

The Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN): Adding Urdu to MAIN

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The Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN), an assessment tool in the Language Impairment Testing in Multilingual Settings (LITMUS) battery, aims to improve the assessment of bilingual children. This paper describes the process of adapting MAIN to Urdu. Given the lack of language assessment tools for Urdu-speaking children, the Urdu MAIN is an important new instrument that is made widely and freely accessible to researchers and practitioners, allowing them to examine the narrative abilities of children acquiring Urdu as a first, heritage, second, or additional language.

1 Introduction

Over-identification and under-identification of language impairments are common problems when assessing bilingual children (Bedore & Peña, 2008). For instance, younger bilingual children, compared to older bilingual children, have a higher risk of being under-identified for language impairments, when some practitioners prefer adopting a wait-and-see approach, as they reason that the children are still young and need time to develop bilingual competence. The European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action IS0804 (2009-2013) *Language Impairment in a Multilingual Society: Linguistic Patterns and the Road to Assessment* was a large research initiative that aimed to address the problems in assessing the language abilities of bilingual children in Europe, and to improve the differentiation of bilingual children with and without language impairments. Their overarching objective was to improve the assessment of bilingual children with and without language impairments, and to disentangle the effects of bilingualism and Developmental Language Disorder (DLD, earlier Specific Language Impairment). Within this initiative, a number of assessment tools appropriate for

bilingual children have been designed and adapted to different languages, forming the Language Impairment Testing in Multilingual Settings (LITMUS) battery (see Armon-Lotem, de Jong, & Meir, 2015).

One part of the LITMUS-battery is the Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (LITMUS-MAIN, hereafter MAIN; Gagarina et al., 2012, 2015, 2019). MAIN was designed to evaluate the narrative production and comprehension abilities of bilingual children aged between 3 and 12 years, but it has also been used to study the narrative abilities of adults (Gagarina, Bohnacker & Lindgren, 2019). MAIN assesses narrative production in terms of macro- and microstructures, and the use of internal state terms (ISTs). Its design allows one to assess narrative production in telling (story generation) and/or retelling modes. Narratives are elicited using four stories each of which being featured by a parallel set of pictures and an associated story script that are controlled for macro- and microstructure components. It also measures narrative comprehension, focusing on macrostructure such as goals and ISTs.

MAIN has been adapted to numerous languages and can be used to evaluate the dual languages of bilingual children, allowing one to study bilingual children with and without DLD acquiring different language pairs. Language samples from typically-developing children provide useful data to generate developmental expectations for the target language, and provide important baseline data for identification of children at risk for or suspected of DLD. Therefore, MAIN not only provides clinicians with an assessment tool appropriate for bilinguals, but offers researchers invaluable language data to make cross-linguistic comparisons and test (clinical) linguistic theories.

This paper introduces a new language adaptation of MAIN, the Urdu MAIN. To date, there are no standardized tests to assess the language abilities of Urdu-speaking children. Adapting MAIN to Urdu provides researchers and practitioners with an important new tool to assess the narrative abilities of children acquiring Urdu as a first, heritage, second or additional language.

2 A short description of Urdu

Urdu is an Indo-Aryan language. Globally, the total number of speakers of Urdu is estimated to be 170 million (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020). Among these speakers, 70 million has it as their first language and 100 million as their second language, chiefly in Pakistan and India (Zeidan, 2019). Urdu has the status of a national language and an official state language in Pakistan and is used in almost all contexts in this country. It is taught as a major and compulsory subject in all educational institutions in the primary and secondary levels in Pakistan (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020). Urdu is closely related to Hindi and the two languages are mutually comprehensible. Both languages have the same Indo-Aryan foundation, but there has been significant lexical borrowing from Arabic and Persian to Urdu.

Urdu has a number of typologically interesting characteristics. For instance, it is an SOV language with postpositions and head-final noun phrases and does not have definite articles. All proper nouns and some common nouns are considered to have inherent definiteness. To express

indefiniteness, a numeral adjective or an indefinite pronoun is used together with the noun. The context also determines whether a noun is definite or indefinite (Platts, 2002). Urdu nouns have grammatical gender, and its verbs are marked for subject gender, person, and number using affixes (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020).

3 Adapting MAIN to Urdu

MAIN was adapted to Urdu following the guidelines for adapting MAIN to new languages (Bohnacker & Gagarina, 2019). This includes that, in each story, the number of macrostructure components such as Goal, Attempt, Outcome are the same across language versions. The microstructural aspects of each story script such as total number of words and overall number of internal state terms were also matched as closely as possible to the English version. In addition, the age of acquisition and the use of basic-level terminology were also considered when selecting the vocabulary. Moreover, the use of idioms was avoided. Matching the total number of words between the English and Urdu story scripts was a challenge – compared to English, Urdu usually uses more words to achieve grammaticality in a sentence. This issue was resolved by being very precise in terms of word selection during the whole adaptation procedure, such that grammaticality and clarity of the sentences were achieved following the requirements specified in the guidelines.

The adaption process involved the contribution of different team members, including a native Urdu-speaking speech therapist (Hamdani), who is doing her PhD research using Urdu-MAIN jointly supervised by Kan (a postdoctoral researcher in developmental linguistics), Chan (a developmental psycholinguist with a speech therapist qualification who is a professorial faculty member in a speech therapy program of a university in Hong Kong), and Gagarina (the original and leading author of MAIN). The assessment protocol and the adaptation guidelines were first studied carefully, and the assessment protocol was then translated into Urdu by the first author (Hamdani). There were no significant challenges in the process except matching the total number of words in each story script as mentioned above. The translations were further checked by three native speakers of Urdu, including: (1) a speech and language pathologist; (2) a college student with Urdu and English as her major subjects; and (3) an engineer who has studied Urdu and English for more than 10 years. These speakers commented on the lexical and grammatical appropriateness of the translation, and suggested changes to meet the requirements set out in the guidelines. None of these four native-speakers of Urdu reported any cultural inappropriateness with the MAIN stories and pictures for Urdu-speakers in Pakistan and Hong Kong. The proofread Urdu version was then translated back into English, and this translation was carefully compared with the original English version. When questions arose during the adaptation process, the other team members (Chan, Kan, Gagarina) were consulted and the questions were addressed and resolved in the team. We have used the MAIN stories to assess narrative abilities in Urdu-Cantonese bilingual ethnic minority children in Hong Kong (Chan et al., 2018) and are planning to use Urdu-MAIN to further assess L1 Urdu-speaking children in Pakistan in an ongoing project.

4 Final remarks

The Urdu MAIN consists of two components: (a) this paper that introduces the Urdu adaptation of MAIN, the Urdu language, and key information regarding the adaptation process; and (b) the full assessment protocol of Urdu-MAIN which contains the four story scripts, instructions for administration, and the scoring forms. The Urdu MAIN can be used free-of-charge for non-commercial purposes under a Creative Commons License (BY-NC-ND 3.0) provided that the copyright and licensing rules are respected. Studies that make use of this tool should cite both the assessment protocol and this introductory article as follows.

- Gagarina, N., Klop, D., Kunnari, S., Tantele, K., Välimaa, T., Bohnacker, U. & Walters, J. (2019). MAIN: Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives – Revised. Materials for use. *ZAS Papers in Linguistics*, 63. Urdu version. Translated and adapted by Hamdani, S., Kan, R., Chan, A. & Gagarina, N.
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