Research Article

Adolescents' judgments of a refusal statement in Malayalam: A metapragmatic approach to conversation analysis of children with Specific Learning Disability

JAIISH(2018)
Vol 37 pp. 64-72

Geethi S.[a], Shyamala K. Chengappa[a]

Affiliations

[a]All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysore

Corresponding Author

Geethi S.
Speech Language Pathologist
Department of Paediatric Neurology
Government Medical College
Trivandrum,
Kerala ,India.
geethisarun@gmail.com

Key Words

Metapragmatic Awareness
Specific Learning Disability
Refusal Strategies

Abstract

A group of children with Specific Learning Disability (SLD) ranging from 12;0 - 14;11 years were compared against a group of age matched typically developing children while investigating their metapragmatic skills. Children's verbal judgements of an expression of refusal statement in a conversational act were used for this purpose. Findings revealed a developmental progression in children's metapragmatic awareness during the adolescent ages. The results also indicated that children with SLD performed less well than typical children. This difference may be probably attributed to these children's poor language processing skills especially with regard to their choice of words, speech acts and impairments in social perception.

Introduction

Metapragmatics - A Perspective

Familiarity with the rules of language, pragmatic norms and culture is very crucial for successful communication. The understanding of why language is used in certain ways is achieved by examining the underlying socio cultural rules, beliefs and values speakers draw on. Pragmatics addresses only the surface level of language use and hence does not provide such insights. From a level above pragmatics, metapragmatics examines the socio cultural patterns embedded in language use and reveals why speakers choose certain linguistic forms to fulfil the pragmatic function and what the culture specific criteria seem to be for the proper use of language. The utterances used and the perspectives of the speaker while using those utterances are focused on at the metapragmatic level. This research is hence conducted on the presumption that metapragmatics lends itself better than pragmatics to the investigation of strategies of speech acts usage.

Metapragmatic knowledge has been defined in various ways. Metapragmatic awareness (MPA) is the ability to reflect upon pragmatic constituents and pragmatic rules or in broader terms - an ability to reflect upon language by linking language to the context (Collins, 2014). Arguments prevail in literature that metapragmatics specifically studies the conditions under which pragmatic rules are supposed to hold and these conditions include general constraints, pre suppositions, speech acts, discourse and the environment surrounding the language users (Mey, 1993). Accordingly, discourse is a metapragmatic condition which not only refers to the immediate context of a conversation but also comprises the hidden conditions that govern the situations of language use. Further MPA is an explicit reflection on the pragmatic rules that govern discourse such as reciprocity, verbosity and proximity which includes pragmatic rules that apply to broad forms of communication such as conversation (Collins, 2014). While engaging in a discourse, it is the speakers' MPA that enable them to choose most suitable strategies and utterances / wordings in the particular context also envisaging the possible consequences of that discourse. Hence it is argued that metapragmatic skills are specific metalingustic abilities reflecting the skills to represent organise and regulate a discourse course (Hickmann, 1985; Geethi & Shyamala, 2018).

Speech act is considered as one of the most compelling notions in the study of language and is ruled by the universal principles of cooperation and politeness (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Further each discrete speech act has a certain communicative purpose and is often socio culturally and socio linguistically embedded. Hence assessing the awareness of speech acts (apologies, compliments, refusals etc.)

Table 1: 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 (e.g., I won't / I can't)
II.	Indirect refusals
	1. Statement of regret (e.g., I am sorry)
	2. Wish (e.g., 'I wish, I could')
	3. Excuse (e.g., 'I have a medical appointment')
	4. Statement of Alternative (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!')
	7. Postponement (e.g., 'May be later')
	8. Topic Switch (e.g., 'Let us have a cup of coffee')
	9. Repetition (e.g., 'Extra one more hour!')
	10. Self Defence (e.g., 'You know, I have helped you many times')
	11. Lack of empathy (e.g., 'This is not my problem')
	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 / Agreement (e.g., 'I would like to / 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..')
	4. Gratitude (e.g., 'Thank you!')
	5. Getting interlocutor attention (e.g., 'Look, I have allowed you once!')

