INTRODUCTION

Blank, Rose and Berlin’s (1978) Levels of Questioning framework (see Table 1) was applied to adapt questions used in an expressive language assessment. This allowed children with severe intellectual disabilities to better understand the questions, and elicited more representative samples of their expressive language abilities.

For this study, the framework was used to develop a series of questions for test pictures, enabling the examiner to alter the question complexity and therefore maximise the information/grammar elicited in language samples of children with intellectual disabilities.

RESULTS

Results showed that there was a significant difference between the information scores (F(1,23)=9.697, p<0.001) and the grammar scores (F(1,23)=4.452, p<0.001) achieved on both tests with the participants achieving significantly higher scores for both information and grammar on the modified question test (see Figure 1).

The samples obtained from the modified question test were also analysed to rate the level of questioning achieved by each participant. Blank et al’s (1978) scoring system was used to determine what level the child was capable of understanding. Figure 2 shows the percentage of participants that achieved each level of questioning.

Inter-tester reliability

Both testers scored ten of the RAPT, modified picture and modified question tests, and the scores were correlated to determine a value for inter-tester reliability. Results showed high inter-tester reliability on all of the tests (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The results support the hypothesis that the modification of the RAPT to include Blank et. al’s (1978) levels of questioning allows children with intellectual disabilities to better demonstrate their expressive language skills. The results showed that on the modified test, children scored significantly higher for both information and grammar when compared to their performance on the original RAPT.

Findings indicated that decreasing the complexity of the questions elicited better samples of their expressive language capabilities. In the original RAPT, all questions are level two or three (Blank et al., 1978), and these questions are frequently too difficult for some children with intellectual impairments. However, these participants were able to answer a related question of lower complexity, thus eliciting information where a more complex question could not be answered appropriately. Asking a related question of greater complexity also gave the participants more opportunity to display their expressive vocabulary and grammar skills. Furthermore, analysis of the modified test gave additional qualitative information on the participants’ ability to answer questions at each level.

METHOD

Twenty-four severely intellectually disabled participants aged between 8 and 19 years took part in this study. Each child was assessed by one of two student Speech Pathologists using the Renfrew Action Picture Test [RAPT], (Renfrew, 1988) and a modified version of the RAPT that utilized Blank et al.’s (1978) modification of the RAPT to eliminate possible test-retest effects, hence pictures from the Singapore English Action Picture Test [SCEAPT] (Brebner, 2002) were used. These pictures were chosen as they have been proven to be of the same picture complexity and elicit comparable linguistic targets to those of the original RAPT pictures (Brebnner, 2002).

The RAPT scores were compared with the modified question scores which incorporated all the Blank, Rose and Berlin levels by scoring for information (expressive vocabulary) and expressive grammar using the original and an equivalent scoring format.

Ten participants’ responses were scored by both student speech pathologists in order to measure inter-rater reliability.

REFERENCES


Brebner, C. (2002) The Singapore English Action Picture Test. Published with permission of Speechmark Publishing Ltd. Available through author; contact chrisandphil@hotmail.com


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