

UNDERSTANDING METAPHORS: GETTING STARTED WITH TCM JUNIOR

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Abstract

Our purpose is to present the first results of the application of a resource to analyze the ability to understand metaphors, with a group of 36 Portuguese children, from 4 to 6 years old.

The instrument is the adaptation to European Portuguese of the TCM Junior, a metaphor comprehension test for children, from 4 to 6 years old, of Italian origin, which exists in circulation and with standardized data.

At the moment, the material used is properly adapted for the Portuguese population, having followed all the rules of linguistic and cultural adaptation, and it is in the application phase, with a view to its measurement and loyalty, by meeting normative data.

However, according to the tests carried out, the resource seems to us to have great potential: it is well accepted by children, it is discriminatory, within and between ages, the averages obtained are close to those of Italian counterparts, thus, the promising results are predictors a valid and necessary resource for the national context.

The inexistence of adapted and available resources for European Portuguese on this subject is a fact. Moving forward with this task, a necessary and urgent task was looming, with guarantees of construct, theoretical and even content validity, based on the evidence of the original authors.

We will also try, although briefly and not completely, for obvious reasons, to account for the instrument's architecture.

We also consider, given its characteristics and evidence, and even as an initial project, that the resource in question can and should work as intervention material in terms of promoting the awareness of figurative and metaphorical language, it can be used by psychologists and other educators.

Keywords: *Figurative language, metalinguistic awareness, understanding.*

1. Introduction

As part of a broader project, to validate assessment and intervention resources in terms of understanding figurative language, metaphors, we applied a tool, adapted for European Portuguese, the Junior TCM, for children from 4 to 6 years of age, instrument validated in Italian, its origin.

In fact, we believe that work in this area is justified for two reasons:

- absence of valid assessment and intervention resources, on this dimension, for European Portuguese;

- relevance of investigating and intervening at the level of understanding, or metalinguistic ability, in general, and, in general, and, in this case, the understanding of figurative, metaphorical language.

We assume that metalinguistic ability can be defined as the ability to reflect on language as an object of thought and intentional manipulation of language (Garton & Pratt, 1989). According to Figueira, Pinto and Ojeda (2019), metalinguistic awareness or metalinguistic capacity is the ability to reflect and elaborate analyzes on language.

As for figurative language, such as metaphors, we consider that it evokes comparisons and distances itself from the literal meaning of words (Figueira, Pinto & Ojeda, 2019). Figurative language differs, therefore, from literal language, since the latter uses words with their true meaning, while figurative language “expresses an idea using other terms, thus appealing to a similarity, whether real or imaginary”. (Figueira, Pinto & Ojeda, 2019).

Based on the work of Pinto, Figueira, Andrade, Pinto and Melogno (forthcoming) they consider three necessary criteria for metalinguistic behavior, which are developed between 4-5 and 6 years of age.

According to the authors, the first necessary criterion of the child will be to dissociate, in the word, the form of the meaning and to relate the similarities and differences that connect the words to the others; it is essential for the child to be able to divide the words into syllables and to identify the relevant morphemes; Finally, the third criterion requires the child to be able to distinguish the objective aspects of words related to the fact that they are inserted in a code shared by the linguistic community from what is, on the contrary, an individual and psychological variation of it.

It is on the basis of all this research that the Italian version of the TCM Júnior (Pinto, Melogno & Iliceto, 2008) appears, in a work of fundamentals of the appeal, in which the instrument measured for children from 4 to 6 years is also presented. In this document, which narrates the entire study (Pinto, Melogno & Iliceto, 2008), the authors record a development in the understanding of metaphors over the age range. The authors reported a relationship between increasing TCM Junior scores and age, that is, younger children have a lower score compared to older children (6 years). That is, younger children (4 years old) give more level zero responses, revealing non-comprehension, and fewer level 2 responses, revealing full understanding of the metaphor, although the presence of level 1 responses is frequent, translators of partial understanding of metaphors.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

Sample found and used in 2021, meaning that the chronological ages correspond, 4 years (range 4-4.11 months), 5 years (range 5-5.11 months) and 6 years (range 6-6.11 months).