is considered as an effective way to gain insight into ones' metapragmatic awareness. The specific emphasis of this research is on the degree of awareness of metapragmatic knowledge measured by investigating the extent of explicitness in typical and atypical children's metapragmatic comments on an expression of refusal. Brown and Levinson (1978) state that in communication, two aspects of people's feelings are involved with 'face'. According to this 'face principle' one is the speaker's desire not to be imposed on (negative face) and other is the speaker's desire 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 the face principle is realised is language specific.

A refusal is considered as a sensitive and subtle face threatening speech act in which either the speaker's positive or negative face is risked. Refusals involve complex negotiation and the act of refusing requires the use of indirect strategies as well as mitigating devices to avoid risking the interlocutor's 'positive face'. The choice of refusal strategies and the degree of directness of refusals may depend on factors such as social status of requestor relative to the refuter, social distance between the two interlocutors, social setting, age, gender and educational level of the interlocutors (Felix-Brasdefer, 2008). The form and content of refusals vary depending on the type of speech acts that elicit them (request, offer, etc.).

Beebe, Takahashi, and Ulis-Weltz (1990) proposed a classification scheme of refusal strategies which was partly applied in the analysis of this research (Table 1). While direct refusals refer to the phrases such as 'No', indirect refusals are indirect strategies that speakers use to minimize the offense to the hearer. Adjuncts to refusals include the positive opinion of interlocutor or expressions of empathy or gratitude.

Metapragmatic awareness of refusals in children and adults

No research could be found on the MPA of refusal. However, a very few studies on inter language pragmatics have investigated MPA of refusals in adults while studying native and non-native speakers' production of refusal statements. Chen (1995) investigated adult native and non-native English speaker's perception of pragmatic appropriateness of refusals in undergraduate students using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Subjects rated the appropriateness of 24 written statements in four different refusal eliciting stimuli, e.g., request, invitation, offer, suggestion (Beebe et al., 1990). A five point Likert Scale was given to subjects to rate the appropriateness of each speech act statement in the scenarios. The rating range from 'very inappropriate' as '1' to very appropriate as'5' on the scale. Results indicated that statements made by native speaker 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.

Chen (1996) explored English native speakers' and English second language learner's beliefs about how a face threatening act such as refusal should be expressed. Three types of data were collected which included refusals occurring in natural conversation, data from DCTs and metapragmatic judgement tasks. Results suggest that 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.

Pragmatic awareness in Children with Specific Learning Disorder (SLD)

Metapragmatic awareness has not been researched yet as direct entity in children or adolescents with Specific Learning Disorder/ Dyslexia. Though pragmatics and social skills of children with dyslexia are controversial issues, a few authors describe that children and adults with varied forms of learning difficulties exhibit difficulties in social sphere due to misperceptions, misjudgement and misreading of social events (Chinn & Crossman, 1995). It is also reported these children exhibit inappropriate topic initiation and disorganised speech content (Riddick, Farmer, & Sterling, 1997). Use of contextual information and topic initiations have been found to be affected in these children as per the parental reports collected using Children's Communication Checklist (CCC-2) (Bishop,2003). Similar difficulties were reported in adults with dyslexia while using self-reporting measures (Griffiths, 2007). There are also documentary evidences of children with nonverbal learning disabilities (NLD) with difficulties with the pragmatic aspects of language despite their relatively well preserved verbal abilities (Rourke, 1989; Solodow, Sandy, 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 and impairments in social perception (Humphries, Cardy, Wordling & Peets, 2004; Mammarella, Meneghetti, et al., 2009; Worling, Humphries, & Tannock,1999; Semrud - Clikeman & Glass, 2008). These children are frequently considered as having a poor social competence and difficulty in adapting to novel situations and social contexts (Semrud - Clikeman, Walkowaik, Wilkinson, & Minne,2010).

