

CLD Corner: Considering the Home Language in the Assessment and Treatment of English Language Learners: Languages Spoken in India

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 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 your questions to ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com. Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (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.

Throughout 2011, the CLD Task Force will present a series of articles in the CLD Corner that focuses on languages that many of us working in the state of Texas encounter in assessments. This second article in the series will focus on languages spoken in India, with a particular emphasis on Hindi. Specifically, we will highlight information about the historical and social contexts in which different languages were spoken as well as the phonology, script, and grammatical structure of Hindi to help understand what patterns we might see in English language learners who also speak Hindi.

Languages in India

There are many languages and dialects spoken in India. Thrasher (1996) compiled evidence indicating that the languages of India represent four or five major linguistic families, and census information taken at various times in the 20th century indicated that up to 188 languages and 544 dialects were being used. Currently, there are fewer than 20 officially recognized languages spoken by large populations in India (Gupta & Jamal, 2007; Thrasher, 1996). Some of these languages are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telegu, and Urdu. Census data from 2000 indicated that more than one million people living in the United States spoke a language from India, with Gujarati, Hindi, and Urdu as the most spoken languages.

Many historical and political factors contribute to the current state of how Indian languages are used in home, school, social, and governmental contexts. Languages typically used in northern India may be based on the Devangari script and share roots with Sanskrit, while many languages typically spoken in southern India are considered Dravidian languages. Official governmental, legal, and business transactions are often conducted in Hindi and English. However, the practice of using Hindi or English as official national languages is not supported by all, and state and regional languages are also well-represented in daily interactions, schooling, and social media. As India is a nation in which many languages are used for multiple purposes, individuals living in India can often understand, speak, read, or write in multiple languages. Additionally, speakers of different languages may be able to understand each other to a great extent. For example, while Hindi and Urdu employ different scripts, they have historical influences from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, and the current daily spoken forms of Hindi and Urdu are very similar and mutually intelligible (Shukla, 2000; Thrasher, 1996). As it is not possible to provide detailed information about so many different languages in a single article, the current CLD Corner will focus on understanding the features of Hindi in comparison to English. Among all the Indic languages, Hindi is likely spoken or understood by the greatest number of people.

Sounds in Hindi and English

The following charts include information about the consonants and vowels in Hindi and English. These Venn diagrams show the sounds that are unique to Hindi 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 speaker who is only making errors on sounds that are unique to English but can produce all of the sounds unique to Hindi as well as the sounds that are shared in Hindi and English. In contrast, when a speaker produces sound errors on the sounds that are common to both languages as well as those which exist only in their native language, this provides evidence of a potential speech disorder. And, of course, the speaker's age and amount of exposure to each language must be taken into account. Just as we don't expect a monolingual English-speaking 2-year-old child to accurately produce all of the phonemes of English, we cannot expect a bilingual speaker to produce all the sounds of his or her multiple languages without adequate exposure to each language and an appropriate age of development.

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English might be mistaken for language impairment when in fact such instances could simply be a sign of language transfer due to incomplete acquisition of English.

Unlike English verbs, Hindi verbs mark agreement with the person, number, and gender features of the nominative subject noun phrase (Nevins, Dillon, Malhotra, & Phillips, 2007). However, pronouns in Hindi are not sensitive to gender; for example, the formal you *aap* can be used when speaking to a male or female elder. A significant difference between the languages is that Hindi has three second-person pronouns (Apte, 1968). In English, *you* is used for singular and plural; however, Hindi has one singular second-person pronoun (informal you *tuu*) and two plural second-person pronouns (*tum* and *aap*). The decision of which plural form to use is dependent on the social context. In Hindi culture, the social context is dependent on the social status of the speaker, listener, age, caste, class classification, and the relationship between speakers (Apte, 1968).

We also see differences in semantics. Due to the many cultures that have contributed to Indian history, Hindi has borrowed words from many languages. Consequently, there are synonyms for many words in the language (Agnihotri, 2007). For example, the Hindi equivalent for *garden* can be *baag*, *bagiicaa*, or *upvan*. Hindi also has a number of redundant compounds, in which the two elements of the compound are drawn from different languages but have similar meanings and are used as single words. For example, the Hindi equivalent for *wealth* is *dhan-daulat* and for *marriage* is *shaadii-vivah*. These features of Hindi vocabulary could pose a challenge to speech-language pathologists (SLPs) interested in developing a vocabulary test because multiple responses to the same item could be considered accurate. Additionally, knowledge of the historical and social features should be considered when working with translators, interpreters, or paraprofessionals as each individual is likely to be most comfortable communicating with the vocabulary associated with his or her own dialect.

An additional difference between English and Hindi is that Hindi noun inflections change depending on number (singular or plural) and case (nominative, oblique, and vocative). The nominative case is generally associated with the subject of the sentence. For example, in the sentence *Kamraa ganda hai* (The room is dirty), the word *kamraa* (room) is the nominative singular subject of the sentence. The oblique singular case, *kamre*, is used before prepositions (i.e., *me/in*), as in the sentence *Kamre me gand hai* (There is garbage in the room). In this second sentence, notice

that a case change (i.e., oblique) resulted in an inflection change on the noun when compared to the case of the first sentence (i.e., nominative). When a number change is made, as in the nominative plural *Kamre gande hai* (The rooms are dirty), notice that the word for *room* takes the same form, *kamre*, as in the singular oblique example, but now the noun represents the plural nominative. It is likely that learners need to memorize these noun forms as the application of a rule does not always lead a speaker to a correct grammatical form (Agnihotri, 2007).

We have highlighted in this article some of the differences between Hindi and English. Awareness of these differences can help SLPs differentiate errors in English that could be predicted by the structure of a first language such as Hindi from errors that would not be associated with Hindi speakers. Errors that would not be associated with transfer or borrowing of sounds and grammatical rules from Hindi into English may provide evidence of a true speech or language disorder in a bilingual Hindi-English speaker.

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