The sample therefore consists of 36 subjects, 24 males and 12 females, aged between 4 and 6 years: 14, 4-year-olds, 17, 5-year-olds and 5, 6-year-olds (see Table 1). All subjects in the sample speak European Portuguese as their mother tongue.

Table 1. Sample distribution by age and sex.

Age	Male	Female	Total
4 year	10	4	14
5 year	10	7	17
6 year	4	1	5
total	24	12	36

2.2. Instrument

The TCM Junior, in its original Italian version (Pinto, Melogno & Iliceto, 2008), is an instrument that allows analyzing the understanding of figurative language, metaphors, of the ages targeted by the test, from 4 to 6 years old (Figueira, Andrade, Pinto & Melogno, in press). To date, it is in the process of being measured, having gone through all the adaptation phases (Figueira, Andrade, Pinto & Melogno, in press). TCM Junior is an individual, oral administration resource, consisting of 25 items, metaphors, of which 12 are presented in the form of simple sentences (M-FR) and the remaining (13) are presented in the context of short stories, in that, for each story, there are 3/4 questions about the narratives (M-HS).

The administrator must have a protocol for each child, where he transcribes the answers given, and may have the help of a recorder so that the answers can be transcribed later.

For the analysis and rating of TCM Junior (Figueira, Andrade, Pinto & Melogno, in press), each item is analyzed according to three levels of semantic conflict resolution, thus the maximum test score is 50 points, or that is, the potentials to be reached can vary between 0 and 50 points. The three levels are: level 0 - deficient or null understanding of the metaphor, no understanding; level 1 - partial understanding of the metaphor; and level 2 - full understanding of the metaphor.

Table 2. Potential raw data (range of potential points).

Age	range items phrases 12 items	range items in stories 13 items	total range 25 items
4 year	0-24	0-26	0-50
5 year	0-24	0-26	0-50
6 year	0-24	0-26	0-50

2.3. Procedures

Before administering the instruments, a statement of informed consent was requested from the guardians of each child. After collecting the duly signed authorizations, the instrument application sessions were scheduled with the educators.

3. Results

3.1. Presentation

The data obtained are presented as a percentage, item by item, from the TCM Junior, and as a function of age. We will also provide examples of responses, depending on the 3 categorized levels.

Table 3. Averages obtained by this sample.

age/N	Average items in sentences [Potential sum (0-24), average (12)]	Average items in stories [Potential sum (0-26), average (13)]	Total average [Potential sum (0-50), average (25)]
4 year (14)	5.43	4.57	10.00
5 year (17)	6.12	6.47	12.59
6 year (5)	6.40	4.20	10.40

3.2. Analysis of the most salient data

Regardless of the age of the subjects:

- . the total averages, and even the partial ones (depending on the type of metaphor) are below the potential average

- . the item averages in sentences fall short of the potential average

- . item averages in stories fall short of potential average

Also, and yet

- . there is an increase in the average, as a function of age, for items in sentences

- . there is an increase in average, regarding items in stories, from 4 to 5 years old, not happening for 6 years old.

4. Conclusions, final remarks

The main limitation of this investigation will be, therefore, the small size of the sample (N=36). However, the acceptance of the resource by the children is quite good and even the results are promising. In this sense, it will be necessary to use more representative and significant samples, so that there is equity in relation to age groups, which will allow us to carry out more sophisticated analyses. However, the results, as described above, should not be underestimated, since the study constitutes a test for the use and validation of the Júnior TCM (Figueira, Andrade, Pinto & Melogno, in press), until confronted with the studies with its original Italian version (Pinto, Melogno & Iliceto, 2008).

We also consider, given the characteristics and procedures used in its adaptation, that the junior TCM resource can and should continue to be used, either in the context of dynamic, universal assessment, or in the context of psychological intervention, initiating studies leading to its validation psychometric.

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