Children with SLD may find it difficult to use language appropriate to the context particularly with regard to choice of words and speech acts (Lapadat, 1991). 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 and 10 years on the assumption that the findings may shed light on SLD children's social difficulties and the role of verbal process in meeting the demands of the task used for assessing pragmatics and Theory of mind. Children's pragmatic skills were assessed using the verbal metaphor test, picture metaphor test, implicit meaning comprehension test and situational test of APL Medea battery (Lorusso, 2009). The verbal metaphor subtest demands the child to listen to a metaphoric sentence and explain its meaning while in picture metaphor sub test, participants have to indicate which of the four pictures represent the actual meaning of the sentence. The implicit meaning comprehension test assesses children's ability to derive information not explicitly mentioned in the text and hence demands inferential processes based on linguistic information within 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 pragmatic of language and Theory of Mind (ToM) in children with dyslexia. The profile of children with dyslexia was characterized by deficits in different domains of pragmatics especially with comprehending metaphor. These children exhibited 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 with difficulties in the inferential processes based on linguistic information embedded in the context. The performance of dyslexic children on the situational subtest which assesses 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 & Kemps, 2007, 2011). With respect to ToM skills, children with dyslexia exhibited difficulties in understanding intentions, beliefs, thoughts and figurative expressions of others.

However while reviewing the literature in this area, no research could be found on usage of refusal strategies in children or adolescents with SLD. Further there is no data available on metapragmatic awareness of refusals in children with SLD. As a part of this research, a metapragmatic task was devised which enable metapragmatic awareness judgements in a culture specific real life situation 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 judgement task for adolescent children which elicits explicit comments on the appropriateness of refusal strategies in a descriptive and reflective manner.
2. To measure the metapragmatic awareness of refusal statements in adolescent children with SLD in terms of the extent of explicitness of their verbal metapragmatic judgments.
3. To measure the metapragmatic abilities of typical adolescent children in terms of the extent of explicitness of their verbal metapragmatic judgments.
4. To compare the metapragmatic abilities of children with typical language development against those of children with SLD in terms of the extent of explicitness of comments on the appropriateness of the speech act of refusal.

Method

The present research used a standard group comparison

Participants

A total of 135 participants were recruited in the present study out of which 90 were adolescent school going children with typical language development and 45 were children diagnosed with SLD. Each of these groups was further sub divided into three groups based on their age levels. Ages of all these children in the study ranged from 12;0 to 14;11.Table 2 shows the demographic details of participants in both the groups (clinical & typical) and subgroups.

Table 2: Group I (Clinical Group)& Group II (Typical Group) Sub Groups

Group	Sub Group	N	Age range
I (Clinical group)	1 (a)	15	12;0-12;11
I (Clinical group)	1 (b)	15	13;0-13;11
I (Clinical group)	1(c)	15	14;0-14:11
II (Typical group)	2 (a)	30	12;0-12;11
II (Typical group)	2 (b)	30	13;0-13;11
II (Typical group)	2 (c)	30	14;0-14;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 followed the Kerala State Syllabus with Malayalam being the medium of instruction. Informed written consents were obtained from the heads of all schools and parents of all the 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.

Clinical Group

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 SLD 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 Paediatric Neurology Department of Government of Medical College, Trivandrum.

Assessment tools used to screen children in the clinical group

The Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V) (American Psychiatric Association) (1994) was used to diagnose*SLD with in this group. The Subtests of Secondary Grader's Reading Acquisition Profile (Malayalam) (Seetha & Prema, 2002) were used to evaluate and confirm children's below average academic levels.

SLD characterized by (a) difficulties with learning and using academic skills indicated 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 mathematical reasoning (b) The academic difficulties substantially and quantifiably below those expected for the individual's chronological age and interfere with academic/ occupational performance/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 acuity other mental or neurological disorders, psycho social adversity, lack of proficiency in the language of academic instruction or inadequate educational instruction.

