THE PRAGMATICS PROFILE OF EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION (REVISED ONLINE VERSION 2022)

# REVISED PRAGMATICS PROFILE - MANUAL

Introduction by Dr Andy Smidt

I was privileged to be taught by Hazel Dewart and Susie Summers in the 1980's at a time when they were developing this profile and we were starting to learn about language and the extent to which context and environment influences the development of communication. Reading their words from the first version of this tool now in 2020 is inspiring. They understood that a pragmatics-based approach would (in their words) "shake the very foundations of how we have been approaching children with language problems". These ideas along with work by Bronfenbrenner and others shaped our understanding of communication as belonging to the whole ecosystem in which the person functions. Light and McNaughton (2015) paraphrased Bronfenbrenner and stated that our focus on the communication of the person with complex communication needs interacting with strange communication partners (e.g., clinicians or researchers) in unfamiliar situations (e.g. clinic rooms) for brief periods of time can hardly be representative of how they communicate in their everyday lives with a range of familiar and unfamiliar communication partners.
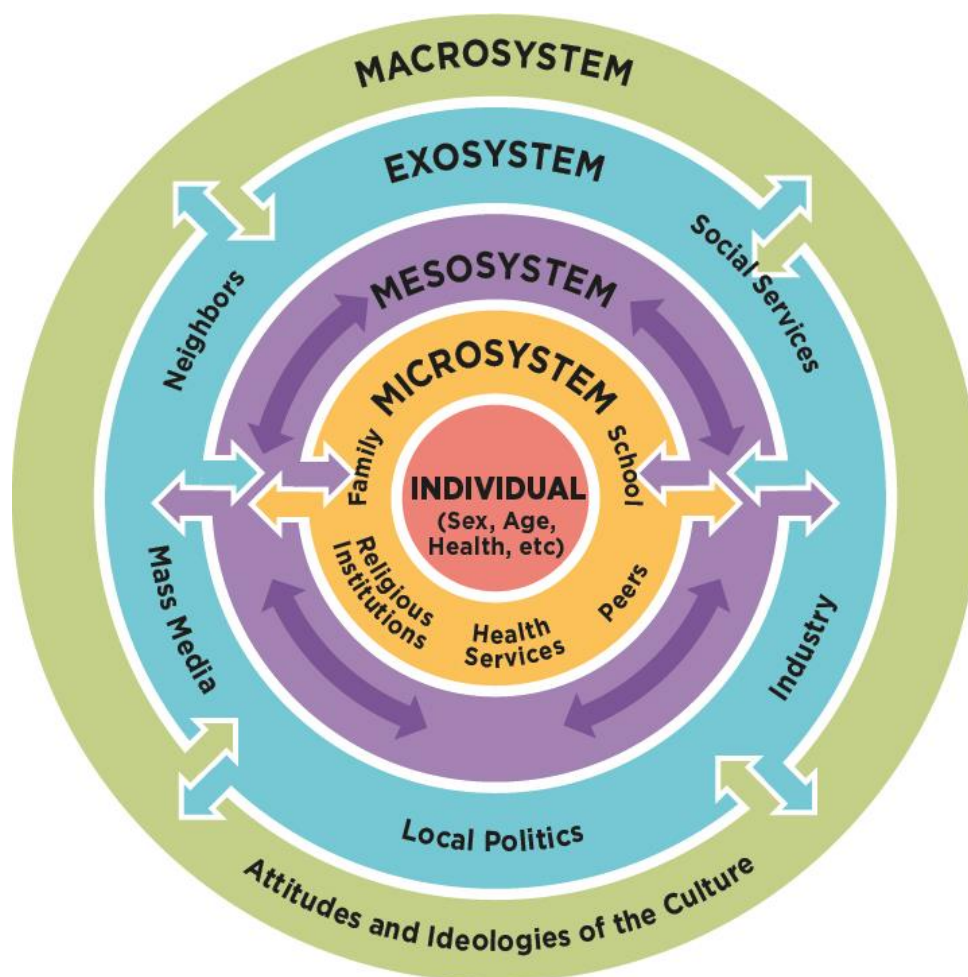
Bronfenbrenner set the individual within layers of systems ranging from their immediate family to the political system which determines the way in which services are provided. If we only look at what the person themselves is doing in a standardised environment, we cannot understand their actual performance on a day-to-day basis. Further, if we only assess interaction with one person (and usually an unfamiliar person) during a timed, standardised, normed tool, we do not actually understand how they communicate and how others communicate with them. It is important here to also link to the trifocus framework from (Siegel-Causey and Bashinski 1997). The trifocus framework demands that we consider not only the person but also their communication partners and the environment in which they communicate.

