

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This paper introduces research on the development of novel instruments for the assessment and research on communicative in Bulgarian-speaking children – the Bulgarian adaptation and norming of the MacArthur Bates Communicative Development Inventories (MBCDIs). It attempts to fill a clear information and research gap in a country where early childhood development, especially language development, has remained largely unstudied.

Learning to communicate is a primary developmental task for young children. It is clear by now that delays in the acquisition of language are one of the earliest indicators of developmental deficits that may affect academic and social outcomes for individuals across the life span, including employment, social adaptation, mental health, etc., all issues with a serious impact both on the individual and on the economic and social life of a community.

The MBCDIs are parent report instruments used to analyze the communicative development of children from 8 to 30 months of age. They cover the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, gestural communication and other aspects of development. Examination of large-scale data allows for the construction of age-referenced norms and the early detection of developmental delays which may be remedied by appropriate and timely intervention.

Data were collected via these instruments from more than 200 caregivers and continue to be collected further. External validity studies where parent reports are compared with real communicative tasks with infants and toddlers indicate good levels of construct and concurrent validity of the instruments.

Analyses of the data find that:

- The MBCDI Words and Gestures and MBCDI Words and Sentences are useful tools for collecting large-scale data on Bulgarian-learning children—they have psychometric properties such as efficiency, validity and reliability
- Lexical and grammatical development in young children learning Bulgarian have clear trajectories that are affected by the age of the child
- Children’s early language development is affected by the education level of their mothers – higher education is associated with more advanced development in toddlers
- Unlike some previous studies, here gender played a limited role in toddlers’ development, especially in grammar acquisition
- Grammar and vocabulary acquisition are moderately to highly correlated in the children’s sample in Bulgarian, indicating the existence of a mutual affecting relationship