Inclusion criteria for participants in the clinical group

All the children in the clinical group met the DSM V criteria of SLD and these children's full scale IQ

ranged between 90-110 on MISIC (Malin,1969). On Reading Acquisition Profile of Secondary Graders (Seetha & Prema, 2002), these children obtained an oral reading score of < 25 , word writing score of <21.49& combined reading score of < 24.14 (males) &<24.44 (females). It was confirmed that these children were also placed at the middle socio economic status III level on NIMH - SES (Venkatesan, 2011). After screening, a few children who did not meet the above criteria were excluded from the study. The remaining sample of 90 typical children who firmly met the above mentioned criteria were compared against the clinical group of 45 children who met the diagnostic criterion for SLD as per the DSM V.

Typical group

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 levels. LPT is the single most language assessment tool available in Malayalam with considerable normative data suitable to be used with adolescent children. The Readapted version of National Institute of Mentally Handicapped Socio Economic Scale (NIMH-SES) (Venkatesan, 2007) was used to derive the socio economic status of these children. Malin's Intelligence Scale for Indian Children (MISIC) (Malin,1969) was used to estimate the IQ of children with typical language development.

Inclusion criteria for participants in the typical group

All these adolescent children were school going native speakers of Malayalam. These children were screened to be negative on WHO 10 Question Disability Checklist (Singhi, Kumar, Malhi & Kumar, 2007). All these participants did not have any histories of special education needs, speech, language or behavioural intervention or any histories of emotional / behavioural or psychiatric illness. Children also exhibited the middle socio economic status (Level III) on NIMH - SES (Venkatesan, 2011). All these children were average or above average in studies with no histories of consistent academic failures which was confirmed with their academic grades obtained in internal assessments and reports from their class supervisors. This ensured that even children with mild learning disorders were excluded from this sample. All these children exhibited an average full scale IQ between 90-110 on MISIC (Malin ,1969). None of these children had severe unintelligibly of speech.

Stimuli and procedure

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 which depicts 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 was revised later based on feedback opinions from two local speech pathologists naĂŻve to the research protocol. After repeated rehearsals, two child mimicry artists recruited from a performing art centre in Thiruvananthapuram voiced these scripted conversation. Later this voiced script of 41 second duration was edited into a pen drive which could be played on a laptop computer. At the next stage, a set of assessor questions were framed which can explore children's ability to talk explicitly about the refusal strategy applied in this script.It was seen that these assessor questions did not place excessive demands on children's expressive language. 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

This procedure of task development was adopted from Metapragmatic Test in Malayalam for adolescents (MTM) (Geethi &Shyamala, 2018a).MTM is a standardized measure of MPA in Malayalam developed for adolescent children. The tool is based on a conceptualization of different levels of metapragmatic explicitness (Karmiloff-Smith, 1986). The authors observed that the above mentioned procedure allowed children to reflect explicitly on the linguistic marker which depicts pragmatic violations of refusal strategies. Through such a method, it was assumed that children's optimum MPA and the levels of explicitness could be estimated. The assessor questions and the exact question wordings used in the study are given in Table 3 (Adopted from MTM, Geethi & Shyamala, 2018a).

Table 3: Assessor Questions and Question wordings (MTM) (Geethi & Shyamala, 2018a)

Assessor Question	Question Wording
Comprehension Check	What were the children talking about?
Descriptive MPA	Something went wrong in the conversation. What went wrong?
Reflective MPA	Why is it wrong?
Metapragmatic Rule Awareness	What could the girl have spoken differently?
*Deductive MPA	How do you refuse a person's request in a nice way?

