Pragmatic Language Development in Young Children (PLD)
Proposed workshop at SLE 2025 in Bordeaux

Keywords: pragmatics; language development; child language; language acquisition, assessment of language skills

We welcome submissions of abstracts from researchers at any level of seniority who are working on relevant topics for the proposed workshop; early-career researchers are particularly encouraged.

Abstracts: Interested colleagues should submit a 300-word abstract (excl. references) for 20-minute talks by **7 November 2024** to tove@ling.su.se and maria.rosenberg@umu.se. We will make selections and inform all presenters of acceptance of their abstracts before the workshop proposal is submitted to the SLE by 20 November 2024. If the workshop proposal is accepted, presenters will be asked to submit a 500-word abstract in EasyChair by 15 January 2025.

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Workshop description
Pragmatic language skills refer to the use of language within social situations. They emerge early in development (Longobardi et al. 2017) and cover many verbal and non-verbal skills, such as intention recognition, responding appropriately, sticking to the topic, or adapting communication to others (Socher et al. 2019). Although pragmatic language development is quite well described, we still lack a clear understanding of its nature and growth (Papafragou 2018).

Measures of young children's pragmatic language have been found to strongly correlate to their core language skills (grammar, vocabulary) (Wilson & Bishop 2022) and might therefore predict later language ability outcomes (Matthews et al. 2018). There is thus little empirical evidence for the assumption that pragmatics and core language are two separate domains, as suggested by Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986). Instead, pragmatics and core language seem to have high and consistent correlations during language development (De Rosnay et al. 2014). This correlation, however, might depend on the near impossibility to design a pragmatic test entirely free from core language aspects, and/or it might be the case that pragmatic and core language skills interact and scaffold each other during early language development, but later be separating (Wilson & Bishop 2022) (N.B. there are children who seem to have difficulties specifically with how to use language in social contexts, cf. DSM-5 2013).

Still, given the heterogeneity of pragmatics, being more of a family of skills than a domain (Matthews et al. 2018; Wilson & Bishop 2022), some pragmatic language skills can be assumed to have stronger associations with some grammatical and/or broader developmental-behavioral skills than others. The view of pragmatics as a family of skills, then, would possibly account for why children with age adequate core language skills may underperform in specific pragmatic skills (e.g., implicature processing) (Wilson & Bishop 2022). To understand the development of pragmatic abilities, we need to know more about their longitudinal association with core language (Rudling et al. 2023), and also with other developmental and behavioral domains (Bishop et al. 2016). A problem for reaching this goal,

however, is that available measures of pragmatic skills differ in coverage, focus, and quality (Matthews et al. 2018).

The aim of this workshop proposal is to bring together studies on how to measure and evaluate the early pragmatic language development among children between the ages 1–7. The workshop is open for researchers from different theoretical and methodological backgrounds interested in how pragmatic language develops in early childhood and how it relates to other domains of language or cognition. The focus of the workshop lies on pragmatic *language* skills: how children use their developing linguistic knowledge to communicate. Other important aspects to also consider in relation to pragmatic language development are variability and shift over time (cf. Fenson et al. 2000) as well as social, cultural and gender differences. We welcome contributions that build on different types of qualitative or quantitative data (not limited to longitudinal sampling, questionnaire, case study, and/or experimental, etc.) to address issues such as borders between pragmatics and other linguistic or cognitive domains, multilingual pragmatic language development, methodology for data collection, sociolinguistic parameters (e.g., age, gender, region), or development of targeted pragmatic language functions.

Key research questions for the workshop include, but are not limited to, the following:
- How do pragmatic language skills develop in young children (e.g., how do skills differ in saliency, between individuals/groups, over time)? To what extent can we identify potential taxonomies of pragmatic skills?
- How can we measure pragmatic language development? What types of methods should we apply to study young children's pragmatic language development?
- What associations can be found between children's pragmatic language skills and grammatical skills (e.g., by looking at developmentally salient syntactic and morphological constructions)?
- What associations can be found between pragmatic language skills and measures of cognitive and behavioral skills (e.g., motor, problem-solving, personal-social)?

The workshop will contribute to expand on our current understanding of pragmatic language development as it appears in various types of data.

References

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