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Original Research Paper

Education

GENDER-BASED COMPARISON OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE DOMAINS IN ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

Arya Kalathimekkad*
Research Associate, Marthoma College of Special Education (Institute of Speech & Hearing), Badiadka, Kasaragod-671551, Kerala *Corresponding Author

Dr. Grace Sara Abraham
Associate Professor, Marthoma College of Special Education (Institute of Speech & Hearing), Badiadka, Kasaragod-671551, Kerala

Lakshmy R
Assistant Professor, Marthoma College of Special Education (Institute of Speech & Hearing), Badiadka, Kasaragod-671551, Kerala

ABSTRACT Adolescence is a transitional phase of development between childhood and adulthood. Development of higher order language functions such as figurative language occurs at this period. Adolescent period is also particularly important crossroads for gender. The need of the study emerges at a point where there are fewer studies that focus on gender differences on figurative language comprehension in adolescent students. The focus of this study was to find out the gender-based variation of figurative language comprehension tasks in 120 adolescent school students between the age group 10-16 years. The procedure of the study involved administration of proverbs/idioms in visual (reading) and similes in auditory (verbal instruction) modality from the standardized test material, the Manipal Manual of Adolescent Language Assessment (MMALA). Results revealed that female participants had higher mean scores than males. But the difference was not statistically significant. The study findings indicate that gender does not significantly affect figurative language development in adolescent students.

KEYWORDS : Adolescent language development, gender, proverbs, idioms, similes

INTRODUCTION

"To read between the lines" is the ability to understand the inner or underlying meaning of a sentence apart from the literal meaning. Figurative Language is defined as "use and understanding of non-literal aspects of spoken language", Ackerman (1982); it includes metaphors, idioms and more, Nippold (1988). 'Swing into action' and 'step back in time' are idioms that added intrigue to an article on baseball that appeared in the New York Times (Kepner, 2013). Nippold (2002) [2] has identified the major changes that occurs between the ages of 10 and 15 years, which are in the domain of verbal reasoning, pragmatics; syntax, lexicon, literacy, and figurative language (e.g., slang, proverbs, idioms, sarcasm). A proverb commonly used as a token of encouragement is 'Every cloud has a silver lining'. The usage of simile 'A Topic is as Ground as a Vehicle'- delivers a ready-made frame that speakers fill with their own modified vehicles (Moon, 2008). Although figurative language comprehension can be found among children, this comprehension gets progressively more sophisticated during childhood, adolescence and adulthood, (Nippold, 1988). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person between ages 10 and 19). It is a preconceived notion that females outperform males in language tasks. Based on the assumption of the biological differences between males and females, differences in the brain structures show gender differences in the speed of language developmental processes (Jäncke, L, 2018). Functional imaging studies have reported a more bilateral activation during language processing in women compared to men (Wallentin, 2009). However, literatures are available on the contrary. In the meta-analysis of 26 neuroimaging studies, Sommer *et.al.*, 2004 found that, although several of the studies, particularly those with smaller samples, showed gender differences in brain functioning, there was no significant effect of gender on language lateralization either in children and adults. The present study is designed to evaluate the gender-based variation of figurative language domains in Adolescent Students. Adolescence is a transitional stage for higher-order language abilities including figurative language. There is a common assumption that gender has an influence on language task performances. It is at this point, the relevance of evaluating gender-based differences on figurative language comprehension in adolescents emerges.

Aim

To investigate the gender difference in performance on figurative language comprehension on visual (reading) and auditory (verbal instruction) modalities in adolescents.

Participants

The total numbers of participants selected for the study were 120 (G) school going adolescents between the age group 10-16 years.

- ✓ Adolescent students attending English medium schooling since lower primary classes of the specified age range were included for the study.
- ✓ Individuals who are mentally or physically challenged (sensory loss, motor deficits) and individuals with other communication disorders are excluded from the study.

Grouping the students on the basis of gender

The participants were divided on the basis of gender consisting of 60 male and 60 female participants.

Ethical considerations

- ✓ A consent letter from the respective educational institution to which the subjects/participants of the study belong to.
- ✓ A consent letter was obtained from the parents of subjects/participants of the study regarding the approval to involve their children for the study purpose giving them the assurance that this do not hinder their regular academic activities in any manner.

Materials

- Language Experience and Proficiency- Questionnaire (LEAP-Q).
- Standardized test material, Manipal Manual of Adolescent Language Assessment

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1: Administration of Language Experience and Proficiency- Questionnaire (LEAP-Q).

Phase 2: Administration of the standardized test material: Similes in visual (reading) and Proverbs/Idioms in auditory (verbal instruction) modality.