**The deductive MPA question assess children's ability to infer the strategies pertaining to the speech act of refusal and explicitly opine on its pragmatic domains in a generalized manner*

Table 4: Scores and levels of explicitness for the MPA assessor questions (MTM) (Geethi & Shyamala,2018a)

Representational explicitness		**Description/Examples**
No Awareness *(Implicit Knowledge Primary Explicitness)*	- 0 points	No linguistic Awareness e.g. No Response / 'Don't know'/ Irrelevant/ Incorrect Response /Repetition of dialogue with no mention of pragmatic rule violation.
Linguistic marker Awareness *(Secondary Explicitness)*	-1 point	Child identified the part of the language used in the dialogue which signalled the pragmatic behaviour of refusing e.g., 'She said no!'
Pragmatic Rule Awareness *(Tertiary Explicitness)*	-2 points	The child identified the part of the language which signalled the pragmatic rule violation of refusing by using an appropriate strategy and stated the pragmatic rule e.g., ' She refused in an impolite way!'

The Scoring scheme design

A scoring scheme was devised based on the theoretical concept of different levels of metalinguistic explicitness (Karmiloff-Smith,1986) .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 point. When the child repeated the part of the dialogue signalling the inappropriate use of refusal strategy, it was considered as a secondary level of explicitness where the child scored 1 point. When the child could explicitly describe a violated pragmatic refusalstrategy, the utterance was placed at the tertiary level of explicitness, scoring the maximum 2 points. Thus these four assessor questions were assigned a score which related to the level of explicitness the child demonstrated. The response to comprehension question was assigned a score 0/1 manifesting a dichotomous pass or fail criteria which just ensured that the child has understood the circumstance in the recorded conversation. However the scores on comprehension check question was not used in the analysis. The testing was done in a silent ambience. All children who 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 and the responses were transcribed on the same day and assigned a score based on the above mentioned scheme. Table 4 exhibits the scoring scheme used i.e. the scores for each level of explicitness exhibited by children for the MPA assessor questions used (Adopted from MTM) (Geethi & Shyamala, 2018 a).

Results

Devising the metapragmatic judgment task

The first objective of the study was to devise a metapragmatic judgment task that could elicit explicit comments on the appropriateness of refusal strategies from children. Over all, the results suggest that the task applied in the study does have appropriate utility, the design was child friendly and the task demands were judged to be appropriate for the age group under investigation. Further using audio interactions proved to be a successful method for collecting data on children's explicit metapragmatic awareness.

Analysis of MPA scores of refusals in children with SLD

The second objective of the study was to measure the MPA of refusal in children with SLD in terms of the extent of explicitness in their verbal metapragmatic judgments across the three age bands. The study examined if there were any differences in MPA of children with SLD within the three age bands between 12;0 and 14;11 years. Kruskal-Wallis test was administered to study the differences between the different age groups within the SLD group. Results revealed no significant differences in their mean scores across the three different age bands within the SLD group ($\chi^2(2) = 8.569, p > 0.05$). It is not known whether MPA of refusal significantly increase in adolescent children between 12 and 15 years with SLD. Hence no prediction was made regarding this. However within the SLD group, no significant differences were observed across the three different age levels. Table 5 gives the mean MPA scores, standard deviations and medians for the three age bands of children with SLD.

Table 5: Mean MPA scores, standard deviations and median for the three age bands of children with SLD.

Age band CA in years;Months	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Median**
12;0- 12;11	15	2.600	1.6388	3.000
13;0 - 13;11	15	2.933	1.5796	3.000
14;0 - 14;11	15	3.533	1.5055	3.000
Whole Group	45	3.022	1.5882	3.000

**CA - Chronological age, *SD - Standard Deviation*

Analysis of MPA scores of refusals in children with TLD

The third objective of the study was to measure the metapragmatic abilities of typical adolescent children in terms of their explicitness of comments on the speech act of refusal. While administering Kruskal-Wallis test to study the differences in MPA between different age groups within the typical group, it was observed that as hypothesised, the mean scores of MPA gradually increased across the three age bands revealing a significant difference in performance between the younger and older adolescents ($\chi^2(2) = 8.569, p < 0.05$).

