ADOLESCENTS' JUDGMENTS OF A REFUSAL IN MALAYALAM: A METAPRAGMATIC APPROACH TO CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY

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Abstract

The present study aims to find empirical evidence of metapragmatic deficits in a group of adolescent children ranging from 12-15 years diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability using verbal judgments of an expression of refusal when compared with a group of age matched children with typical development (cwTLD).The findings revealed a developmental progression in the metapragmatic awareness of refusal across the three subgroups of cwTLD. The results also indicated that children with SLD performed less well than the typical group while measuring children's awareness of refusal strategies. The difference in performance could be probably be attributed to their poor language processing skills (especially with regard to their difficulties in their choice of words and speech acts) and impairments in social perception .

Key Words: Metapragmatic Awareness, Specific Learning Disability, Refusal Strategies.

Background

Metapragmatics - A Perspective

The familiarity with pragmatic norms, rules of a language , community and culture is crucially important for successful communication. The understanding of why language is used in certain ways is obtained by examining the undrerlying socio cultural rules , beliefs and values speakers draw on. Pragmatics does not provide such insights as it addresses only the surface level of language usage. From a level above pragmatics, metapragmatics examines the implicit operational rules , the sociocultural patterns embedded in language use and reveals why the

speakers choose certain linguistic forms to fulfill the pragmatic function and what the culture specific criteria seem to be for the proper use of language. Kasper (1989) opines that metapragmatics investigates the culture specific values of contextual factors with in a language. Consequently at a metapragmatic level, not only the utterances used in a language, the perspectives a speaker have when using a language is focused on. For this reason, the study is conducted on the presumption that metapragmatics lends itself better then pragmatics to the investigation of the strategies of speech acts which is culture specific to the use of a language.

Metapragmatic knowledge has been defined in various ways. It is considered as a conscious mastery by the individual of the social rules of language (Bates,1976). It is also argued that metapragmatic skills are specific metalinguistic abilities reflecting the ability to represent, organize and regulate a discourse course (Hickmann , 1985; Geethi, Shyamala, 2018). To a considerable extent, this research incorporates both these conceptions and focus on social knowledge which affects the variations in linguistic expressions of refusals as a function of the communicative context. Specific emphasis of this research is on the degree of awareness of this metapragmatic knowledge measured through investigating the extent of explicitness in typical and atypical children's metapragmatic comments on an expression of refusal.

SpeechActs

Speech acts is one of the most compelling notions in the study of language and seemingly ruled by universal principles of cooperation and politeness.(Leech,1983; Brown & Levinson,1987) and their application lead to important social implications. (Ervin-Tripp,1976).Assessing the awareness of speech acts(apologies, compliments, refusals etc.) are considered as effective ways to gain insight into ones metapragmatic awareness as those are often socio culturally and socio linguistically embedded .Each discrete speech act has a certain communicative purpose.

Degree of politeness is a dimension of speech act.(Betz,2015).Indirect speaking is a form of politeness aimed at some form of cooperative interaction. Social interaction and indirect speech involves conflict as well as cooperation. (Brown& Levinson,1987).In essence, politeness is not only a strategy to ensure smooth conversation between the interlocutors but it's also a technique to prevent conflict and misunderstandings among the interlocutors.(Kasper & Kellerman,1997)A few researches report Metapragmatics of speech acts in interlanguage pragmatics.(Hartford &Bardovi-Harlig,1992b) using data gathering methods such as natural data observation ,role plays, discourse completion tasks and metapragmatic judgment tasks.

The FACE principle. (Brown & Levinson,1978)

In communication, two aspects of people's feelings are involved with 'face' . One is the desire of the individual not to be imposed on .(Negative face) and the other is the desire of the individual to be approved of.(Positive face).All languages observe this face principle by saving both the speaker's and listener's ' positive' or 'negative' 'face' .The actual way in which this 'face' principle is realized is language specific.

