CLD Corner: Considering the Home Language in the Assessment and Treatment of English Language Learners: Spanish

By: Culturally and Linguisticlly Diverse Task Force Members

CLD Corner

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 the 2010-2011 year include **Ellen Stubbe Kester**, PhD, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Margarita Limon-Ordonez**, MS, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Lynette Austin**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **M. Ruth Fernandez**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Barbara Fernandes**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Rachel Aghara**, PhD, CCC-SLP, **Lisa Carver**, MA, CCC-SLP, **Tracey Gray**, MA, CCC-SLP; and **Sarah Panjwani**, BA. Submit questions to ellen.kester@ bilinguistics.com. Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

The Culturally 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.

Happy New Year from the CLD Task Force! Throughout 2011, the CLD Task Force will present a series of articles in the CLD Corner that focuses on languages many of us encounter in assessments. We are starting with Spanish in this issue, and over the course of the year, we will cover several Indian languages, Vietnamese, Arabic and Farsi, Mandarin and Cantonese, and Tagalog. We will highlight information about the language structure and phonology of these languages to help understand what patterns we might see in English language learning children who speak these languages as their native tongue.
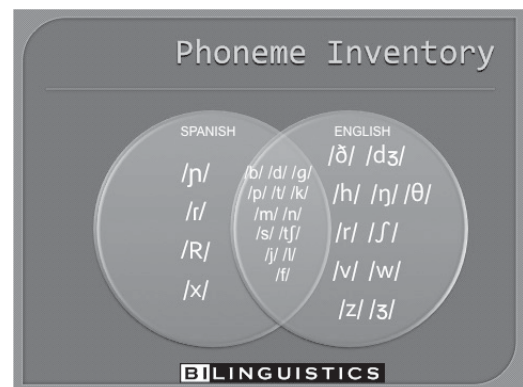
Theoretical Framework

The Competition Model (MacWinney, 1997; MacWhinney & Bates, 1989) has been applied to bilingualism to help explain what types of errors can occur in children who are learning English as their second language. The crux of The Competition Model is that each language has cues that help us learn the language and interpret what others say to us. For example, verbs provide information about the subject and tense; when you hear the word "eats," you know that the subject is singular and that the time is the present. Word order is another cue. In English, the most common word order is subject-verb-object. When we encounter sentences we do not understand, we can use our knowledge of sentence structure to deduce what was said. For example, in the sentence, "The boy parged the gum from his shoe," we might guess that "parged" is a verb (because it follows the subject) that means "took off" or "removed."

Cues are not consistent across languages. Children learning two languages at once are often faced with "trying out" cues or rules. For example, the plural rule in English is "add 's' " while in Spanish the rule is "add 's' when the word ends in a vowel and add 'es' when the word ends in a consonant." This is the reason most English speakers think that the singular form of "tamales" is "tamale." It is really "tamal." Do we suspect that someone has a language impairment when they say "tamale?" No, we know that we can explain the error as an influence from your native language. This is the framework we can use in assessment to differentiate children who are making errors that result from language influence versus those who are experiencing difficulty learning language in general.

Spanish Phonology as Compared to English

The following charts include information about the consonants and vowels in English and Spanish. These Venn diagrams show the sounds that are unique to Spanish on the left side, the sounds that are unique to English on the right side, and the sounds that are common to both languages in the middle. We can use this information to help determine whether we can expect errors on certain sounds. We would be less concerned about a child who is only making errors on sounds that are unique to English but can produce all of the sounds unique to Spanish and the common sounds than a child who is making errors on the common sounds and the sounds of their native language. That said we also have to take into account the normal developmental sequence of the sounds. Those that are unique to one language or the other also tend to be later occurring sounds.

Kester & Prath (2007). Reprinted with permission from Bilinguistics.

CLD Corner... *(continued)*

Spanish and English also differ considerably in their vowel systems. Spanish has five vowels, all of which are included in English. The result of having fewer vowels in Spanish is that native Spanish speakers tend to pick the Spanish vowel closest to the English target until they have acquired all of the English vowels. In the chart below, the Spanish vowels are circled. Someone who has not acquired the English vowel system might use /i/ for /I/.

Kester & Prath, 2007. Reprinted with permission from Bilinguistics.

In addition to inventory differences, there are also differences in the phonotactic constraints in English and Spanish. For example, there are no S-clusters in word initial position in Spanish, but there are in English. Also, only five sounds are allowed in the final position of Spanish. Those sounds are [r], [l], [n], [s], and [d]. English allows most sounds to occur in word final position. These are important differences to consider when assessing and setting goals for clients. If the only final consonants that an English Language Learner (ELL) omitted were those that are not allowed to occur in final position in Spanish, we are likely looking at a language difference rather than a language disorder.

