

Linguistic Markers of Developmental Language Disorder in Georgian-Speaking Children

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Abstract

Objectives: Approximately 7.6% of children worldwide have Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), a neurodevelopmental condition, characterised by significant challenges in learning, understanding, and using language, without any obvious biomedical reason. Children with DLD face significant risks such as poor academic outcomes, mental health problems, difficulties with social relationships, and a lack of independent life as adults. Despite being a common disability, many children with DLD remain unidentified and underserved, especially in resource-constrained countries. One main reason for this is the lack of knowledge about linguistic markers of DLD in languages other than English. We conducted the first study that aimed to investigate linguistic markers of DLD in Georgian-speaking children, as documented by Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs).

Methodology: We used two approaches to collect the data. First, 10 SLTs from both private practice and public service settings in Tbilisi participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Second, we collected additional data on linguistic markers via a workshop involving 33 SLTs. We developed tailored questions in advance that concerned language profiles and linguistic markers of children the SLTs have worked with, information about assessment and progress monitoring tools, and existing resources that SLTs use to support children and families.

Results: The analysis is still ongoing and will be completed in June 2026. Preliminary findings revealed both universal and language-specific linguistic markers of DLD in the Georgian language. We also found that Georgian SLTs lack appropriate tools and resources to work effectively with children with DLD. Based on the findings, we will develop both an inventory of linguistic markers of DLD in the Georgian language, as well as a DLD screening tool.

Discussion: Overall, our study contributes to understanding of how language difficulties manifest in underrepresented and under-researched languages such as Georgian and adds to the still limited knowledge of linguistic markers of DLD across languages. This is the first evidence of linguistic markers in the Georgian language, and more research, systematically investigating linguistic markers of both typical and atypical development of the Georgian language is pressingly needed.