SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS INFLUENCING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN GERMAN PRESCHOOLERS WITH MEDICAL ISSUES IN THREE FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

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Abstract

The study aimed at the identification of sociolinguistic factors associated with changes in the classification of German preschool children as those needing or not needing medical assistance in acquiring/learning German. In three studies, 508 German and immigrant children were tested twice with validated, age appropriate language tests with a time span of several months in between. After each test session, a group of language experts classified all test participants as needing or not needing medical help in acquiring German. Differences between these two classifications of the participants were categorized as “worse – the same – better”. Afterwards, these differences were cross-tabled and correlated with the sociolinguistic variables from questionnaires for parents and daycare center teachers. The significant factors entered regressions and classification trees as independent variables for the prediction of the changes (“worse – the same – better”) in the classifications of children. The most relevant factors were immigration background, language disorders in the family, and language therapy. Most children whose classification changed to “better” were immigrants who just began to acquire German. Children whose classification changed to “worse” had family members suffering from language disorders. Other factors associated with changes in the classification of children were, among other things, whether the child attended a nursery school in the first two years of life, the participation in language courses, time span between two test sessions, whether the child played with German-speaking children after the daycare center time, and age when the child had enough language contact to learn German.

Keywords: language acquisition, language disorder, German language, language assessment, language impairment