Expressing Refusals to Requests - A 'Face' Threatening Speech Act

Refusals are considered as face threatening speech acts (FTA) s either the speaker's positive or negative face is risked when a refusal is called for or carried out. Refusals, as a sensitive , subtle and high risk face threatening act can provide much insight into ones metapragmatic awareness as a high level of pragmatic competence is required in expressing and judging the act of refusing verbally. Performing the speech act of refusing require indirect strategies as well as mitigating devices to avoid risking the interlocutor's 'positive' face. This choice of refusal strategies and the degree of directness of refusals may involve considering the social status of the requester relative to the refuser, social distance between the two interactants , social setting , age, gender

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and educational level of the interlocutors.(Felix-Brasdefer, 2008). This speech act may lead to unintended offenses and/or communication breakdowns due to its inherent face threatening nature. Moreover, the form and the content of the refusals vary depending on the type of speech acts that elicit them (Request, offer etc.). Refusing involve complex negotiation and due to the risk of offending the interlocutor, it often include indirect speech strategies. Beebe et al (1990) proposed a classification scheme of refusal strategies which was partly applied for the data analysis of this study.

Taxonomy of the Speech Acts of Refusal (Beebe et al ,1990)

Classification and coding scheme **of refusal strategies**
I.Direct Refusal
1. No
2. Negative Willingness (Eg. I won't/I can't/ I don't think so)
II. Indirect Refusals
1.**StatementofRegret** (e.g. I'm sorry)
Wish (e.g.,I wish, I could)
3.**Excuse/Reason/ Explanation** (e.g., 'I have a medical appointment')
4.**StatementofAlternative** (e.g., 'Please ask another friend')
5.**Set condition for acceptance** (e.g., 'If I guessed I would not have allowed it!')
6. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., 'Don't worry!/Never mind!')
Postponement (e.g., 'May be later, I can')
8.**Topic switch** (e.g. Let us have acup of cup of coffee or tea')
Repetition (e.g. ' Extra one more hour!!')
9.**Self Defense** (e.g. 'You know, I have helped you many times')
11.Lack of empathy (e.g 'This is not my problem/responsibility')
12.Joke (e.g. Dessert! ' I don't want to kill myself ')
13. Criticism (e.g., You are always absent!')
III.Adjuncts to Refusals
1.**Statement of positive opinion/ Feeling or Agreement** (e.g., 'I would like to/ Its awesome !/ good opportunity !')
2.**Statement of empathy** (e.g. ' I know your efforts ,but this is more important for me!')
3.**Pause Filler** (e.g. ' Hmm..')
Gratitude (e.g. ' Thank u !!')
5. Getting interlocutor attention (e.g 'Look I have allowed you once !')

Direct refusals refer to the phrases such as 'No',' 'I wont' etc. indirect refusals are indirect strategies that speakers use to minimize the offense to the hearer .Adjuncts to refusals include the

positive opinion of the interlocutor or expressions of empathy or gratitude. Chen (1996) suggests that there are three speech acts the speaker is expected to perform when using a refusal.

a. An expression of regret (eg. I am very sorry)

b. A direct refusal (eg. I can't attend the party)

c. An excuse (eg.I have an important meeting)

Metapragmatic awareness of refusalsin children and adults

The available research on the speech act of refusals seem to be negligible. However metapragmatic awareness of refusals have been investigated in a very few studies on inter language pragmatics studying native and non native speaker's production of refusals.

Chen (1995) investigated adult native and non native English speaker's perception of pragmatic appropriateness of refusals on undergraduate students using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Subjects rated the appropriateness of 24 written statements in 4 different refusal eliciting stimuli. Eg. Request, invitation , offers, suggestions. (Beebe etal ,1990).A point Likert scale was given to subjects to rate the appropriateness of each speech act statement in the scenarios. The rating ranged from 'very inappropriate' as ' 1' to very appropriate as ' 5' on the scale. Result indicate that statements made by native speakers of English were considered pragmatically more appropriate than those of non native speakers as judged by native raters. Also, stronger the pragmatic impression , the more extreme the ratings and higher the level of rating consistency for a statement. In addition, subject's pragmatic judgments tended to be consistent over time.

