Psychosocial traits of children identified as at risk for language delay by the Spanish McArthur-CDI

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The MacArthur CDI Inventories have proved their validity as language assessing instruments, for very small children in the 8 to 30 months age period. Nevertheless, their application and use in clinical contexts is not yet clearly established. The Inventories have been found to correctly predict language delays, from early on. At times, they have also been found to adequately describe the linguistic level of language impaired children, as well as that of children with specific syndromes. Their use as basic diagnostic instruments is not to be recommended, as they are not designed for that purpose. If used on their own, they would, in fact, not discriminate among different pathologies. There is also an extremely high variability of the language acquisition process, which has backed doubts about the instrument’s ability to predict early language delays. In spite of this, their use as early detectors of at-risk cases in language development, is reasonably backed too.

Although the isolated and/or shallow use of these Instruments would trigger false alarms, we claim that a complementary and non-trivial use could detect at-risk population, under reliably set conditions. In order to ensure confidence in research on those conditions, a first step should establish the influence of psychosocial variables on low scores in the MCDI.

This study has focused on those variables, i.e.: sex, age, bilingualism, schooling, and their relation to lowest percentiles in the Spanish MCDI-2 which was standarized with a sample of 593 children. Results obtain which variables should be taken into account when assessing the real risk of a future language delay, in children with low Spanish MCDI scores (<percentile 10th), comparing the values of those variables in low vs high performance groups.