

## Assessing language abilities in deaf children

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Assessment instruments have the general aim of determining the linguistic level of the user, whether they are adults or children. They can be used for research purposes, but also for diagnostic and educational goals. For deaf children they have the important function of providing information for the planning of their educational program. They must cover the language forms the children are exposed to. The instruments used have to share the same properties of assessment instruments in general, such as reliability, validity and usability.

The assessment of language abilities in children has to take into consideration the language or languages they are exposed to. In the case of deaf children the exposure is almost always bimodal and bilingual, that is involving some form of signing and spoken language. The way that the two modalities are offered in the input to the child can vary a great deal – how the modalities are combined and the extent to which they made accessible to the child. As with any bilingual child language assessment has to take this diversity into account. Recently developed questionnaires for multilingual children (PABIQ: Tuller et al. 2014) offer the opportunity to develop instruments for deaf children, but there are challenges.

The bimodal bilingual production of the child also poses considerable challenges for assessment. Due to the particular situation of sign languages some aspects are difficult to realize such as standardization, whereas there are also aspects specific to sign languages such as the consideration of iconicity in the lexical items used. Specific types of language assessment instruments like non-sign repetition or picture vocabulary tasks also pose specific problems due to the properties of sign languages. Observation instruments and spontaneous language analyses also needs careful construction for these bimodal bilingual children. A few examples of such instruments will be discussed.