Chen (1996) explored English native speakers' and English second language learners among Chinese speakers' beliefs about how a speech threatening act such as Refusal should be

expressed [1].Three types of data were collected. Refusals occurring in natural conversation , data from discourse completion tasks and metapragmatic judgement tasks.   Results suggest that while stressing the linguistic function of speech acts, native speakers considered truthfulness, directness, clarity and effectiveness as most important while valuing social interaction. English second language learners were more concerned about being direct, preserving face and avoiding embarrassment.

Measures ofassessing metapragmatic awareness of refusals

Authentic role plays, written discourse completion tasks and meta pragmatic judgment tasks have been used to study MPA of refusal strategies in adults. Beebe & Cummings (1985) [1] demonstrated that for refusals, subjects intention about what they would say correspond closely to what other subjects say in natural situations. How ever, the authors of this study claim that it's not advantageous to use DCT for measuring MPA of a face threatening speech act like refusal [1] because real life verbal interaction involve much more elaboration especially in responding to face threatening situations which cannot be captured through DCTs. Further interaction between interlocutors is absent in DCTs.

Chen (1995) (1996) employed meta pragmatic judgment task to study the awareness and usage of refusal strategies in adults . A meta pragmatic judgment task do not generate speech act data but assess them. It can be used as an interpretative tool with the aforementioned data gathering methods. In this study, a metapragmatic judgement task is employed based on two assumptions.

a.Pragmatic appropriateness should be intuitively and holistically judged as pragmatic impression is intuition driven.

b.Segmenting a speech act for analysis may alter or distort its pragmatic content as a speech act statement is more than the total number of semantic units it is composed of.

Pragmatic Awareness in children with Specific Learning Disorder (SLD)

Metapragmatic awareness has not been researched yet as a direct entity in children or adolescents with dyslexia. Though pragmatics and social skills of children with dyslexia is controversial, a few authors describe that childen and adults with varied forms of learning difficulties exhibit difficulties in social sphere due to misperceptions, misjudgments and misreading of social events (Chinn &Crossman, 1995).It's also reported that these children exhibits in appropriate topic initiation and disorganized speech content (Riddick, Farmer &Sterling,1997). Use of contextual information and topic initiations have been found to be affected in children as per the parental reports using Children's Communication Checklist(CCC-2) (Bishop,2003) and similar difficulties were reported in adults with dyslexia while using self reporting measures (Griffiths,2007). There are also documentary evidences of children with non verbal learning disabilities (NLD) having difficulties with the pragmatic aspects of language despite their relatively well preserved verbal abilities. (Rourke,1989; Solodov et al, 2006,Cardillo, Gracia, Mammarella & Cornoldi, 2017). In general, these children with NLD reveal communication impairments such as difficulties in drawing inferences, especially with emotional and spatial materials (Humphries et al,2004; Mammarella et al, 2009; Worling, Humphries &Tannock,1999) and impairments in social perception (Semrud-Clikeman & Glass,2008) .It's assumed that when these chidren have difficulties in processing non verbal information, they may not benefit from important social cues needed for effective social interaction (Morris, 2002) .They are frequently considered as having a poor social competence

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and difficulty in adapting to novel situations and social contexts (Semrud-Clikeman, Walkowaik, Wilkinson & Minne, 2010).

Further, theory of mind (ToM) is one of the important social perception skills basic to social interaction which is closely linked to one's pragmatic abilities. (Lorusso,2009; Martin & McDonald, 2003; Thomas& Daum, 2006) .These domains are closely interlinked because pragmatics relies on the abilities to keep track of the intentions of the speakers/listeners to communicate successfully(Milligan et al,2007). Considering ToM as an ability to attribute mental states (intentions, thoughts, beliefs and emotions) into the behavior of others and use this knowledge to predict the behavior of others , ToM could be considered as a precursor to the development of social communication skills.(Pincus,1998).