In this new version of the profile a group of experts contributed to the revision of the Pragmatics Profile. Our aim was to create an online tool and to ensure that the new version was based on best practice and current research in the field of assessment. We were able to utilise the power of conditional logic to create one form which would direct users to appropriate questions based on previous answers and thereby avoid needing different versions for people of different ages.

Why the Pragmatics Profile was developed

Dewart and Summers' original inspiration for the development of the Pragmatics Profile was the belief that conventional approaches to clinical work on speech and language problems in young children need to be supplemented by a perspective on children as communicators in everyday interactions. They saw traditional approaches to assessment, such as standardised testing providing only a very limited picture of how people make their needs and wishes known. Assessment needs to move beyond this and consider how they deal with the range of different communicative situations and conversational partners that will be encountered in the course of a day. They wanted to capture how the person communicates in situations outside the clinic to give a holistic understanding of how this person functions in their everyday environment.

Dewart and Summers focused on a pragmatic approach as offering a perspective on language that emphasises how communication is achieved. It considers how language is used to communicate a variety of intentions, to relate to the communication needs of the listener and to participate in conversation and connected discourse (Bates 1976).

Dewart and Summers, based on the work of Lund and Duchan (1983) predicted that a pragmatics approach would "shake the very foundations" of assessment. They wanted to move away from assessment in one context in a two-hour diagnostic session towards a more functional "real world" evaluation.

They sought to contribute to this 'revolution' by developing a method of exploring communication that would provide the practitioner with a picture of the person as a communicator outside the clinical context and within the context of everyday life. They valued the input from parents, teachers and other carers and wanted to find a means of enabling them to share their knowledge about communicating with the person in a structured way that would be useful for the practitioner. The approach they developed took the form of a structured interview carried out with key communication partners.

In the later published adult version, they became aware that for many, if not most people, it was inappropriate to ask for an account of their communication from others without giving them the opportunity to provide their own account and impressions. They therefore created two versions of the adult form, one for a family member, friend, spouse or other close associate of the person and one for the person him or herself. The two versions paralleled one another so that person and communication partners were asked about the same situations and experiences.

It was also important that the focus of the questions should be on communication, not on communication difficulties. They intended that questions could be applied to anyone, not just people with impairments affecting

communication. Where the person in question does have such an impairment, the questions should be applicable, regardless of the type of impairment or its cause. These requirements for the questions and their wording proved at times to be a tall order and required careful wording to be inclusive of all.

The Approach Adopted in the Pragmatics Profile

The main features of the Pragmatics Profile's approach are:

- it consists of an informal interview with an open form of questioning;
- it focuses on a person's communication in daily life rather than in clinical interactions;
- it facilitates a way of working with families and carers in which their insights and knowledge are valued, encouraging them to feel that they can make a contribution to intervention and to monitoring progress;
- it provides a way of establishing a person's own perceptions, placing value on people's own insights into their experiences as communicators
- it yields qualitative, descriptive data which can provide an added dimension to other quantitative assessments;
- it can help plan intervention that is relevant to the everyday communicative needs of clients and of those who live with or care for them.

