

The Differences Between Spanish-Speaking SLPs and Bilingual SLPs

By: TSHA Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD) Committee

*The CLD 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 Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD) Committee. Members for the 2013-2014 year include **Lisa Carver, MA, CCC-SLP** (co-chair); **Ivan Mejia, MA, CCC-SLP** (co-chair); **Raul Prezas, PhD, CCC-SLP**; **Christina Wiggins, MS, CCC-SLP**; **Brittney Goodman, MS, CCC-SLP**; **Sarah Panjwani, MS, CFY-SLP**; **Mary Bauman, MS, CCC-SLP**; **Phuong Palafox, MS, CCC-SLP**; **Marisol Contreras, BS**; and **Alisa Baron, MA, CF-SLP**.*

Providing speech therapy services to increase communication skills is always the best option once a disorder has been identified, but addressing the linguistic and cultural needs of the child and family in each situation requires culturally competent clinicians to plan services that will lead to the best overall outcome for the client.

Submit your questions to ivanmejia@bilingualspeech.org. Look for responses from the CLD Committee on the Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (TSHA) website (www.txsha.org) and in the *Communicologist*.

Are you a speech-language pathologist (SLP) who speaks some Spanish, a fluent speaker of Spanish who is an SLP, or a trained bilingual SLP? What are the differences, and why are the distinctions important?

- A speech-language pathologist who understands and speaks some Spanish while providing services to bilingual or Spanish-speaking clients during the course of clinical practice can help to improve clients' functional communication skills.
- A speech-language pathologist who also has competency in comprehension and expression of the Spanish language can also provide therapy to help clients improve their communication skills.
- A trained bilingual speech-language pathologist who speaks a second language fluently and has received additional training on the

unique development of speech and language skills in bilinguals is familiar with both formal and informal assessment techniques for bilinguals, knows appropriate therapy targets, and is able to acknowledge how cultural variables affect the therapeutic process.

The distinction between bilingually trained SLPs and SLPs who use Spanish in therapy with bilingual clients is critical in order to accurately diagnose communication disorders, select the most appropriate therapy goals, and provide information that is culturally appropriate to family members.

In the state of Texas, there is a high demand for speech-language pathologists who speak both English and Spanish due to the large population of clients who speak Spanish as their primary language. Employers seeking to hire staff to serve these clients may or may not be

aware of the recommendations of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) for bilingual service providers to possess specific skills in the following areas (ASHA, 1989):

- **Proficiency:** A bilingual service provider has near-native proficiency in both languages spoken in regard to lexicon (vocabulary), semantics (meaning), phonology (pronunciation), morphology/syntax (grammar), and pragmatics.

- **Knowledge of:**

- The processes of normal language development among bilinguals and how these differ from language development in monolinguals;

- Both formal and informal assessment techniques to competently diagnose communication disorders and language differences;

- Treatment approaches and targets best suited for bilinguals; and

- Cultural information, the role of culture in the communication skills of bilinguals, and how it affects treatment outcomes.

A clinician who presents himself or herself as a bilingual SLP or audiologist must possess the specific skills in each area above. In this article, the authors will present the different paths that a clinician might choose in order to demonstrate competence as an SLP or audiologist who has been trained in bilingual issues.

There are several graduate-level programs for clinicians who

would like to attend a formal course of study that provides a bilingual certificate upon completion. In Texas, there is currently no statewide bilingual certification available for bilingual speech-language pathologists or audiologists through the state licensing board; the burden of competency is the responsibility of the clinician. In the United States, there are about 20 universities that offer some kind of specialized bilingual training in communication sciences and disorders and at least four universities located in Texas with



bilingual certification as an option as part of their SLP master's programs. A brief description of these programs is provided below:

- **Our Lady of the Lake University** in San Antonio has a bilingual certification (Spanish/English) program that graduate students may apply for as part of

the master of arts specialization in communication sciences and disorders. This degree plan includes 41 semester hours of classes, some specialized coursework, and practicum with bilingual and monolingual clients.

- **Texas Christian University** in Fort Worth has a master of science program with an emphasis in bilingual SLP with a total of 46 credit hours that includes two additional courses (*Multicultural Issues in Communication Disorders* and *Speech, Language, and Cognition in Bilinguals*) and a variety of practicum experiences that prepare students for working with culturally and linguistically diverse children and adults.

- **The University of Texas at Austin** has a bilingual certificate that is available as part of the master of arts in speech-language pathology degree that includes two additional courses and 125 contact hours of practicum with bilingual clients. Specialized courses include *Language Theory and Bilingualism* and *Collaborative Models of Assessment and Treatment for Bilingual Children*.

- **The University of Texas at El Paso** requires 75 contact hours with bilingual clients and offers a certificate in bilingual speech-language pathology that requires several specialized courses, including *Structure of Spanish for Language Professionals* and *Multicultural/Multilingual Issues in Communication*.

- **Texas State University in San Marcos** offers a bilingual/

multicultural cognate that includes coursework and additional clinical requirements as part of their graduate course of studies. This bilingual track at the graduate level includes specialized classes as well as on- and off-campus clinical experiences with monolingual Spanish-speaking clients and bilingual (Spanish-English) clients.

• **The University of Texas-Pan American** in Edinburg prepares students for independent professional practice as speech-language pathologists for service in a diverse and multicultural society through coursework and practicum.

Continuing education unit (CEU) courses are a viable option for SLPs who already hold a master's degree, have gained some proficiency in Spanish, and also have an interest in gaining knowledge about bilingual issues without returning to the academic setting. Many CEU opportunities across the state and online are available for clinicians to learn about language development in bilinguals that address the different areas of bilingualism. Opportunities for learning about bilingual language development are found on the ASHA website as the website offers several introductory-level CEU courses under the "Multicultural Issues" heading. Course selections include "Second Language Acquisition in Children: Considerations for Assessment," "Assessing Children Who Speak Spanish: Milestones in Spanish Grammar Development," and "Bilingual Phonological Development and Disorders" (www.asha.org/ce). Other useful websites that provide numerous CEU

opportunities for learning about bilingual language development include:

• **www.bilinguistics.com** ("Difference vs. Disorder: Speech Development in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations"; "Difference vs. Disorder: Language Development in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations"; "Assessment with English Language Learners: A Bilingual Approach"; "Cultural Considerations for Speech-Language Evaluations"; "Cultural Considerations for Speech-Language Therapy"; "Language Assessment of Bilingual Children")

• **www.northernspeech.com** ("Multicultural Populations: Assessment and Treatment Considerations for the Speech-Language Pathologist")

In addition to taking CEU courses to learn about the different areas of bilingual speech-language pathology, it is also helpful to find another bilingual SLP to serve as a mentor and colleague to discuss information and assessment results and guide the treatment process. A visit to ASHA's "Find a Professional Near You" link ([see www.asha.org/findpro](http://www.asha.org/findpro)) may prove to be a great starting point for finding someone who is skilled in the area of bilingual speech language pathology. Additionally, joining ASHA's Special Interest Group 14, "Communication Disorders and Sciences in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations,"

is a valuable resource for clinicians and provides access to many bilingually trained SLPs who can respond to questions and make recommendations in an open forum. ★

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