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Assessment of Pragmatic Abilities in Adolescents with Typical Development

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Abstract

Currently there is no validated battery to assess pragmatic abilities in Hebrew. The aim of the present study is to validate a battery of tests assessing various pragmatic skills. The use of such battery has great importance, as it provides norms to the assessment of impaired pragmatic skills, within many populations with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as ASD, schizophrenia, learning disabilities, dyslexia and intellectual disabilities. In order to validate the battery, the Assessment of Pragmatic Abilities and Cognitive Substrates (APACS) was translated to Hebrew. The APACS battery was previously validated and found high reliability and validity for ages 19-89 years. The battery includes six tasks, focusing on two main domains: pragmatic production and pragmatic comprehension. The assessment of pragmatic production will be conducted by the use of interview and description tasks, whereas pragmatic comprehension will be assessed by narratives, two figurative language, and humor tasks. Nine scores are given after the completion of the battery, including a score for each task and three composite scores: pragmatic production, pragmatic comprehension and APACS total. The translated battery, APACS-Heb is currently the most comprehensive and the first validated battery for pragmatic tests in Hebrew. Forty Hebrew-speaking adolescents ages 16-20 participated in the study. A subgroup of twenty participants were assessed twice, with a 2-week interval, for which test-retest was evaluated. All participants performed screening tests assessing vocabulary, Theory of Mind and social responsiveness. In the current study, pragmatic norms were created for Hebrew speaker adolescents. In addition, the validity and test-retest reliability of APACS-Heb were assessed. Furthermore, the effect of vocabulary, Theory of Mind and social responsiveness on APACS-Heb performance was evaluated. We expected APACS-Heb to have high internal consistency, test-retest reliability and content validity. In addition, we expected age to predict performance on APACS-Heb. Furthermore, we expect that the factor analysis would reveal two factors, one of which will have high loading mostly for the *Humor* task. As expected, high internal consistency and content validity were found. Additionally, test-retest reliability was found for most APACS-Heb tasks and all composite scores. Furthermore, an effect of age and gender was found for most tasks and composite scores. As for the age effect, performance improved as age increased, and for the gender effect it was found that females outperformed males. In addition, regression analysis for the screening tests revealed a contribution of Theory of Mind to pragmatic production, pragmatic comprehension and APACS total scores. Lastly, a factor analysis revealed two factors, in which the first factor correlates with most tasks, and the second factor correlates

only to humor. It was suggested that humor is a separate skill that does not depend on other pragmatic skills measured in the battery. In conclusion, normative data was collected for the APACS-Heb battery, and it was found that it is a valid and reliable measure of pragmatic skills. As it addresses several domains of both pragmatic production and pragmatic comprehension, the APACS-Heb battery can evaluate pragmatic skills among Hebrew speaking adolescents. Future studies can address the assessment of pragmatic skills among populations with neurodevelopmental disorders.