Highlighting Communication Contrasts between Vietnamese and English

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (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 the 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;**

/f/æ/tʃ/ ... /z/b/ɛ/t/u/

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD) Task Force is now offering half- and full-day trainings for school districts, educational service centers, university programs, and other agencies on assessment and intervention with CLD populations. For information, contact Ellen Kester at ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com.

Tracey Gray, MA, CCC-SLP; Stacy Thomas, BS, and **Sarah Panjwani, BA.** Submit your questions to ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com. Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

Challenges speech-language pathologists encounter when a linguistically diverse individual is referred for a communication assessment include gathering information about the individual's native language(s) and related cultural components of communication and understanding how first language skills compare and contrast with skills acquired in English. Also, as clinicians, we are presented with the challenges of providing both efficacious and culturally competent services to caseloads that include increasing numbers of English language learners. This requires SLPs to update our knowledge about different languages, communication styles, and the influence of the structure of the first language on the second language. This article provides preliminary information on the phonology and syntax of the Vietnamese language in addition to information regarding Vietnamese-influenced English in order to help clinicians separate common patterns typically observed when Vietnamese speakers learn English as a second language from a potential speech and/or language disorder.

Phonology

Vietnamese is a tonal language, with six distinct phonemic tones (variations in pitch and stress), in which each tone represents a meaning change. There are three types of phonemes in Vietnamese: tones, consonants, and vowels (Tang, 2007). Vietnamese is generally considered a monosyllabic language (with a few exceptions, including some poly-syllabic words borrowed from other languages); however, most utterances include a minimum of two syllables. Several geographically based dialects of Vietnamese exist, including central, northern, and southern dialects. The regional dialects, while different, have been found to be mutually intelligible among speakers from different regions (Hwa-Froelich, Hodson, and Edwards, 2002).

Vietnamese has 24 consonants and 11 different single vowel sounds. While consonant clusters do not generally occur in Vietnamese, vowel diphthongs and triphthongs are not uncommon. The Vietnamese consonants include nine plosives (/p/, /b/, /t/, /th /, /ʈ/, /d/, /c/, /k/, /g/, /ʔ/), four nasals (/m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /ɲ/), two glides (/j/, /w/), five fricatives (/f/,/z̻/, /ɣ/, /x/, /h/), one affricate (tʃ), and three liquids (/l/, /r/, /ʈ/) (Hwa-Froelich, 2007). Consonants can occur in initial and final position of words that are typically monosyllabic. Final consonants are voiceless stops or nasals, which include: /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/, and /ng/. Tang (2007) reported that Vietnamese has a wider variety of single vowel and vowel

combinations, including seven shared single vowels like /i/ as in the word "see," /æ/ as in the word "cat," /ɛ/ as in the word "egg," /ɔ/ as in the word "caught," /a/ as in the word "hot," /ʊ/ as in the word "hook," and /u/ as in the word "blue." Additionally, Tang (2007) described five single vowels in Vietnamese that do not have an English counterpart and 30 possible combinations of vowels that create diphthongs and triphthongs. A more thorough description of phoneme production in addition to audio samples of vowel and consonant productions can be found online (see Ager, S. 2011).

Typical phonological patterns used by speakers of Vietnamese who are learning English would include omission of final consonants, addition of tones that impact English prosody, simplification of English consonant clusters, or interjection of vowels between two consonants (/pə-liz/ for "please") (Pham and Kohnert, 2008). Common final consonant substitutions that may be observed by Vietnamese second language learners while speaking English may also include /p/ for /b/,

/s/ʊ/v/t͡ʃ//k/m/æ/s/tʰ/l/t͡ʃ/u/s/

/t/ for /d/, /p/ for /f/, /p/ or /b/ for /v/, omission of /s/ or /ʃ/ for /s/, omission of /ʃ/, /s/ or /ʃ/ for /z/, /ʃ/ for /t͡ʃ/, and /n/ for /l/ (Hwa-Froelich, et al, 2002).

Syntax and Morphological Characteristics

Both English and Vietnamese include content words (nouns, verbs, objects) and function words that serve to relate words to one another (Tang, 2007); however, the syntactical structures are quite distinct. Vietnamese grammar consists of word order and the use of function words. Vietnamese does not mark tense with bounded morphemes such as -ed and -ing but instead uses optional words to show past, present, or future, although time is more often marked within the context of the sentence (Pham and Kohnert, 2008). Additionally, plural forms do not mark aspect and number but instead numerical references precede the noun (such as "two dog") and no changes in agreement occur. Although the common word order of sentences (subject-verb-object, or SVO) exists in both languages, remarkable differences in Vietnamese include that adjectives always modify nouns (example "cat white,"), question words are interjected where the answer will be expected in an SVO sentence ("who want eat?"

with the response "Mom want eat."), and the use of negation has two forms ("no" precedes the verb ad in "I no play," or in the case when the copula is used, a negation phrase [khộng phải] meaning "not correct" is required, using the form "It no correct to be cat," with the translation "it is not a cat") (D.H. Nguyen, 1997 cited in Tang [2007]). Changes in meaning using the phonemic tones are also employed to indicate pronouns such as "this" or "that" in relation to a third person and prepositions. Both languages use affixation (such as the use of prefixes and suffixes) to change word meaning; however, in Vietnamese these would appear as separate words that respectively precede or modify a noun or verb. Luong (1990) as cited in Tang (2007) described that pronouns in Vietnamese are mostly kinship terms that indicate age, gender, and blood relations and their use has both social context and depends upon the relationship between the speaker and the listener, such as "older sister," "father's younger brother," or "aunt," although these are also used to address other people of similar age and status.

Tang (2007) and Pham and Kohnert (2008) summarized common grammatical and syntactical patterns for Vietnamese speakers learning English, which include omission of word endings for tense, plurality, and auxiliary verbs, difficulty with word order for questions, and lack of word form changes to indicate a change in word type, as in "this is so bore" instead of "boring."

Cultural Components for Consideration

Knowledge about Vietnamese culture and attitudes about both verbal and nonverbal communication is critical to clinicians during both assessment and intervention. General cultural differences between American and Asian cultures encompass both gender and age restrictions on social interactions, including bowing of the head and looking away during greetings and using indirect eye contact as a sign of respect. In regard to social touching or handholding, between same sexes this is considered acceptable; however, handshaking between persons of the opposite sex is not

customary (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2008). There is high value placed on education, which includes not only acquisition of academic skills, but also highly regards the learning of respect for elders as a sign of social responsibility. Pham and Kohnert (2008) also described the parent/child relationship as hierarchical, in which a parent-directed interaction style is preferred and children are often instructed to learn by observing adult models. All of these factors have direct implications during initial communications with family members and interactions with the child during the intervention process. ★

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