Focus on everyday use of language

The Pragmatics Profile is concerned with how language is used in day-to-day communicative interactions. Issues of 'ecological validity' (Bronfenbrenner 1979) have often been raised in relation to assessments communication. Scores from standardised tests are considered inappropriate (Cascella 2006), provide little or no insight into everyday use of language for communication and do not yield relevant information on which to determine intervention. In the clinic only a small range of communicative functions are typically elicited, largely because one person holds the balance of power and is in control of the interaction. This form of assessment does not capture a range of everyday communicative exchanges such shopping, chatting with friends, telephoning for an appointment, buying a bus ticket, where there is a wide range of communicative. The Pragmatics Profile is not an assessment of success in such situations, that is it is not a test of functional communication. However, its questions about how a person uses language are grounded in concrete situations typical of day-to-day life. Through responses to these questions a picture of everyday communication is built up.

The Pragmatics Profile aims to provide a broad perspective on a person's use of language for communication in day-to-day interactions. The information is obtained indirectly through interview. The information gained is therefore always from the experience of one individual. It may be followed up with more direct observation where more detailed investigation is thought to be necessary.

Working with families and carers

One of the most important features of the Pragmatics Profile is that it places value upon the knowledge and insights provided by family members or other communication partners. It can help to establish a relationship between the assessor and a range of others involved in the person's life and it builds respect for their contribution and understanding of how the person communicates. By being invited to share their experience of a person through the Pragmatics Profile interview, they can come to feel that they have an input into the impression of the person and have a role in any further work to be carried out.

In considering the questions, respondents may become more aware of aspects of the person's communication. For example, where a person has lost facility with spoken language through a stroke, a family member or carer may come to focus less on the limitations of the person's speech and more on the strategies by which he or she is managing to communicate. Similarly, someone close to a person with intellectual disabilities may realise that certain aspects of the person's behaviour are being used communicatively, even though they had not previously been considered in that light.

Using the information gained from the Pragmatics Profile to plan targets for intervention can encourage communication partners to understand targets and how changes implemented in the person's everyday lives can impact communicative success and quality of life.

Qualitative approach

Qualitative, descriptive information can play an important role alongside quantitative data in investigating communicative competence (Dewart and Summers, 1993). As discussed above, traditional psychometric techniques and other forms of measurement are particularly problematic for pragmatic aspects of language where it is difficult to establish what is 'correct' performance and where behaviour varies on a wide range of variables depending on the situation, the partner and the purpose of the interaction.

Typical qualitative interview approaches involve a skilled interviewer conducting open-ended interviews based around a preplanned agenda, transcribing the interviews and then analysing them to determine the main themes that emerge from the data. The Pragmatics Profile provides a structured tool for the qualitative investigation of pragmatic aspects of language. The Pragmatics Profile provides a framework for an interview that can be used with different communicators over time and by different informants. Using the interview schedule means that interviewers do not have to devise their own questions for each person and experience can be built up of the way the questions work in practice. There is still flexibility in the way questions are asked as users become more skilled in the application of the interview.

Adoption of a qualitative approach involves a different attitude in relation to data collection and the collation and analysis of results from that associated with quantitative measures.

The findings of the Pragmatics Profile are not summarised numerically but in descriptive form. These descriptions can be used alongside scores from quantitative measures and help provide information concerning the impact of communication difficulties on the person's everyday living. They can enrich the data supplied, providing an added dimension to a set of test scores.

Form of questioning

The Pragmatics Profile questions are rooted in concrete events and everyday experiences to which parents, teachers and others can readily relate. The wording of each question has been carefully chosen and tested. We had to ensure that each question directed respondents to the aspect of communication it was intended to. At the same time the questions had to use language that was easily understandable and that would not sound formal or stilted when spoken by the interviewer.

Questions should be relevant to the experience of any individual, irrespective of whether he or she has difficulties with communication. The questions were designed not to ask directly about communication difficulties or problem behaviours but about how communication is achieved. Difficulties and problems emerge in the course of an interviewee's responses. The questions do not seek retrospective information but focus on the person's current communication. Sometimes, however, interviewees will

also want to comment on what communication was like at a previous time, perhaps before a communication disorder was acquired.

