underlying some of the core concepts on oral proficiency assessment, including their definitions and key characteristics in the context of child second language acquisition. Although research on second language acquisition has used various quantitative and qualitative measures to assess oral proficiency, yet there is little research concerning preschool children's proficiency assessment. In this paper, various rating scales and performance measures of spoken language are reviewed, three major constructs – complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF) are discussed with regard to preschool children's L2 (Latvian) performance assessment. A range of measures (e.g., in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), i.e. the criteria for the evaluation of L2 linguistic performance of Russian (L1)-Latvian (L2) bilingual children are described and presented in detail. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Preschool education, second language (L2-Latvian), oral proficiency assessment, performance measures, criteria.