SLD is a neuro developmental disorder with a pattern of learning difficulties featuring errors with fluent decoding ,spelling, impairments in language abilities including phonological processing, these individuals may find it difficult to use language appropriate to the context particularly with regard to the choice of words and speech acts.(Lapadat,1991).Reviewing the scarce literature in this field on children with dyslexia on the speculation that studying pragmatics and ToM in children with dyslexia may shed light on their social difficulties ,the role of verbal processes in meeting the demands of the task used for assessing pragmatics and ToM, Cardillo et al (2017) investigated the impairments in pragmatics and social perception in Italian speaking SLD children and typically developing children between the ages 8 to 10 years . Children's pragmatic skills were assessed using the verbal metaphor subtest , picture metaphor subtest implicit meaning comprehension subtest and situational subtest of APL Medea battery (Lorusso, 2009). The verbal metaphor subtest demands the participant to listen to a metaphoric sentence and explain its meaning while in picture metaphor subtest, participants have to indicate

which of the four pictures represent the actual meaning of the sentence. The implicit meaning comprehension sub test assess children's ability to derive information not explicitly mentioned in the text and hence demands inferential processes based on linguistic information with in the context. The situational subtest examines the ability to understand the meaning of specific expressions used during social interactions.(e.g. an utterance like ' if I were in your shoes, I would get angry!')

The authors of this research view that though these tasks in the above mentioned study do not refer to the term 'metapragmatics' directly , all these tasks in general points to the abilities of children to contextualize the verbal utterances by reflecting to their own social experience which demands a higher order pragmatic competence. Results of the above mentioned research confirmed the weakness in pragmatics of language and ToM in children with dyslexia. The profile of children with dyslexia was characterized by deficits different domains of pragmatics especially with comprehending metaphor, exhibiting difficulties in explaining the meaning of verbal and perceptual metaphoric sentences and inferring from linguistic information embedded in the context. Children with dyslexia also performed poorer than the typical group in implicit meaning sub test exhibiting difficulties with the inferential processes based on linguistic information embedded in the context. The performance of dyslexic children on the situational subtest which assess the ability to comprehend the meaning of specific expressions used in social interactions did not differ significantly from the typical group. The group appeared to be able to contextualize the sentence with reference to their every day social experience. Social perception abilities were assessed using ToM subtests from NEPSY-II (Korkman, Kirk & Kemp, 2007, 2011) .With respect to ToM skills, children with dyslexia had difficulties in understanding intentions, beliefs and thoughts and figurative expressions of others .

How ever,while reviewing the literature in this area, no research could be found on usage of refusal strategies in children or adolescents with SLD. Also, at present, there is no data available on the metapragmatic awareness of refusals on children with SLD.As a part of this research, a metapragmatic task was devised which enable metapragmatic awareness judgements in culture specific real life situations suiting Malayalam speaking school going adolescent children. It was assumed that this clinical task shall measure children's ability to explicitly reflect upon the speech act of refusal. The extent of explicitness with which a child can judge and comment metapragmatically on the appropriateness of expressing refusals is the focus of this research. With such an aim, measures which tap children's ability to produce descriptive and reflective remarks on the speech act of refusal were devised and built upon.

The aims of the study are as follows

1. To devise a metapragmatic judgment task for adolescent children which elicits explicit comments on the appropriateness of refusal strategies in descriptive and reflective manner.

2. To measure the metapragmatic abilities of typical adolescent children in terms of their extent of explicitness of comments on the speech act of refusal

3. To compare the metapragmatic abilities of children with typical language development with those of children with Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) in terms of the extent of explicitness in their verbal metapragmatic judgments.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The present research used a standard group comparison.

Participants

Typical group consisted of 90 children sub grouped under three age levels ranging from 12;0 to 14;11.

Group I Typical Group (N = 90)

Sub group I(a) N = 30; Age range:12;0 to 12;11

Sub group I(b) N = 30; Age range:13;0 to 13;11

Sub group I(c) N = 30; Age range:14;0 to 14;11

Clinical group consisted of 45 children sub grouped under the 3 age levels ranging from 12;0 to 14;11

Group II Clinical Group (N= 45)

Sub group II(a) N=15; Age range :12;0 to12;11

Sub group II(b) N=15; Age range: 13;0 to13;11

Sub group II(c) N=15; Age range :14;0 to 14;11

All these children in the typical and clinical group were recruited via state government secondary and high schools in Trivandrum district of South Kerala .All these children follow the Kerala state syllabus with Malayalam being the medium of instruction. Informed written consents were obtained from the heads of all the schools and parents of all children after they were intimated about the nature of research, its objectives and social implications. Screening

sessions were conducted at the initial phases of the research to establish children's suitability for taking part in the research.

