

# ASSESSING LINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN ACQUIRING SECOND LANGUAGE (LATVIAN) IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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EDULEARN19  
11th annual International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies  
Palma de Mallorca (Spain), 1st - 3rd of July, 2019.



**LATVIEŠU VALODA**  
VALSTS PĒTĪJUMU PROGRAMMA

# INTRODUCTION

- ▶ In Latvia, amendments to the Education Law (Grozījumi 2018/65.1) provide for a gradual transition to education in the official language, i.e. Latvian in minority educational institutions, therefore it is necessary to evaluate the Latvian language (L2) oral proficiency of those 5-6 year old minority children who acquired their second language in preschool settings.
- ▶ It is of great importance to find out appropriate methods and performance measures to assess the preschoolers' Latvian language abilities in the language environment that is specific to Latvia.

# OBJECTIVES

- ▶ The **objectives** of the study:
  - explore the rationale underlying some of the core concepts on oral proficiency assessment
  - give an overview of the CAF triad
  - review the key issues relating to the assessment of linguistic performance of preschool children acquiring second language - Latvian

# ASSESSING ORAL LANGUAGE:

## Four types of language knowledge

- Grammatical knowledge
  - Textual knowledge
  - Functional knowledge
  - Sociolinguistic knowledge
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# ASSESSING ORAL LANGUAGE: The construct of oral communication

- ▶ Speaking ability - the verbal use of language to communicate with others
- ▶ Oral communication includes:
  - **interactional** competence
  - appropriate use of **phonology**
  - appropriate and accurate use of **vocabulary** and **grammar**
  - appropriate **fluency**

# ASSESSING ORAL LANGUAGE: Assessment tools and procedures

- ▶ Appropriate for young learners, reflect:
  - characteristic features of the young language learner
  - learning context
  - purposes of assessment
- ▶ Different kinds of **rubrics** and **rating scales**:
  - observation checklists
  - task-based criteria sheets
  - holistic rating scales
  - analytic rating scales

# ASSESSING ORAL LANGUAGE: Performance measures (1)

- ▶ Three major performance measures: *complexity, accuracy, fluency* (CAF)
- **Complexity** - the capacity to use more advanced language  
size, richness, diversity of the learner's linguistic L2 system
- **Accuracy** - the conformity of second language knowledge to target language norms  
degree of deviancy from a particular norm  
deviations – usually characterized as errors
- **Fluency** - the capacity to produce speech at normal rate and without interruption  
ease, eloquence, smoothness of speech

# ASSESSING ORAL LANGUAGE: Performance measures (2)

- ▶ There is a clear lack of consistency in terms of how complexity, accuracy and fluency have been assessed in empirical studies; researchers use different measures.
  - ▶ Important issue - whether general or more specific measures of CAF are more appropriate. What exactly are we evaluating when measuring complexity? What is the 'best' measure to gauge accuracy? What are components of fluency?
  - ▶ There has not been consensus reached on how to define and measure the constructs of preschool children's L2.
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# RESULTS (1): Assessing Latvian: Performance measures (Complexity)

- ▶ **Complexity** - the degree to which a learner uses varied and sophisticated structures and vocabulary in speaking.

Complexity is divided into lexical complexity and grammatical complexity.

- ▶ Components of **lexical complexity**:
  - *Diversity*: size of lexis
- ▶ Components of **grammatical complexity** at different linguistic levels (morphology, syntax):
  - *Length*: short vs. long units
  - *Variation*: variety of units

# RESULTS (2):

## Assessing Latvian: Performance measures (Accuracy)

- ▶ **Accuracy** - how much a learner speaks without errors in real-time communication
  
- ▶ Components of **phonological accuracy**:
  - provide a global impression of accurate pronunciation of
    - vowel and consonant sounds
    - stress of the word
  
- ▶ Components of **lexical accuracy**:
  - *Appropriateness*: correct vs. incorrect meaning of words
    - appropriate words used
  
- ▶ Components of **grammatical accuracy**:
  - provide a global impression of accuracy: error-free clauses
  - focus on the specific language:
    - noun-adjective-gender-agreement errors
    - noun-verb-number-agreement errors
    - degrees of errors: the severity of an error

# RESULTS (3):

## Assessing Latvian: Performance measures (Fluency)

- ▶ **Fluency** - how fast and how much a learner speaks without dysfluency markers (i.e. false starts, functionless repetitions, etc.)
- ▶ Components of **fluency**:
  - *Speed or rate*: slow vs fast
  - *Silence or breakdown*: number and duration of pauses

# CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ Speaking performance can be seen from several linguistic aspects: fluency, accuracy, syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, sociolinguistic appropriateness, pronunciation, and other aspects.
- ▶ Assessment criteria must be appropriate for preschool children, based on learning objectives, depending on context and assessment purpose.
- ▶ Analytic rating scale is useful for assessing linguistic performance of children as it guides the assessment, splits up the specified criteria so that assessors can make separate decisions about each level of performance or separate element of the learner's performance.
- ▶ Assessment criteria in analytic rating scale and performance measure checklist based on CAF were created by the author of the present study for assessing linguistic performance of preschool children acquiring Latvian as their second language.

# Thank You!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*The research team is grateful to the Latvia State Research Program “Latvian language” No. VPP-IZM-2018/2-0002 for the considerable support during project implementation (2018 – 2019).*