The Profile uses open ended questions which allow interviewees to provide their own responses and to describe the communicative behaviour in their own words rather than 'Yes/no' questions as these may give the impression that a certain behaviour is expected. In addition, such questions may limit the range of information provided by respondents. Instead we have used open-ended questions

The questions identify a particular communicative situation and ask how the person usually acts. The interviewee, therefore, has to provide a short description of how the person usually communicates in that situation. If the interviewee has difficulty in answering, the interviewer may use a number of prompts provided in the form of examples for each question. These can help direct the respondent to the range of behaviours the question is concerned with. The examples are for use as prompts should the interviewer wish to employ them. They are not intended to be presented one by one in checklist fashion. Thus, the interviewee is not given the impression that a particular behaviour is expected. The emphasis is on the interviewee's own spontaneous responses.

Use of examples

Under each question in the Pragmatics Profile a set of examples of communicative behaviours has been provided. Respondents should always first be encouraged to describe the communicative behaviours in their own words. Interviewers should only use the list of examples if the interviewee has difficulty thinking of a response to the question. These lists of examples are provided to help interviewees think about what is being looked for in the question and answer in a relevant way. It must be stressed that the examples are not to be used as a checklist but only as prompts when the person being interviewed fails to think spontaneously of an answer to the question. There is an element of skill on the part of interviewers in deciding when to come in with a prompt and deciding which example to choose. If the interviewer thinks that the interviewee is simply agreeing with whatever examples are being offered, examples that are at a different level of functioning can be suggested which may stimulate a strong negation and perhaps a more informative response.

When the interviewees have described the typical behaviour for each question, the interviewer may decide to probe further, perhaps by asking for an instance of a recent occasion when such a behaviour occurred, especially if the answer seems unexpected, that is, it does not match with what has already been said or what the interviewer already knows about the client. Observations may also be carried out of particular situations identified by the interview to be of interest or in need or corroboration. The more the interview can focus on real incidents from the respondent's experience, the more concrete will be the picture that emerges.

The Pragmatics Profile is intended to be completed as part of an interview and not given to the respondent to complete themselves. In the event that the form is given or sent to the respondent it is essential to make it clear that the main focus is on respondents' spontaneous answers to the questions and emphasizes that the prompts are not intended to be used as a checklist. There is a danger that unusual or atypical behaviours would be missed if the Profile examples were being used in checklist fashion. If people are filling in the Profile on their own, it is essential that the content of their responses is subsequently discussed in detail so that the information is shared fully.

Identifying targets for intervention

The online form includes a section where interviewees are asking about each question and whether it is a priority for therapy. In working with families and communication partners, it is important to identify

which aspects are priorities for the family even if it is not something the SLP would pick to start with. The form therefore asks with each question whether it is a priority and a summary of the priorities is sent to the interviewer when the form is submitted.

Sections

Section A: Communicative functions

This section investigates the person's main mode or modes of expressing communicative functions. It is important to know whether a person has access to the full range of ways of communicating or whether these are restricted. For example, a person may have access only to nonverbal means such as eye movements, gesture, vocalisation, or may use writing as the main vehicle of communication. Another person may express communicative functions largely through single-word utterances. If the person uses alternative and augmentative communication (such as a sign system, a communication board or book or speech generating device) then it may be important to record whether this is used for all or only some communicative functions. Where a person does have access to a full range of ways of expressing communicative functions, then what is recorded is likely to be the person's preferred style of communication and it should be made clear that this is the case. Some functions may tend to cause particular difficulties for an individual. For example, some functions such as asking for assistance, expressing emotion or giving information might seldom be expressed or be expressed in a form different from the one more generally used by that person.