Screening Tools used to assess children in the Typical group

Linguistic Profile Test (LPT) (Malayalam) (Asha &Karanth 1997) was used to obtain the phonologic, semantic and syntactic scores for the typical children while estimating their language age levels.

National Institute of Mentally handicapped Socio Economic Scale (NIMH- SES) (Venkatesan, 2007) to derive the socio economic status of these children.

Malin's Intelligence Scale for Indian Children (MISIC) (Malin, 1969) to estimate the IQ of children with typical language development.

Inclusion criteria for participants in the Typical Group

*Participants were school going native speakers of Malayalam.

*Screened negative on WHO 10 Question Disability Checklist (Singhi, Kumar, Malhi &Kumar, 2007)

*Participants should not have any histories of special education needs , speech language or behavioral intervention.

*A middle socio economic status of III on NIMH-SES (Venkatesan,2007)

*No histories of emotional, behavioral or psychiatric illness.

*A total score of >283.3 on the Malayalam version of The Linguistic Profile Test (LPT) (Asha & Karanth,1997)

*Average or above average in studies with no histories of consistent academic failures confirmed with their academic grades.

*A full scale IQ between 90-110 on MISIC, Malin (1969).

*No severe unintelligibly of speech.

Majority of the children in the clinical group were recruited through State Government secondary and high schools in South Kerala , Trivandrum. In schools, teachers filled a pre inclusion criteria form for Specific Learning Disorder which was developed by the investigator. Teachers used this form to identify students in their classes who may meet the criterion of SLD. A few children were directly diagnosed by the investigator as SLD using the DSM V criteria from out   patient units of Pediatric Neurology Department of Government Medical College ,Trivandrum.

Assessment tools used to screen children in the SLD

LPT (Asha &,Karanth,1997) to estimate the language levels.

MISIC (Malin,1969) to estimate the intelligence quotients of children with SLD

Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V)(American Psychiatric Association) (1994) to diagnose SLD with in this group

Subtests of Secondary Grader's Reading Acquisition Profile (Malayalam) (Seetha & Shyamala 2002) to evaluate and confirm children's below average academic levels.

*SLD characterized by (a)difficulties with learning and using academic skillsindicated by the presence of inadequate, slow or effortful reading /difficulties in understanding the meaning of what is read/difficulties with spelling/difficulties with written expressions/difficulties in mastering number sense,number facts or calculation /difficulties with mathenmatical reasoning (b)The academic difficulties substantially and quantifiably below those expected for the individual's chronological ageand interfere with academic /occupationalperformance/activities of

daily living/ confirmed by an individually administered standardized achievement measures and clinical assessment.(c)difficulties begin during school years, fully manifested when the demands exceed the limited capacities(d) the difficulties not better accounted for by intellectual disabilities,poor visual or auditory acquity, other mental or neurologicaldisorders ,psycho social adversity, lack of proficiency in the language of academic instruction or in adequate educational instruction.*

Inclusion criteria for participants in the clinical group

*All children in the clinical group met the DSM V criteria of SLD.

*Oral reading score <25 and Word writing score <21.49 on Reading Acquisition Profile of Secondary Graders (Malayalam) (Seetha & Shyamala,2002)

*Combined Reading Score <24.14(males) &< 24.44(females) on Reading Acquisition Profile of Secondary Graders(Malayalam) (Seetha & Shyamala,2002)

*A middle socio economic status of III on NIMH-SES (Venkatesan,2007)

*A full scale IQ between 90-110 on MISIC, Malin (1969).