Within the normal group, a pair wise age comparison was done using Mann-Whitney Test to investigate the difference in performance between the three age bands. 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 the 12;0-12;11 age band and 14;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 and 14; 0-14; 11 age band, a significant difference was noticed in the MPA of refusal ($|Z| = 1.223, p < 0.05$). Table 6 gives the mean MPA scores, standard deviations and medians for the three age bands of children with SLD.

Table 6: Mean MPA scores, standard deviations and medians for the three groups of typical children

Age band CA in years;Months	N	Mean	SD	Median
12;0 - 12;11	30	3.600	2.5407	3.000
13;0 - 13;11	30	4.200	1.7798	4.000
14;0 - 14;11	30	5.267	1.7798	5.000
Whole Group	90	4.356	2.2995	4.000

**CA - Chronological age, *SD - Standard Deviation*

Comparison of performance of typical and SLD children with in each age group

The next aim of the study was to compare the metapragmatic abilities of children with typical language development against those of children with SLD. Mann-Whitney test was used for this purpose which revealed no significant difference with in the 12; 0-12; 11 ge band between the two groups ($|Z| = 1.223, p > 0.05$). The distribution of MPA scores for the typical group were found to be significantly different from the SLD group within the 13;0-13;11 age band ($|Z| = 3.159, p < 0.05$).A significant difference was noted between the typical and SLD group for MPA scores with in the 14; 0-14;11 age band also ($|Z| = 3.749, p < 0.001$).

Discussion

The study investigated adolescent children's conscious metapragmatic knowledge of the speech act of refusals by tasks involving judgment and modification of an expression of refusal. The three metapragmatic assessor questions- descriptive, reflective and rule awareness question demanded verbal explanation , judgement and justification from children while the deductive MPA question required children to comment on the usages of politeness strategies as a means to refuse a request.

A descriptive analysis of MPA responses in typical and SLD groups

Children's metapragmatic responses were subjected to a descriptive analysis using the Taxonomy of Refusal Strategies (Beebe et al., 1990). It was observed that the youngest age band of SLD group (12;0-12;11) used more number of direct refusal strategies expressing negative willingness such as 'I can't / 'No' than the children of the same age level within the typical group. Strategies of postponement, statements of alternatives, self-defending strategies 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 group of 14-15 years were able to judge the strategy of refusal using complex language forms thereby referring to the pragmatic rules of conversation in a very explicit manner. The responses of these children contained moremetapragmatic 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 responses were much higher in the 14-15 age band compared to the younger age groups and non-awareness markers significantly decreased over the higher age levels.

Progression of MPA during adolescence in typical children

Though no research could be found on MPA of adolescent children, it has been suggested in the literature that it cannot be assumed that MPA development stops during childhood (Collins, 2014). Performance of MPA of refusal task showed a clear progress in typical children during their adolescent years. Their mean scores of MPA show a significant increase between the three age bands i.e. 12-13 years, 13-14 years and 14-15 years. The scores were observed to be gradually improving over the years. Adolescents at the higher academic grades are more exposed to extensive reading, comment explicitly on text book language by inferring implicit meanings, explicitly define concepts, incorporates figurative language and engage in analysis of complex texts. It may be assumed that these metacognitive and metalinguistic experiences may facilitate and foster their metapragmatic abilities to a complex level. Such

increasing awareness may prompt these children to identify the inadequacies in the use of speech acts and recognize the subtle impoliteness in language usage and apply the stylistic variations in language (Nippold, 1998). Further, during mid-adolescence, development of social cognition is evidenced as social perspective taking skills in children which functions as a base for complex changes in social interactions such as considering interlocutor's intentions during language use (Nippold,1998).

Haslett and Brown (1989) assert that during mid-adolescence, there occurs a refinement of communication skills which help them to establish better social relationships. The highest median score at the14;0-14-11 age band could be attributed to the sophisticated sociolinguistic competence which is believed to emerge during the mid adolescent period with which children may develop the ability to alter their speech according to the formality of the situation and more complex interpersonal negotiation strategies (Cheshire,1982; Selman et al.,1986). However no research could be found on metapragmatic awareness of refusal strategies in children or adolescents against which the present results could be compared.