When the Pragmatics Profile is used with unintentional or pre-intentional communicators, it is important to confirm that the behaviours are interpreted by the respondent and may not have been used by the person with understanding that they can impact the behaviour of another person. For example, when someone cries in pain, they may do so knowing that the behaviour will alert the communication partner, or they may cry merely as a response to being in pain without intent to communicate this. Many questions are worded to elicit sufficient detail from the informant such that the interviewer can start to build an understanding of whether behaviours are used with intent to communicate or not. Sensitive probing to elicit additional detail may assist in this and so the interviewer should seek additional information as necessary.

Section B: Response to communication

This section investigates whether the person is responsive to a range of aspects of communication and how the person responds. It may, for example, emerge from the interview that the person tends to ignore others' attempts at communication, appears to misunderstand, frequently asks for repetitions or usually complies with whatever is said. If difficulties with understanding some forms of communication are reported, these should be recorded in the summary. The focus here is on how the person responds and not on whether they respond.

Section C: Interaction and conversation

This section investigates the person's participation in social interactions: how he or she is reported to initiate and maintain interactions and to repair conversational breakdowns and misunderstandings. Any characteristics of the person's style of interaction that are reported to affect the way the conversation flows or is perceived by others can also be noted.

Section D: Contextual variation

This section seeks to understand situations, topics and people that result in the person being most communicative. Contexts which cause particular difficulties can also be noted. Information in this section may be relevant for decisions about the best contexts in which to obtain representative samples of the person's communication.

The assessor can also note the way the communication partner deals with the questions and the degree to which there is an awareness of communication issues and insight into any problems. This information is of importance in the planning of intervention strategies.

How the profile links to intervention

A major aim of the Pragmatics Profile is to provide information and insights that will be useful in planning and carrying out intervention with the person and their communication partners. The goal of intervention is to promote the person's communicative abilities so that he or she is able to participate fully in their everyday life. The use of the Pragmatics Profile encourages cooperation and understanding between the professional and significant people in the person's life. This cooperation and understanding can contribute significantly to enhancing participation for the person.

The user of the Pragmatics Profile gains an understanding of everyday life for the person. Knowledge is gained about how the person communicates and with whom, and the opportunities that are available for communicating. Aspects of the cultural background and lifestyle often emerge. This information can be valuable in suggesting how the person's communication skills may be developed, whilst avoiding suggestions that are unrealistic or would conflict with the family's cultural values.

The role of the Pragmatics Profile in enhancing awareness

The process of answering the Pragmatics Profile questions can in itself enhance awareness of the person's communication and encourage respondents to observe and monitor how the person communicates and how this may change over time. Sometimes a family's main concern is that the person should begin to talk; the person's pre-linguistic attempts at communication may therefore be undervalued. Describing the person's communications via gesture, vocalisations and other means can help the communication partners to see the relevance of these behaviours and the value of encouraging them. Engaging in the conversation and answering the questions in the Pragmatics Profile may help interviewees to become more sensitive to the person's communicative initiations and responses. This awareness may lead to carers spontaneously suggesting ideas for ways in which their own interaction with the person may be modified to facilitate communication.

Obtaining further information

Many users of the Pragmatics Profile will wish to extend their investigation of a person's communication. Insights gained from the Pragmatics Profile may, for example, suggest that observation of the person in specific naturalistic situations would be of value (Lund and Duchan 1983; Ogletree and Price 2018)Such observational data helps to validate the information gained from the interview. The person's responses may alternatively be observed in carefully contrived communicative situations using a dynamic assessment approach(Boers et al. 2013). It may be useful to collect recordings of the interaction between the person and a range of communication partners (e.g. MOSAIC) (Smidt 2010)

Using information gained from the Profile

When the interview has been carried out, there are a number of ways in which information gained from the Pragmatics Profile can contribute to planning intervention. Information can be obtained that is relevant to identifying both strengths and needs and to planning interventions. Intervention might aim to expand the range of functions and responses being expressed, for example, or it might build upon those functions already expressed in order to extend the form in which they are expressed.

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