Research Article

Which Measures Better Discriminate Language Minority Bilingual Children With and Without Developmental Language Disorder? A Study Testing a Combined Protocol of First and Second Language Assessment

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Purpose: This study aimed to assess a protocol for the evaluation of developmental language disorder (DLD) in language minority bilingual children (LMBC). The specific aims were (a) to test group differences, (b) to evaluate the discriminant validity of single measures included in the protocol, and (c) to define which model of combined variables had the best results in terms of efficacy and efficiency.
Method: Two groups of LMBC were involved, one with typical development (n = 35) selected from mainstream schools and one with DLD (n = 20). The study protocol included the collection of demographic information and linguistic history; a battery of standardized tests in their second language (Italian), including nonword repetition, morphosyntactic comprehension and production, and vocabulary and narrative skills; and direct (children's

evaluation) and indirect (parents' questionnaire) assessment of linguistic skills in their first language.
Results: Results showed that the two groups differed in almost all linguistic measures. None of the single measures reached good specificity/sensitivity scores. A combined model that included direct and indirect assessment of first language skills, morphosyntactic comprehension and production, and nonword repetition reached good discriminant validity, with 94.5% of cases correctly classified.
Discussion: The study defines a complex picture of the linguistic profile in bilingual children with DLD, compared to typically developing bilingual peers. The results reinforce the idea that no single measure can be considered optimal in distinguishing children with DLD from typical peers. The study offers a concrete example of an effective and efficient protocol with which to discriminate LMBC with and without DLD.

W ithin Grosjean's (1989) pragmatic definition of bilinguals as "those people who use two or more languages in their everyday life" (p. 4), this study focused on a subgroup of bilingual children who

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are exposed to a variety of minority languages in their home environments and to the societal language within the school context, leading them to be considered as sequential bilinguals. However, in many cases, they were born in the country of schooling from immigrant families (in Italy, 80% of non-Italian citizen children attending Infant school were born in Italy; MIUR, 2018); thus, their exposure to the societal language might be heterogeneous.

Despite the fact that bilingualism per se is not a risk factor for developmental language disorders (DLDs), language minority bilingual children (LMBC) might encounter an increased chance of over/underdiagnosis or of misdiagnosis (Bedore & Peña, 2008; Grimm & Schulz, 2014; Lehti et al., 2018; Salameh et al., 2002). The second language (L2) linguistic skills of these children may vary immensely depending on several factors, such as the amount and quality of bilingual exposure (Scheele et al., 2009; Sorenson Duncan