All the selected participants were administered with the figurative language domain from the test material, *Manipal Manual of Adolescent Language Assessment* developed by Karuppali and Batt, (2016). The domains assessed were proverbs, idioms and similes. The scoring with respect to each domain are as follows:

DOMAIN 1: Proverbs/idioms

15 Proverbs

0- Incorrect score
1- Literal meaning
2- Figurative/ Indirect meaning
TOTAL SCORE = 15*2 =30

15 Idioms

0. Incorrect score
1. Literal meaning
2. Figurative/ Indirect meaning
TOTAL SCORE = 15*2 =30

Total score- Domain 1

Proverbs + idioms = 30 + 30 = 60

DOMAIN 2: Similes

30 Similes

0- Incorrect response
1- Correct response
TOTAL SCORE= 30*1 = 30

Total score- domain 2 similes = 30

Phase 4: Statistical Analysis

Test statistics were used for the comparison of the respective groups. Recent version of Statistical Protocol for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for statistical analysis. The mean and standard deviation values have been derived for all the participants across the domain in the standardized test material. The mean and standard deviation values have been derived. T-test was employed to determine the significant difference between the two groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Mean and standard deviation of each domain was calculated for groups.

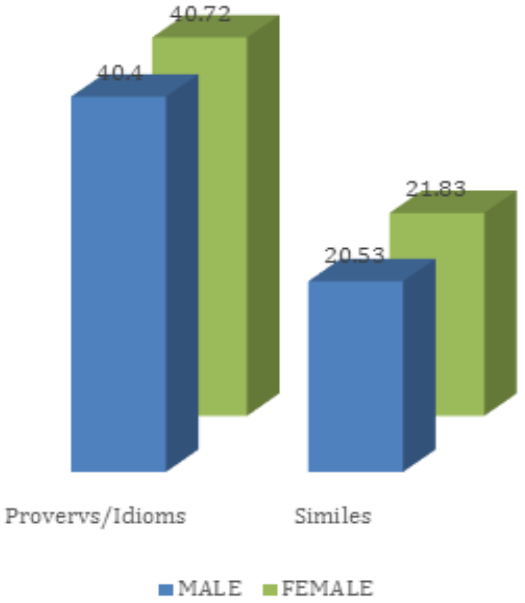

Figure 1: Mean values of groups Males and Females across the domain proverbs/idioms (visual modality) and similes (auditory modality).

TABLE 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test results of groups Males and Females across the domains proverbs/ idioms (visual modality) and similes (auditory modality).

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	t value	P value	
proverbs/idioms–(Visual)	Male	60	40.40	8.06	42.00	-.203	.839	NS
	Female	60	40.72	8.97	44.00			
	Total	120	40.56	8.49	43.50			
similes-(Auditory)	Male	30	20.53	4.18	22.00	-1.841	.068	NS
	Female	30	21.83	3.53	23.00			
	Total	120	21.18	3.91	22.50			

The mean values obtained for proverbs/idioms (Visual) task by Male participants was 40.40. Female participants obtained a mean value of 40.72. On t-test, difference in performance was not statistically significant. The mean values obtained for similes (Auditory) by Male participants was 20.53. Female participants obtained a mean value of 21.83. On t-test, difference in performance was not statistically significant. Although mean values indicate that females performed better than males in both the tasks, t-test reveals a result which is statistically non-significant for both the groups. Thus, gender did not exert a significant influence on performance across the figurative language tasks.

Nippold et al. (2015) conducted a study to examine forty adolescents with typical language development (N = 20 boys and 20 girls; mean age = 14 years) answering critical-thinking questions about the deeper meanings of fables along with typical conversational task. The measures of syntactic complexity were significantly higher regardless of gender in the results. The findings of this study show that there are no gender differences in linguistic skills in adolescents, as there is no significant difference in performance between male and female participants. For some domains, males have performed better than females while in others females have performed better than males.

The test result of the study is conformity with another study done by Nippold et al. (2017) to create a language sampling task appropriate for adolescents and to contribute normative data from speakers with typical language development. Thirty adolescents (mean age = 14 years, 1 month) participated. The results revealed that although boys and girls did not differ in their performance on the task, some fables were more effective than others at eliciting spoken language and a complex syntax. The present study highlights the role of gender in figurative language development of adolescents. The study emphasizes the importance to reconsider gender-based advantages in the development of higher order language aspects such as figurative language in adolescents.

CONCLUSION

The importance of language in the life of any human being needs no emphasis. Adolescent period is crucial for the development of meta-linguistic abilities such as figurative language comprehension. The study investigates the gender-based variation in figurative language comprehension in adolescents. In this study, though there is a greater mean score values obtained for female participants. T-test reveals that there is no significant gender-based differences in figurative language comprehension in adolescents. At the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Convention in 2016, a group of university and school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) were discussing the evolution of speech-language services in the schools. Each SLP agreed that the landscape of school-based service delivery models has evolved over the last decade. Figurative language adolescent students as a pivotal point especially with the adolescent population should be addressed by SLPs. To conclude, the study results pertain to reconsider the previously conceived notions of gender-based variations on

understanding of higher order language functions like figurative language. Evaluations and interventions by SLP's would be helpful for this population to improve their higher order language learning abilities irrespective of their gender.

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