Identifying Language Differences from Language Disorders in Second Language Learners

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Agenda

Issues in assessing bilingual children
The second language acquisition process
The assessment toolkit
Typical and atypical patterns of 2nd language acquisition
Interpreting test results

Issues in Assessing Bilingual Children

By 2030, nearly 40% of the children in the U.S. will learn a home language other than English

IDEIA Statute:
Reduce the inappropriate over-identification of children, especially minority and limited English-proficient children, as having a disability.

Statute: Title 1.D.664.b.2.D.vii
Learning two languages

“Human language is remarkably complex, and yet children who are typically developing acquire language with what appears to be minimal effort. The process of learning two languages is not any more difficult than learning one, provided that the conditions required for the development of one language are also present when one is learning the second.”

What are the conditions required?

- “Intact cognitive system that is able to process the regularities of the language(s) and
- a rich linguistic environment that stimulates and encourages communication and that provides sufficient exemplars of the regularities of the language(s) to which the child is being exposed” (Iglesias & Rojas, 2012)

Our typical referral population

- Spotty academic history
  - Frequent moves from school to school or town or town
  - ELL support varies
    - Immersion programs
    - Second language instruction as “tutoring” or translation of English instruction
    - Dual language/bilingual program in which both L1 and L2 are supported
- Lack of a rich linguistic environment
  - Accurate L2 models lacking at home
  - Culture of poverty
Basic Assumptions

- Given supportive environments, typically developing children are able to learn two languages relatively quickly.
- It is fairly straightforward process to identify and qualify children with severe language impairments for services.
- Clinicians typically have questions about identifying children mild to moderate language impairments. These children who are referred usually have fair to good basic interpersonal communication skills in the second language but classroom performance lags behind age-level peers.

Some terms

- Simultaneous Second Language Learners
  - learn more than one language before the age of 3
- Sequential Second Language Learners
  - learn another language after the age of 3
- L1: first language learned
- L2: second language learned
Where is the bilingual student in the language learning process?

- Second language learners seldom (if ever) have “equal” proficiency in the two languages they speak.
- ELLs can be anywhere on the continuum of language mastery in L2.
- Proficiency shifts depending on the content of the conversation and the setting of the speaker(s).
- A = first language
- B = second language

| A | A | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B | B |

Adapted from Valdez & Figueroa, 1994

Normal bilingual phenomena can look similar to a disorder to those unfamiliar with 2nd language acquisition

Some typical characteristics of bilingual speakers in the U.S.
- Arrest: The level of proficiency in the first language does not change.
- Attrition: Language loss and language forgetting
- Avoidance: Specific element of a language is not used
- Language non use (silent period): a language is not used for communication purposes
- Overgeneralization: a language rule is applied in an unrestricted fashion
- Language transfer: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and/or pragmatic characteristic is used in another language
- Fossilization: an inaccurate rule stabilizes to the point of continual usage

Result: Bilingual children often misdiagnosed
- Low test scores in both Spanish and English

(Center 4 Educational Service Center, 2005)

“Cultural Due Diligence” when assessing students from CLD populations

- A cultural due diligence process
  - Investigate available information about the student’s language and culture as well as developmental, family, and educational history
  - Assembling relevant, accurate information about a student yields a body of evidence that will assist you in making recommendations for intervention

(Lewis & Cheng, 2008)
Appropriate diagnosis: An information gathering, interpretive process

- What is best practice?
  - Information gathering from multiple sources
  - Importance of due diligence and hypothesis testing
  - Test in both L1 and L2

- Lewis, et. al. (2010)
  - Gather existing information
  - Review to determine additional information needed
  - Ask questions: what factors may be contributing to the student’s difficulties in the classroom?
  - Observe in multiple settings with multiple communication partners
  - Determine next steps: classroom interventions? Assessment?
  - Integrate all information
    - Where does the preponderance of evidence lie?
    - What are the student’s best options for assistance?

Assessment: What is in your toolkit?

- Historical Information
  - Development
  - Medical
  - Education
  - Family

- Language Sampling and Analysis

- Observations
  - In the classroom
  - With L1 peers
  - With L2 peers

- Dynamic assessment

- Interviews with parents and teachers

- Comparisons to normative groups

Where do you get the tools?

- ASHA.org
- Bilingual Language Development and Disorders, 2nd Ed. (B. Goldstein, 2012)
- Assessing Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students: A Practical Guide (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005)
Grammar (Morphology/Syntax) Patterns: Typically developing ELLs

- ELLs are in some point of transition from using the primary language exclusively to learning linguistic rules of the second language.
- That transition period results in unstable use of grammar.
- Patterns may resemble those of monolingual speakers with a disorder.
- Obtain spontaneous language samples and examine production across genres (e.g., story retell, descriptions, conversation).
- Language structures that do not suggest a disorder in the absence of other types of errors:
  - Article-noun agreement errors (el mano instead of la mano)
  - Few noun-verb agreement errors (Los niños se cayó)

Grammar (Morphology/Syntax) Patterns: Typically developing ELLs

- Code switching
  - Is a rule governed form of language use.
  - Often includes switching of content words (nouns, adjectives) and phrases.
  - Inserting a noun is the most frequent form.
  - Typical children never go through a stage of random use of each language or frequent ungrammatical code switching.
  - Inconsistencies in language rule application (may have learned some irregular forms correctly (children) but not others “mans”) or over-application of a rule (sheeps instead of sheep).
  - No differences were found in the code switching behaviors of typically developing ELLs and those diagnosed with a language disorder.