Out of the total children who were screened for typical language development, a few who did not meet the above mentioned criteria were excluded. The remaining sample of 90 children whose data which met the criteria for typical language development was used in this research and were compared against the clinical group of 45 children who firmly met the diagnostic criteria for SLD as per the DSM V criteria.

Stimuli used for the research and the procedures devised

Devising the metapragmatic task

Documentary literature on the speech act of refusal and the strategies of its polite usage were reviewed in depth. A short conversational interaction between two children depicting an inappropriate expression of refusal while responding to a request was scripted by the investigator using a culture specific theme. The script was scrutinized for errors in grammar and style and revised later based on feedback opinions from two local speech pathologists naïve to the research protocol. After repeated rehearsals, two child mimicry artist recruited from a performing art centre in Trivandrum voiced these scripted conversation. Later this voiced script of 41 second duration was edited into a pendrive which could be played on a laptop. At the next stage, a set of assessor questions were framed which can explore children's ability to explicitly talk about the refusal strategy applied in the script. It was seen that the assessor questions did not place excessive demands on children's expressive language. The questions framed were as follows

1. A comprehension Check Question
2. A Descriptive MPA Question
3. A Reflective MPA Question
4. A Metapragmatic Rule Awareness Question
5. A Deductive MPA Question

These procedures of task development were adapted from Metapragmatic Test in Malayalam for adolescents (MTM) (Geethi, Shyamala,2018a),as given in Table I, a standardized measure of MPA in Malayalam for adolescent children based on Karmiloff-Smith's (1986)

conceptualization of different levels of metapragmatic explicitness . All these questions elicited children's ability to reflect explicitly on the linguistic markers depicting pragmatic violation of the strategies of refusing. Through such a method, the authors assumed that children's optimum MPA and the levels of explicitation could be estimated.

The scoring scheme design

A scoring scheme given in Table IIbased on the theoretical concept of levels of metalinguistic explicitation (Geethi, Shyamala, 2018a) was used in this research. Non awareness responses (in which the child demonstrated no awareness) and re description responses (where the child repeated the part of the dialogue) were combined to be considered as a 'Non-awareness' category where the child scores '0 points'. When the child repeated the part of the dialogue signaling the inappropriate use of the refusal strategy, it was considered as a 'secondary level of explicitation' where the child score '1 point'. When the child explicitly describe the pragmatic strategy which was violated while expressing the refusal, the child's utterance was placed at the 'tertiary level of explicitation' there by scoring a maximum points of '2'. The four assessor questions were assigned a score which related to the level of explicitation the child demonstrated. The response to comprehension question was assigned a score of '0'/ '1' manifesting a dichotomous pass or fail criteria which just ensured that the child has just understood the circumstance in the recorded conversation .the scores on comprehension check question was not used in the analysis.   Once a child failed the comprehension check question, the examiner did not proceed with the MPA questions as the comprehension of the dialogues could not be ensured.

The testing was done in a silent ambiance. All the children participated in the study listened to the recorded conversation after which they responded verbally to the investigator's five assessor questions. The sessions were video recorded for analysis, responses were transcribed on the same day and assigned a score based on the above mentioned scheme.

Analyses

Kruskal-Wallis Test was administered to study the differences between the different age groups with in the typical and SLD groups. With in the SLD group, no significant differences were noticed across the three age bands. With in the normal group, a pair wise age comparison using the Mann - Whitney Test was done to investigate the difference in performance between the three age bands. Descriptive statistics was used to estimate the mean and standard deviation.

Results

Results revealed significant differences in their mean scores across the three different age bands with in typical group ($x^2(2)$ = 8.569, $p < 0.05$). With in the SLD group, no significant differences were noticed across the three three age bands ($p > 0.05$). With in the typical group of adolescent children, as predicted, significant difference was found across the three different age groups in the meta pragmatic awareness scores of expressing refusals. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table III. Its not known whether MPA of refusal significantly increase in adolescent children with SLDs between 12;0-14;11 age band. Hence no prediction was made as to whether there would be a significant group difference in SLD group between 12;0 age band and 14;11age band . How ever,with in the SLD group, no significant differences were observed across the three different age levels.(Descriptive statistics shown in Table IV).

