

WORLD NEUROSCIENCE SUMMIT

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The development of a metalinguistic mind in children from 5 to 7**Maria Antonietta Pinto***University of Rome, Italy*

The object of this study is the development of metalinguistic abilities in an age range—5 to 7 years—where an important turn takes place in education, namely the transition between kindergarten and primary school. Based on the literature starting from the 70's of the last century, embryonic forms of awareness of how language variation can be manipulated to convey variation in meaning are widely attested in preschoolers. These forms, however, denote an intuitive and implicit level of awareness and will attain a "meta-level", based on more systematic and explicit reflectiveness, later in development in correlation with cognitive, linguistic, and educational factors. To measure the development of these abilities across the above age range, we recruited 160 native Italian-speaking children from 5 to 7, with comparable numerosity at each age, gender balance, average socio-cultural background, and no cognitive nor neuropsychological impairment. We used 6 metalinguistic tasks, the Raven's Colored Progressive Matrices, a lexical and grammatical ability tests. The directions of the metalinguistic tasks trigger grammatical, semantic, lexical or semiotic conflicts. To face them, the child must elaborate an explicit representation of some structural aspect, which is metalinguistic in nature. The results showed a significant increase in all the measures across the span considered and correlations between all the measures. A factor analysis on the metalinguistic tasks showed that a single factor accounted for a large part of the common variance, which suggests that these tasks capture core aspects of the capability to face the typical metalinguistic conflicts of children of the age range considered. These years can be seen as essential for the emergence of a 'metalinguistic mind'. This study can stimulate further research on atypical populations, for instance those with neurodevelopmental disorders, to explore the possibility that these children can also develop a 'metalinguistic mind'.

Biography

Maria Antonietta Pinto is past Professor of developmental and educational psychology at "Sapienza" University of Rome (Italy). His research interests bear upon sociolinguistics in the Italian context; cognitive development in relation to sociolinguistic contexts; metalinguistic development; metalinguistic tests from preschool to adult age (translated into 8 languages); metalinguistic development in relation to bi/plurilingualism and language learning; metalinguistic enhancement at school; metaphor comprehension tests; figurative language competence in clinical populations. She has been Principal investigator and Coordinator of the European Longlife Learning Project MATEL (Metalinguistic Awareness Tests in European Languages; 2013-2015).