Grammar (Morphology/Syntax): Atypical Patterns in Spanish

- Language structures that suggest a disorder in Spanish:
  - Omission of an article (Pelota está allá)
  - Omission of prepositions (está mesa for está en la mesa)
  - Pronouns errors.
  - Pronoun substitutions or doubling (Quiero verla a la niña)
  - Omission of clitic pronouns (me, te, se).
  - Ex. Peino “[I] comb” instead of Me peino for “[I] comb myself”
  - Verb errors.
  - Numerous noun-verb agreement errors.
  - Failure to use subjunctive mood in obligatory contexts.
Articulation/phonology Patterns:
Typical patterns in Spanish

- Bilingual children have similar phonetic inventories and phonological error patterns as monolingual Spanish and monolingual English speakers
- Use developmentally appropriate phonological processes
- L1 phonology may influence L2 phonology and morphology
  - Ex. Spanish Phonology affecting English phonology
    - May use flap or trilled r for English r
    - May add “es” to words beginning /s/ blends, such as “estreet” for street
  - Ex. Spanish phonology affecting English morphology
    - May delete final /s/ in third person singular forms (he run for he runs) or plurals (two dog for two dogs)
    - May delete “ed” past tense verb forms (jump for jumped)

Articulation/phonology patterns:
Atypical Patterns in Spanish

- Lower consonant accuracy
- Higher error rates on clusters, liquids, and fricatives than other classes of sounds
- More phonological errors and higher percentages of occurrence than observed with typically developing peers
  - Ex.
    - Backing: using a sound produced in the back of the mouth that is usually produced in the front, such as /k/ for /t/ (e.g., coma for toma)
    - Weak syllable deletion

Pragmatic (Social Communication):
Typical patterns in Spanish

- Differences from mainstream interactions
  - Reduced personal space
  - Reduced eye contact when a child converses with an adult
  - Children engage in verbal interactions with peers more than with adults
  - More physical contact (e.g., touching arm) when conversing
Pragmatics (Social Communication)
Atypical Patterns

• If pragmatic difficulties were present only in the weaker language...this was probably due merely to a lack of adequate exposure to the second language.”

Semantic Development:
Typical patterns in Spanish

Total vocabulary is distributed across two languages—each single language lexicon represents some fraction of a child’s lexical knowledge. Most bilingual children know
• some words in L1 and L2 (leche and milk)
• some words in L1 only (tetera, but not bottle)
• some words in L2 only (doggie, but not perro)

When you combine the child’s vocabulary in both languages, the child often has learned same or greater number of words as monolingual peers.

When you evaluate the child’s vocabulary in only L1 or L2, the child’s vocabulary may appear restricted.

Semantic Development:
Atypical Patterns in Spanish

• Lack of diverse word types or categories in receptive and expressive vocabularies
• Produce few word associations in word association tasks (poorly developed semantic maps)
• Produce few category labels and are less likely to describe object functions in definition tasks
• Difficulty in category generation tasks
Conceptual Scoring

"Conceptual scoring" is scoring the meaning of a response regardless of the language in which it is produced.
B. Pearson, S. Fernandez, & D.K. Oller, 1993

Bilingual children benefit from conceptual scoring, especially when tested in Spanish
L. Bedore, E. Peña, M. Garcia, & C. Cortez, 2005

Different ways of combining test scores across languages were tested—combining scores across two languages in a composite or selecting combinations of better task or language performance to use as a basis for decision-making. Classification can be more accurate when scores in both language are used systematically for decision-making.
E. Peña and L. Bedore, 2011

Conceptual Scoring ---> Dual-Language Score

"Conceptual scoring" is based on literature examining semantic language development (vocabulary and other semantic skills) when a bilingual child demonstrates some language skills in Spanish and some in English.

PLS-5 Spanish applies that research to all oral language domains (semantic, morphosyntax, and early academic skills).

What performance patterns can be expected using dual language scoring?

- PLS-5 Spanish STDZ sample
- Dual language administration/scoring
- 3 age groups
  - Birth to 2:11
  - 3:0 to 5:11
  - 6:0 to 7:11
- Different levels of Spanish-English proficiency
  - Monolingual Spanish speaker
  - Primarily Spanish speaker with some English abilities
  - Bilingual Spanish-English speaker
### PLS–5 Spanish Dual-Language STDZ Study

#### Standard Score by Administration Method and Fluency Group
(Norm Sample)

**Ages Birth-2:11**

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**Spanish Dual-Language**
- Bilingual
- Primarily Spanish
- Monolingual

**Ages 3:0-5:11**

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**Spanish Dual-Language**
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**Ages 6:0-7:11**

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**Spanish Dual-Language**
- Bilingual
- Primarily Spanish
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1. Less of an effect on expressive scores using dual-language scoring below age 3.

2. Nevertheless, dual-language scoring significantly raised the average standard scores of bilingual children. Children who primarily speak Spanish but know some English had a smaller increase than children who are more fully bilingual.
PLS–5 Spanish Standardization: Dual-Language STDZ Study

1. Little effect of dual-language scoring below age 3.
2. Nevertheless, dual-language scoring significantly raised the average standard scores of bilingual children. Children who primarily speak Spanish but know some English had a smaller increase than children who are more fully bilingual.
3. Dual-language scoring did not appreciably affect the scores of children with language disorders, but you should still assess English to get the full picture of the child’s skills.

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Questions?

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References


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