

Ball, M. J., Crystal, D. & Fletcher, P. (2012). *Assessing Grammar: The Languages of LARSP*.

Bristol: Multilingual Matters. (318 pages)

This is an ambitious book which aims to present a range of versions for different languages of the grammatical analysis procedure LARSP. It will be of use to anyone who works clinically with speech and language impaired children who speak the target languages, and for those carrying out research on language acquisition and impairment in different languages or with bilingual children.

LARSP was developed in the 1970s and became an assessment tool widely used by speech and language therapists (SLTs) working with language impaired children at that time. It is still taught on many SLT pre-registration courses in the UK and elsewhere. The analysis, carried out on a spontaneous language sample, contributes to the identification of language impairment and to intervention planning and to measurement of progress. The first three chapters of the book bring the reader up to date, with the first describing the origins of the LARSP concept (Crystal), followed by more recent research using LARSP in English (Fletcher, Klee and Gavin), and a description of a computerised version (Long). These introductory chapters are followed by descriptions of LARSP-based profiles for Hebrew, German, Dutch, Welsh, Bengali (Sylheti), Irish, Persian, Frisian, Chinese, French, Spanish and Turkish.

The book appears to be aiming to do two things, on the one hand to give an update of the LARSP procedure, and on the other to present the different versions across languages. To consider the update first, the landscape of provision for children with language impairments has changed radically in the decades since LARSP was first developed and it is a shame that this is not acknowledged. While 'having enough time' has always been an issue for clinicians, this has become even more acute in recent years, at least within the UK, with little or no time given for in-depth analysis of individual children. Service delivery models have also changed with more intervention focused on small groups (especially at pre-school age). Interventions have been developed that focus on early parent-child interactions, and interventions are more often delivered by classroom assistants with clinicians taking a consultative role. Time has to be made for group planning and/or extensive consultation with other professionals. Faced with little time for in-depth evaluation, clinicians will tend to fall back on using standardised tests in isolation, or base decisions on partly intuitive

observations of the child's communication. Long, in his chapter, acknowledges the use of 'shortcuts' (page 40) but notes that effective use of these is dependent on the experience of the person doing the analysis. The value of doing a complete analysis lays in its comprehensiveness, but this may be a luxury that today's clinician simply cannot afford. Long rightly explores the use of computerisation for grammatical analysis and provides evidence that this is a way of cutting down on time spent. However there is still a need to spend time creating transcript files. It would be useful if the 'next thirty years' could see a focus on using the LARSP approach to identify key indicative information for identification, intervention and evaluating progress.

The second part of the book presents LARSP-based profiles for a range of languages and linguistic situations. This has immediate value for the clinician working with children who speak these languages; where little is known about the developmental sequence for a particular language, a comprehensive analysis may be the only way to arrive at a clinical judgement. The degree of development and background research for these profiles vary considerably: databases that underpin the profile categories are large and small, in some cases there are strict quantitative criteria for placement on the chart (e.g. used by 50% of the children at a particular age), while others give broad descriptive reports on the proportions of structures used at each stage. In some cases there are computerised versions available (e.g. Parisse, Maillart and Tommerdahl, for French), and others give case studies to illustrate use of the chart with individual children (e.g. Bol, for Dutch). Some profiles are devised for bilingual communities (e.g. Welsh, Frisian) and suitable adjustments made to accommodate this. As a result this is a useful resource not only for clinical use, but also for research development. Where a profile is available for a target language, researchers can see where further development is required; when developing new profiles, this book provides models to follow. A short summarising chapter at the end might have been useful.

To conclude, this book contains a wealth of information about grammatical analysis for different languages. In some contexts there is however an urgent need for research that will support the clinician in using the insights gained from LARSP profiling in their particular working clinical situation.

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