Between 12;0 -12;11 age band and 13;0 -13;11 age band

It was noticed that between the 12;0 - 12;11 and 13;0-13;11 age band, a significant difference was observed in the MPA of refusal.($|Z| = 2.767$, $p<0.05$).

Between 12;0-12;11 age band and 14;0-14;11 age band

It was seen that between the 12;0 -14;11 age band, no significant difference was observed in the MPA of refusal. ($|Z| = 1.147$, $p >0.05$)

Between 13;0 -13;11 age bandand 14;0 -14;11 age band

Between the 13;0 -13;11 and 14;0 -14;11 age band, a significant difference was noticed in the MPA of refusal. ($|Z|= 1.223$, $p <0.05$)

Preliminary inspection of the data reveals an advantage for children with TLD in MPA of refusals irrespective of their age levels. The larger standard deviations for the typical group indicate more variance in MPA with in the typical group than the SLD group.

Comparison of performance of Typical and SLD group with in each age group

Mann-Whitney Test revealed no significant difference with in the 12;0 -12;11 age band between cwTLD and cwSLD . ($| Z | = 1.223$, $p >0.05$)

The distribution of MP scores for the typical group were found to be significantly different from the SLD group with in the 13;0 – 13;11 age band.($|Z| = 3.159$, $p< 0.05$).

A significant difference was noticed between the typical and SLD group for MPA scores within the14;0 -14;11 age band also(|Z|= 2.183 , p<0.05).

Over all, the data reveals a significant difference between the typical and clinical group irrespective of their age bands.(|Z|= 3. 749 , p< 0.001)

Discussion

The study investigated the adolescent children's conscious metapragmatic knowledge of refusals by tasks involving judgment, explanation and modification of an expression of refusal. In this study, the authors considered that the meaning of utterance has to be defined by a social situation or to the linguistic form of the utterance and metapragmatic knowledge could be referred to both of them. Out of the assessor questions which demanded explanation, judgment and justification, the deductive MPA question required children to comment explicitly on the usages of politeness strategies as a means to refuse a request.

Beebe et al's (1990) Taxonomy of Refusal strategies were applied to do a descriptive analysis based on their responses. It was observed that the youngest age band of SLD referred to more number of direct refusal strategies expressing negative willingness such as ' I can't'/ 'No' than the children of the same age band with in the typical group. Strategies of postponement, statements of alternatives , self defensing strategies lacking empathy etc were observed in the metapragmatic comments of children with in the 13-14 age band of typical and SLD group. More number of children in the highest age band of 14-15 years were able to refer to the pragmatic rules of conversation applying the strategies of politeness using more complex language forms. Their language contained explicit metapragmatic awareness markers such as speech act verbs. Remarks expressing empathy, regret and, positive opinions were used as

adjuncts to their refusals. Further, it was also observed that the prevalence of pragmatic rule awareness markers was much higher in the 14-15 age band than the younger 12-13 &13-14 age bands and non awareness markers significantly decreased over the higher age levels .

Performance on the MPA of refusal task showed a clear progress in cwTLD during their adolescent years. Their mean scores of MPA show a significant increase between the three age bands.i.e. 12;0 -13;11years,13;0-13;11 & 14;0-14:11 years ,their scores gradually improving over the years. Such a gradual improvement in the metapragmatic scores could be correlated to Nippold & Martin (1989)'s insight that language development in adolescence unfolds in a slow, gradual and protracted manner and becomes obvious only when the complex linguistic phenomena are analysed in depth and compared against the clinical groups.

