An exploration of sarcasm detection in children with attention hyperactivity deficit disorder.

Ludlow AK, Chadwick E, Morey A, Edwards R, Gutierrez R.


Abstract

The present research explored the ability of children with ADHD to distinguish between sarcasm and sincerity. Twenty-two children with a clinical diagnosis of ADHD were compared with 22 age and verbal IQ matched typically developing children using the Social Inference-Minimal Test from The Awareness of Social Inference Test (TASIT, McDonald, Flanagan, & Rollins, 2002). This test assesses an individual's ability to interpret naturalistic social interactions containing sincerity, simple sarcasm and paradoxical sarcasm. Children with ADHD demonstrated specific deficits in comprehending paradoxical sarcasm and they performed significantly less accurately than the typically developing children. While there were no significant differences between the children with ADHD and the typically developing children in their ability to comprehend sarcasm based on the speaker's intentions and beliefs, the children with ADHD were found to be significantly less accurate when basing their decision on the feelings of the speaker, but also on what the speaker had said. Results are discussed in light of difficulties in their understanding of complex cues of social interactions, and non-literal language being symptomatic of children with a clinical diagnosis of ADHD. The importance of pragmatic language skills in their ability to detect social and emotional information is highlighted.