

Bilingual Speech and Language Assessment- Identifying Communication Disorders in Multicultural Populations

The identification of bilingual children with communication disorders is often a challenge. Results from norm-referenced tests are difficult to interpret because of the heterogeneity of the bilingual student population. Students may perform poorly on these measures for a variety of reasons. Spanish-speaking students who have limited opportunities for continued use of Spanish, may lose proficiency in Spanish as skill is acquired in English. These students may perform poorly in both languages, giving the false impression that they have language disorders.

In the United States, a variety of dialects of Spanish are spoken. Many words commonly used in Mexico, for example, are not used in Puerto Rico. These dialectal differences can significantly affect test performance. When assessing the language skills of bilingual children, it is important to examine the strategies used by them during communication in a variety of settings. It is also important to determine how they respond when various types of intervention strategies are used.

Detailed guidelines for assessing children from bilingual backgrounds have been described in [Multicultural Students with Special Language Needs](#) by Roseberry-McKibbin (2018). This book also provides detailed information about cultural differences that may affect language performance in the classroom and during testing.

In the [Bilingual Communication Assessment Resource](#), Mattes and Saldaña-Illingworth (2009) described specific strategies that can be used to distinguish communication differences from disorders. Strategies for identifying disorders of articulation/phonology, language, voice, and fluency are presented. The book includes parent interview questionnaires, assessment tasks in English and Spanish, observational record forms, and other tools that can be used to collect information.

By carefully examining how bilingual children use language and how they respond to instruction, communication disorders can be identified without the use of norm-referenced tests. When assessing bilingual children, it is important to examine their actual use of language in functional communication contexts.

References

Mattes, L. J. and Saldaña-Illingworth, C. (2009). *The Bilingual Communication Assessment Resource*. Oceanside, CA: Academic Communication Associates.

Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (2018). *Multicultural students with special language needs: Practical strategies for assessment and intervention*. Oceanside, CA: Academic Communication Associates.