Haslett &Bowen (1989) assert that during mid adolescence, a time of psychological development, emotional transitions and maturational development, there occurs a refinement of communicational skills which helps them to establish better social relationships. The highest median score at 14;0-14;11 age band could be attributed to the sophisticated sociolinguistic competence which is believed to emerge during this adolescent period with children developing the ability to alter their speech according to the formality of the situation (Cheshire,1982) and put into practice the social variations present in the speech of adults. However, no research could be found on the metapragmatic awareness of Refusal strategies in particular in children or adolescents against which the present results may be compared. The highest performance of the oldest age group could also be attributed to their advanced mutual collaboration skills to resolve inter personal conflicts and more complex level of interpersonal negotiation strategies than those of the younger age groups.(Selman et al,1986) . Changes in the thought processes of adolescents during the period between 10 and 15 years of age results in communicative developments such

as complex verbal reasoning and   more advanced pragmatics. This could be attributed to the major developments during this phase such as a spurt in metacognitive processes, general cognitive development and social cognition. The development of social cognition is evidenced as advanced social perspective taking in adolescents which   functions as a base for complex changes in social interactions such as considering interlocutor's intentions during language use (Nippold,1998).

Adolescents at the higher academic grades are exposed to more extensive reading incorporating advanced syntax, vocabulary and figurative language , analyze more complex texts ,comment explicitly on the text book language by inferring implicit meanings , explicitly define concepts , state assumptions, evaluate arguments linguistically and discuss texts as a part of their academic curriculum. All these meta cognitive and meta linguistic experiences may facilitate and foster their metapragmatic abilities to a complex level.Further, it's also argued that children with developmental disorders may perform much like younger normally developing adolescents on their measure of pragmatic development (Lapadat,1991;Nippold,1993). This suggest that adolescents with a diagnosis of SLD may be delayed in using their interpersonal negotiation strategies .Todate, no research has been carried out , referring directly to the metapragmatic awareness of children, adolescents or adults with SLD. Further, MPA of refusals or abilities to express refusals have not been investigated in either young , adolescent or adult SLD s. How ever ,the authors of this research hypothesized that children with dyslexia who do not employ the strategies needed to monitor the intentions of others and who cannot maintain their own behaviors to avoid misunderstandings in communicative interactions may fail to make reflective judgments on the pragmatic aspects of communication such as expressing a refusal in an appropriate way. It is documented that pragmatic discourse comprehension and even

pragmatic inferencing impose complex processing demands on working memory as these require integrating multiple and varied aspects of discourse content. Dyslexics are also reported to have difficulties 'in finding the right word' to communicate with others and are disadvantaged because of misjudgments with in the social sphere. (Chin & Crossman,1995). Lending support to these views, this study revealed that with in the SLD group, no significant differences were found between the three age bands .This was evidenced with their median values which do not consistently improve over the higher age levels.

The results of this study revealed that children with SLD performed generally poorer in the MPA task of refusal than the typical children. The difference in performance could be probably be attributed to their poor language processing skills especially with regard to their difficulties in choice of words and speech acts and impairments in social perception and weak executive abilities (Lapadat,1991;Cardillo et al 2017). Further, the results of this research are also in agreement to a few investigators' arguments that children with SLD are less likely to initiate repair in the face of a communicative breakdown (Pearl , Bryan & Donahue,1980). Though the issue of pragmatics and social skills in children with dyslexia are controversial, the results of this research are consistent with a few previous pragmatic investigations on children and adults with dyslexia. (Cardillo et al, 2017; Griffiths, 2007; Mashal & Kasirer, 2012; Abrahamsen & Sprouse,1995 ; Lee & Kamhi,1990) . With in the youngest age band of 12;0-12;11 years, no significant differences were seen in MPA scores of refusals .This finding is consistent with the findings of Cardillo et al (2017) that 10 year old children with dyslexia performed equally well as their typical pairs in their ability to understand the relationship between emotions and social contexts measured using the contextual subtest of APL Medea Battery (Lorussu,2009).

Conclusion

The study explored one possible intersection between socio cognitive and linguistic development in adolescents- a research field that has received less attention. The 'meta awareness' of different social exchanges and adaptations according to the interpersonal contexts requires to be examined in adolescents from the scratch. It may start from investigating spontaneous participation in exchange of communicational acts to metapragmatic reflection on applying and cancellation of 'maxims' that underlie human communication. Further metapragmatic awareness may prove to have a valuable role in therapy out comes for adolescent children with pragmatic impairments.

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