Introduction

A recent meta-analysis study showed that extremely premature children present persisting language problems in the school-age (Barre et al., 2011). However, other studies examining a range of language subdomains are needed to further understand the specific nature of language difficulties in these children. Little is known about their spontaneous speech (Jennische & Sedin, 2001). In the present study, we investigated differences in spontaneous language ability between French-speaking extremely premature children and in term-born control children.

Methodology

23 Extremely premature children

M_age 7.3 years
Gestational age < 26 weeks at birth
Birthweight between 500g and 1000g
French native speakers
School grade: between the end of the kindergarten to the 2nd grade

23 Term-born children

Matched on age, gender and sociocultural level to extremely premature children

Results

Informative language task: Poorer variety of the words used by EPC (p<.05) but no difference for the token/type ratio (ns)

Informative language task: Fewer and less rich ideas in EPC (p<.05)

Informative language task: Lower average length of utterances in EPC (p<.05)

Discussion

These findings highlight an impairment of spontaneous language in extreme premature children, and suggest that their language has to be assessed by both descriptive and informative language tasks to identify the locus of impairment.

Contact: Trecy Martinez Perez – trecy.martinezperez@ulg.ac.be – University of Liege: Department of Psychology – Belgium

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