

CLD Corner: Nondiscriminatory Standards and Expectations for Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP): Accent and Dialectal Differences.

By: CLD task force members

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Corner was created in an effort to provide information and respond to questions on cultural and linguistic diversity. Questions are answered by members of the TSHA Task Force on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity. Members for 2009-2010 include **Ellen Stubbe Kester**, PhD, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Lynette Austin**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Gina Glover**, MS, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Katsura Aoyama**, PhD; **Nelcy L. Cardenas**, MS, CCC-SLP; **M. Ruth Fernandez**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Margarita Limon-Ordonez**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Barbara Fernandes**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Benigno Valles**, MS, CCC-SLP; and **Jacqueline Lopez**, (student member). Submit your questions to gina.glover@fwisd.org. Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

The Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Task Force is now offering half and full day trainings for school districts, education service centers, university programs and other agencies on Assessment and Intervention with CLD Populations. For information, contact Ellen Kester at ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com.

Nondiscriminatory standards and expectations for speech-language pathologists: Accent and dialectal differences.

The discussion over accent and dialect can bring very interesting reactions. Sometimes those whose accent/dialect differs from the majority experience a feeling of inferiority. Some natives who consider themselves "accentless" may believe they are superior to those with an accent. It is important to keep in mind that everyone's dialect is impacted not only by their first language but also by their geographical region, age, gender, educational level, etc. Therefore, the concept of being "accentless" would not be appropriate to describe those who speak a form of mainstream English for that specific area - in our case, Texas.

Despite the fact that the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (1998) has developed a technical report called "**Students and Professionals Who Speak English with Accents and Nonstandard Dialects: Issues and Recommendations**" and made it available to all professionals, we still encounter a lot of discrimination towards professionals who speak a variety of English "with an accent." The document makes reference to some of the dialects of English spoken in the USA such as individuals who speak Appalachian English, one of the New York

dialects, African American English, British English, Southern English, and English influenced by some other non-English languages such as Spanish.

My Experience (written by task force member **Barbara Fernandes**):

I was born in Brazil and did not learn English until I was 21 years old after moving to this country. During my training as a speech-language pathologist (SLP) I encountered discrimination and prejudice towards what first was only a limited English proficiency to what later became merely an accent as my proficiency of English increased. I have experienced everything from questions such as "how can you become an SLP with such an accent?" or being told by a professor in one of my communication and disorders classes, in front of the entire class, that I in fact had a speech disorder, to being discouraged to pursue a career as an SLP. Dealing positively with such comments was a challenge!

Going through a series of accent reduction CDs did not help me feel empowered as a speaker as I expected. Overcoming the effects of discrimination did not come until I was able to understand and value diversity while being supported by professors in my graduate program.

Now let's talk about another example of students facing discrimination in our profession collected from another colleague; this time involving a native English speaker.

"There was a student (Caucasian) who came from a small town in Texas. She had a strong Texas accent, and was an excellent student academically. A professor (who came from the Northeast) commented, "You will have a hard time finding a job with that accent." Another professor responded, "If she wants to work in rural Texas [which she did], her accent is a plus."

Stories such as the one mentioned above repeat themselves daily, not only in programs that train future professionals, but in professional work environments as well. Just when I thought the times when professionals are judged based on which dialect of English they spoke were behind us, I heard something I just could not believe and it came from an SLP. Here is the little anecdote:

A few professionals (diagnosticians, SLPs, teachers, etc.) were discussing the details of an upcoming project in my school. As part of the project we had to make an audio recording of a book to be played to the bilingual students.

continued on page 25

CLD Corner... (continued from page 24)

We all agreed that we needed someone who is very lively and enthusiastic to make the recording. When the name of one of our liveliest diagnosticians was brought up to the table, the SLP in charge replied, "Oh no! She cannot do this; she has an accent!" While trying to recover from the shock, I realized that some professionals needed to be educated with regards to this issue. Now my colleague frequently speaks of starting some sort of "accent reduction" program. Apparently she believes now that her accent must be eliminated because an SLP made her feel inferior.

SLPs are one of the very few professionals who understand the origin of dialect and accent. It is our responsibility not only to practice and treat other professionals in a way that keeps this knowledge in mind, but also to educate other professionals about the importance of a nondiscriminatory behavior regarding linguistic diversity. A dialect is more than just a form of English - it is part of who we are as cultural individuals and part of our identity.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association technical paper states that "acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity behavior is expected of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in their interactions with colleagues and student clinicians." (ASHA 1998) Perhaps where we should focus is on the skills and knowledge of each individual. Is the SLP capable of identifying problem areas and remediating them?

Test your knowledge of accents and dialects:

1. How many dialects are spoken in the USA?
2. What is ASHA's standard for English language proficiency?
3. What measures are used to demonstrate English proficiency?
4. Is a "Texas Twang" a legitimate form of English?
5. Which accents are acceptable?

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (1998). Students and Professionals Who Speak English with Accents and Nonstandard Dialects: Issues and Recommendations [Technical Report]. Available from www.asha.org/policy.

PAC Changes Mean Better Representation of Statewide Membership

By: Bess Sirmon Fjordbak, PhD, CCC-SLP, VP for Social and Governmental Policy

The TSHA Political Action Committee (PAC) has recently undergone substantial changes in its organizational structure, and will now more appropriately reflect representation of membership across the state. The 2010-2011 PAC is chaired by **Larry Barnes** from Canyon. He will be assisted by Vice-Chair **Allie Atkinson** from Victoria. Membership in the PAC has expanded to 13 voting members, six of whom will be designees from regional associations.

The primary objective of the PAC is to raise funds for political contributions and to attempt to influence the election of individuals to state offices in order to promote the interests and needs of the speech-language pathology and audiology professionals, and of persons with communication disorders. The PAC exists to promote the interests of the profession and of those it serves by facilitating the participation of speech-language pathologists and audiologists in the political process. This is accomplished by encouraging speech-language pathologists and audiologists to understand the institutions and procedures of government and the public issues acted upon by governmental officials who affect

the profession and those it serves. All of these objectives are focused on promotion of public policies that result in accessible and appropriate services in the areas of education and health care, in the training of qualified personnel to deliver these services, and in research that leads to more effective and quality services and benefits to persons with communicative disorders.

All TSHA members are encouraged to join the PAC by making a contribution to further the goals of the Association. Your participation is vital to accomplishing the PAC mission, particularly as we are entering an important election cycle, and heading into a legislative session during which the ability to practice as speech-language pathologists and audiologists will be under close review. You can make a contribution by visiting the TSHA website at www.txsha.org and clicking on the "Donate to TSHA PAC" button on the right side of the page. If you are interested in serving on the PAC Board and participating in fundraising activities, please contact Larry Barnes at lbarnes@wtamu.edu.