MPA in children with SLD

The results of this study revealed that children with SLD performed generally poorer in MPA task of refusal than typical children. This difference in performance could be attributed to their poor language processing skills especially with regard to their difficulties in choice of words and speech acts (Lapadat, 1991; Cardillo et al., 2017).To date no studies have been reported on the MPA of children, adolescents or adults with SLD. Further MPA of refusals or abilities to express refusals have not been investigated in children or adolescents with SLD. However it is argued that children with developmental disorders will perform much like younger normally developing adolescents on their measures of pragmatic awareness (Nippold,1998; Lapadat,1993).While it is reported that children with SLD have difficulties in monitoring their own verbal responses to avoid misunderstandings in communicative interactions, it is logical to assume that such children may fail to make reflexive judgments on pragmatic aspects of communication such as expressing a refusal in an appropriate way.

Conclusions

During adolescence, to be successful communicators, children require sophisticated perspective taking, social cognition and flexibility. These are often lacking in children with SLD. The metaawareness of different social exchanges and adaptations according to the interpersonal contexts are to be examined in adolescents at a deeper level. It may start from investigating spontaneous participations in communicational acts to metapragmatic reflection on complex conversational exchanges between interlocutors. Metapragmatic awareness may prove to have a valuable role in therapy out comes for adolescent children with SLD and pragmatic impairments.

References

American Psychiatric Association (1994).*Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorder-IV-IR.* Washington, DC:American Psychiatric Association.

Asha, M. M & Karanth,P .(1997). Linguistic Profile Test (LPT)(Malayalam).Normative data for children in Grades I -X. Unpublished Dissertation. AIISH.

Beebe, L.M., Takahashi, T., & Ulis-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R.C. Scarcella , E. Anderson,& S.D. Krashhen (Eds.) Developing communicative competence in a second language, Newyork, Newbury House, 55-73.

Bishop, D.V.(2003). CCC-2.*Children's communication check-list (2ndEd.).* London, UK: Pearson.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S.(1978). 'Universals in Language Usage: Politeness phenomena' in E. Goody (Ed.) *Questions and Politeness.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cardillo, R., Gracia, R. B., Mammarella, I. C., & Cornoldi, C.(2017). Pragmatics of language and theory of mind in children with dyslexia and associated language difficulties or nonverbal learning disabilities. *Applied Neuropsychology*, Child. DOI: 10.1080/21622965.2017.1297946.

Cheshire, J. (1982). *Variation in an English dialect. A sociolinguistic study.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, H, J.(1995).Metapragmatic judgment of refusals. It's reliabilityand consistency. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign languages.

Chen, H. J. (1996).Cross cultural comparison of English and Chinese metapragmatics of refusal. Indiana University (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.ED408860)

Chinn, S. J, & Crossman, M. (1995). Stress factors in the adolescent. In T. R. Miles & V. Varma (Eds.), *Dyslexia and stress* (pp.49-54). London, UK: Whurr.

Collins, A.(2014). Metapragmatic awareness in children with typical language development, prag-

matic language impairment and specific language impairment. Doctoral Thesis submitted to the University of Manchester in the Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences.

Felix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2008). Perception of refusals to invitations: Exploring the minds of foreign language learners. *Language Awareness,17*(3),195-211.

Geethi, S., & Shyamala, K. C. (2018a). Development of a metapragmatic tool for adolescent children in Malayalam and its validation in children diagnosed with Specific Learning Disorder. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, AIISH, University of Mysore, Mysore.

Geethi, S., & Shyamala, K. C. (2018 b). Assessment of Metapragmatic Awareness- From Theoretical Perspectives to Clinical Practice: The Current Clinical Scenario. *Language in India, 18*(3).

Griffiths, C. C. B. (2007). Pragmatic abilities in adults with and without dyslexia. A pilot study. *Dyslexia,13*(4),276-296.

