

# New toolkit will help identify early language issues

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(Medical Xpress) -- A new assessment tool will help prevent multilingual children being wrongly diagnosed with speech and language problems.

Dr. Carolyn Letts, Newcastle University, has just finished working on an update of the Reynell Development Language Scales (NRDLS), widely used by speech and language therapists to identify problems in children from three to seven-and-a-half-years-old.

The new edition contains a Multilingual Toolkit, an additional handbook that offers [guidance](#) on how to adapt and use NRDLS for children whose first language is not English.

“Many children referred to speech and language therapists in the UK have English as an additional language and a diversity of first languages,” explained Dr. Letts, who carried out the review with Dr. Indra Sinka. “This can lead to both under and over referral as it can be difficult to identify and diagnose impairment in these cases. Often the child’s characteristics are simply features of second language acquisition rather than other underlying problems.”

The authors devised the toolkit after discovering that some therapists had been literally translating the original material, which does not take into account the complexity of the language and could easily lead to false readings.

As in previous editions, there are two scales: one explores aspects of the

child's understanding of selected vocabulary items and grammar (Comprehension Scale); and the other examines how the child uses the language (Production Scale).

It was standardised on 1,266 children in the UK aged between two and seven-and-a-half years-old and the revisions are based on advances in language acquisition and indicators of language impairment, along with user feedback.

“If a child is not speaking or their language seems behind it suggests they may need additional help, and this is where the test comes in,” said Dr. Letts, who is speaking about her latest research at the Child Language Seminar in Newcastle this week (13/14 June 2011).

“With increasing concerns about children starting – or indeed, finishing – school with [language](#) difficulties, it's vital that any issues are identified early on and suitable interventions put in place as soon as possible.”

The play-based format of NRDLS has been retained, with engaging stimulus material that includes a trio of toys – a monkey, teddy and rabbit – that [children](#) can ‘direct’ as they carry out the various tasks. The amount of material in the pack has been more than halved to make assessment quicker and more straightforward, so most assessments should now take approximately 45 minutes.

Dr. Letts, who co-authored the new edition with Professor Edwards (University of Reading) and Dr Sinka (Open University), was also involved in the previous revision 14 years ago.

Provided by Newcastle University

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