Language Differences in Spanish and English
This is not a comprehensive review of the differences in the language systems of English and Spanish, but we will highlight some of the more frequent differences. In the area of syntax, there are multiple differences that are often seen to influence English production by native speakers of Spanish. One of those is word order. In English, there is little variation from the subject-verb-object word order, while in Spanish there is more flexibility. An ELL from a Spanish-speaking home might produce a sentence such as "the candy, the girl ate!," which would be an acceptable structure in Spanish but is not acceptable in English. Pronoun dropping is another feature of Spanish that differs in English. Once the subject is established in Spanish, a pronoun, such as "he" or "she" is not required. Difficulty with pronouns is a red flag for language

impairment in a monolingual English speaker but could result from an influence from Spanish.

Morphology is an area where early learners of a second language often struggle. For Spanish speakers learning English, we often see the use of the simplest form of the verb to express present tense, past tense, or future tense. For example, "The boy *go* to the store." While the verb system in Spanish is much more complex than the English system, children with typical development tend to simplify verbs until they learn the correct verb morphology.

Finally, we also see differences in semantics. Prepositions are one of the most common areas where differences are noted. There is not a one-to-one correspondence with the prepositions used in English and Spanish. For example, the word "en" in Spanish is represented by "in" and "on" in English. Other examples of preposition differences are presented in the chart below.

Spanish use of prepositions	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT	Possible misuses of prepositions in L2 (English)
"en"	"in" and "on"	Put the food in the plate.* Put the food on the bowl.*
"pensar en" "pensar de"	To think about or think of	I think on him everyday.* You can do it if you think of it.*
Enojarse con	Get mad at	Get mad with.*
Soñar con	To dream of	I dreamt with you last night*
Decidir de	To decide on	Have you decided of what you want?*
Casarse con	To marry or be married to	Is he married with her?*
Estar enamorado de	To be in love with	Is he in love of her?*
Consistir en	To consist of	What does your plan consist in?*
Buscar	To look for	I'm looking my toy.*

Kester & Gorman (2004). Chart is reprinted with permission from Bilinguistics.

We have highlighted in this article some of the differences in Spanish and English that can lead to errors in the English productions of those who speak Spanish as their first language. It is by no means a comprehensive list. This framework of trying to identify whether errors can be explained by one's native language can be applied more broadly and across languages. Stay tuned throughout the year for a wealth of information about many of the languages we encounter in our jobs.

Legislative Friends of TSHA

By: Gilda Lopez, MS, CCC-SLP, Political Action Committe Member

For most of us, the start of a new year makes us think of resolutions. We reflect on the changes we want or need to make to make our lives better. Many of us seem to share the same New Year's resolutions. Spending more time with family and friends is one of the top 10 resolutions Americans will make this year, according to an article written by Albrecht Powell featured on the About.com website.

This year, the Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (TSHA) plans to continue spending time and showing our gratitude to those legislators who support our profession and are interested in improving the access to the services we can provide to the people we serve.

Senator **Leticia Van de Putte** (District 26, San Antonio) is a long-time friend of TSHA. The senator is a practicing pharmacist, who is deeply involved in education issues. Senator Van de Putte is a strong advocate for children and quality public education and currently serves on the Senate Committee on Education. Multiple civic organizations and community groups have recognized her as one of the most effective, hardworking, sincere, and influential legislators in Texas.

The TSHA legislative team has worked closely with Senator Van de Putte and her staff for many years. She has sponsored TSHA's Loan Repayment bill in the last two legislative sessions. This bill provides assistance with repayment of educational loans to speech-language pathologists (SLPs) or audiologists who seek work in public schools or universities. Senator Van de Putte is a friend indeed who cares about improving the lives of the schoolchildren of Texas.

Representative **Garnet F. Coleman** (District 147, Harris County) has also supported TSHA issues for many years. He carried our Insurance Bill during the last legislative session. This bill reduced the disparity and limitations within private health insurance that children and families experience when accessing speech, language, and hearing services. While the bill was viewed as "a work in progress," Coleman achieved getting it heard in committee. Representative Garnet F. Coleman is a legislative friend serving on the House Public Health Committee who cares deeply about human issues affecting Texans.

Representative **Dan Branch** (District 108, Dallas) is another long-time friend of TSHA. As chair of the House Higher Education and Public Education Finance Committee, where the loan repayment bill was being heard last session, he provided information to TSHA member **Heather McFadyen**

regarding the progress on this bill. Recently his committee delivered a report with recommendations to the legislature entitled "Education: Priority One". Representative Branch is a key TSHA contact in the legislature.

These three legislators are great examples of our many "friends" in the legislature to whom we need to show support. Your TSHA Political Action Committee contributions allow us to say "thank you" for carefully considering our issues and listening to our positions.

During the upcoming Texas legislature session, when bills will be introduced that will impact the way we perform our jobs for our patients, students, and families, TSHA will be there contacting our former friends and making new ones.

You too can make a New Year's resolution to spend time and become a friend of your legislators in Austin. Let your legislators know about you, your profession, and what you do and care about. Legislative support for our bills comes from legislators having the best information to make the best decisions.

Consider making a TSHA PAC contribution so that TSHA will achieve the 2011 resolution to spend more time with key friends in Austin.

CLD Corner... *(continued)*

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