Haslett, B., & Bowen, S. (1989). Children's strategies in initiating interaction with peers. In J.Nissbaum (Eds.), *Life -span communication* (pp.27-52). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hickmann, M. (1985). Metapragmatics in child language. In E. Mertz & R.J. Parmintier (eds.) *Semiotic mediation: socio cultural and psychologicalperspectives.* (177-201) .New York: Academic Press.

Humphries, T., Cardy,J. O., Wordling, D .E., & Peets, K. (2004). Narrative comprehension and retelling abilities of children with non-verbal learning disabilities. *Brain and Cognition, 56*, 77-78.

Karmiloff-Smith, A. (1986). From meta processes to conscious access. Evidence from children's metalinguistic and repair data. *Cognition, 23*, 95-147.

Korkman, M., Kirk, U., & Kemps (2007).NEPSY-II. San Antonio, TX: Pearson (Italian version: C Urgesi,F. Campanella, & F. Fabbro,2011)

Lapadat, J. C. (1991). Pragmatic language skills of students with language and/or learning disabilities: A quantitative synthesis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 24*,147-158.doi:10.1177/002221949102400303

Leech, G. N.(1983). *Principles of Pragmatics.* London/New york: Longmann.

Lorusso, M. L. (2009). *APL Medea - Pragmatic abilities in language.* Firenze, Italy: Giunti OS.

Malin, A. J.(1969). Malin's Intelligence Scale for Indian children. Indian Psychological Corporation, Lucknow.

Mammarella, I. C., Meneghetti, C., Pazzaglia, F., Gitti, F., Gomez, C., & Cornoldi, C.(2009). Representation of survey and route spatial descriptions in children with nonverbal (visuospatial) learning disabilities. *Brain and Cognition, 71*, 173-179.

Nippold, M.(1998).*Later language development: The school ageand adolescentyears.*(2nd ed.).Austin,TX:Pro-Ed.

Riddick, B., Farmer, M., & Sterling, C.(1997).*Students and dyslexia: Growing upwith a specific learning disability.* London, UK: Whurr.

Rourke, B. P.(1989). *Non-verbal learning disabilities: The syndrome and the model.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Seetha, L., & Prema, K. S. (2002). Reading acquisition in Malayalam : A profile of secondary graders. Unpublished Masters dissertation, AIISH, University of Mysore, Mysore.

Selman, R. L., Beardslee, W., Schultz ,L. H., Krupa, M.,& Podorefsky, D. (1986). Assessing adolescent interpersonal negotiation strategies: Toward the integration of structural and functional models. *Developmental Psychology, 22*, 450-459.

Semrud-Clikeman, M., & Hynd, G. W.(1990). Right hemisphere dysfunction in nonverbal learning disabilities: Social, academic and adaptive functioning in adults and children. *Psychological Bulletin, 107*, 196-209.

Semrud-Clikeman, M., Walkowaik, J., Wilkinson, A., & Minne, E. P. (2010). Direct and indirect measures of social perception, behavior and emotional functioning in children with Asperger's disorder,non verbal learning disability or ADHD. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 38*, 509-519.

Singhi, P., Kumar, M., Malhi, P., & Kumar, R.(2007). Utility of the WHO ten Questions Screen for disability detection in a rural community. The North Indian Experience. *Journal of Tropical Paediatrics, 53*(6), 383-387.

Solodow, W., Sandy, S. V., Leventhal, F., Beszylko, S., Shepherd, M. J., & Nass, R.(2006). Frequency and diagnostic criteria for non verbal learning disabilities in a general learning disability school cohort. *Thalamus, 214*,17-33.

Venkatesan, S. (2011). Socio Economic Scale-2011-Developed and standardized from the revised version of NIMH Socio Economic Status Scale-1993. Secunderabad, National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped.

Worling, D. E., Humphries,T., & Tannock, R. (1999). Spatial and emotional aspects of language inferencing in nonverbal learning disabilities. *Brain and language, 70*, 220-239.