

Preventing Disproportionate Representation of Students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds as Having a Language Impairment

Szu-Yin Chu & Sobeida Flores

National Taitung University, Taiwan & University of Texas at Austin, U.S.A.

Abstract

Disproportionate representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds in certain special education categories (e.g., emotional disturbance) has drawn attention of researchers and educators because these students may not receive instructions that are responsive to their educational needs. Specifically, CLD students may be easily suspected as of having a language impairment. Meanwhile, there has paucity of data about language development of typically-developing students from CLD backgrounds, resulting in the difficulty to distinguish language differences from language disorders. Although there has been relatively few studies focusing on CLD students with language impairment, two perspectives will be addressed to examine how to effectively identify CLD students with language impairments, including linguistic point of view and second language acquisition. The discussion concludes with the information of non-biased assessment as well as prevention of CLD students from being misdiagnosed.

Keywords: *Cultural and linguistic diverse, Language impairment, Disproportionate representation, Non-biased assessment.*

Rationale

Professionals working in the educational field are experiencing rapid growth of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds across the United States. There is a significant trend indicating the increasing number of students from CLD backgrounds enrolled in public schools across states (Kea, Trent, & Davis, 2002). For example, nearly one in five students in U.S. public schools speak a language other than English at home (Wagner, Francis & Morris, 2005). In 2005-2006, there was an approximate 5.1 million English language learners (ELLs)¹ in U.S. public schools, representing 10% of the PreK through 12th-grade student enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). According to Roseberry-McKibbin, Brice, and O'Hanlon (2005), the growth of the population of ELLs was 105% since 1990. Take the Spanish speaking population for example; Kindler (2002) pointed out that approximately 79% of the aforementioned ELLs speak Spanish as their first language. The changing student demographics have challenged both general education and special education in a number of ways. Specifically, the large number of students whose primary language is not English (i.e., L1) in this country have brought challenges to speech and language pathologists (SLPs) (Goldstein, 2006).

Accompanying the growth in student background diversity, the disproportionate representation of CLD students in specific special education categories has drawn the attention of researchers and educators. A major difficulty is caused by the relatively limited studies on CLD students and specific language impairments (SLI) (Goldstein, 2006). In the field of education, different terminologies are used to refer to those students who come from homes and/or communities where a language other than English is spoken. In this article, the term CLD is used to refer to bilingual students, ELLs/Limited English Proficiency (LEP), English as a second language (ESL), and ethnic/racial diversities. The authors emphasis will be on the students who use English as their second language (i.e., L2), and discuss

¹ ELLs refer to those students whose first language is not English. These students may or may not have sufficient knowledge of English when they enter U.S. public schools. In the past, limited English proficiency (LEP) was the term commonly used to label these students. The term LEP remains in use in federal policy contexts.

how the similar characteristics between CLD students and students with language impairments resulted in the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education. Recommendations regarding reducing the misrepresentation of CLD students in the category of SLI will be provided.

Who are they: Students from linguistically diverse backgrounds

Students from linguistically diverse backgrounds reflect tremendous diversity in their proficiency in English. L1 refers to those whose primary language is not English, while L2 refers to those whose English is their second language. In this paper, we focus on students who are in the process of acquiring English, have a first language other than English, and need school's support for them to understand instructions in English. Educators often refer these students as ELLs (No Child Left Behind Act, 2000). Roseberry-McKibbin and O'Hanlon (2005) conducted a survey of public school speech-language pathologists (SLPs) nationwide in 2001, asking them about their difficulties in providing services to ELLs, and received responses as follows: the SLPs reported they do not speak the languages of the children; they lack appropriate assessment instruments; they lack knowledge in developmental stages in children's first language; they lack available interpreters; they lack knowledge of second language acquisition, the phenomenon of bilingualism, and children's cultural characteristics; many of the SLPs also reported having difficulty to distinguish language difference from language disorder. These concerns reveal the challenging task of working with students with a first language other than English.

Besides the shortage of professionals who speak the child's language, the need for nonbiased assessment tools is the second most concern. Every individual CLD has a unique language learning process and background. CLD students' language proficiency in English may influence their abilities to perform an assessment (Shore & Sabatini, 2009). Different learning experiences in language may also make it more difficult to come up with a single assessment to differentiate between CLD students and students with language impairments. Whether a CLD student will end up being proficient in both languages or only English is controlled by several variables, including: "language instruction at school, language spoken at home, years of residence with L1 and L2 country, history of language deficits, socioeconomic status, and years of exposure to English" (Girbau & Schwartz, 2008, p. 126). Goldstein (2006) proposed that the bilingualism of every individual falls on a continuum. We cannot assume that any two individuals are identical in their language development. Besides proficiency level in the two languages, CLD students also vary in their degree of skills in different language modalities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Considering the individualized nature of language acquisition, individualized assessment and treatment process is most effective and yields less bias (Saenz & Huer, 2003). Therefore, to make appropriate referral, assessment, and instructional decisions educators need to understand the unique characteristics of CLD students.

Definition of Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) defined students with SLI as "having problems in communication and related areas, such as oral motor function." Possible causes of speech and language disorders include "hearing loss, neurological disorders, brain injury, mental retardation, drug abuse, physical impairments such as cleft lip or palate, and vocal abuse or misuse" (NICHCY, 2004, p. 1). The word of "specific" was defined as those "children's problems are restricted to language." (Campbell & Skarakis-Doyle, 2007, p.514). Researchers (e.g., Rice, 2004) tend to view SLI as a neurodevelopment disorder with inherited genetic elements. In Girbau and Schwartz (2008) study, the findings revealed that six out of seven mothers of children with SLI have one or more relatives with language and/or learning disabilities. It seems that heredity may be one possible explanation of SLI. SLI may result in the disruption of children's neurocognitive development which may cause difficulties with language learning (Paradis, 2010).

Students with SLI are behind their same age peers in language acquisition and speech production (Campbell & Skarakis-Doyle, 2007). Language impairment refers to a student's inability to understand and/or use verbal and nonverbal words in certain context (NICHCY, 2004). Bortolini and Leonard (2000) noted that children with language impairment score at same age-appropriate levels on nonverbal tests of intellectual functioning, however the most adversely affected part of them is their phonology system. Characteristics of students with language impairment include: "improper use of words and their meanings, inability to express ideas, inappropriate grammatical patterns, reduced vocabulary, and inability to follow directions" (NICHCY, 2004, p. 1). This is the group that speech and language

pathologists are targeted to serve, while CLD students with similar characteristics but without disabilities are not. Speech and language pathologists encounter a great challenge in distinguishing the two groups.

Research studies have found methods to distinguish a true SLI and a typically-developing CLD student. Although there has been relatively limited research focusing on CLD students with SLI, studies about bilingual children can bring implications for the CLD population. For example, Girbau and Schwartz (2007) pointed out that one task that could distinguish SLI students with typically-developing peers is the repetition of non-words. In the intervention conducted by Girbau and Schwartz (2007), they compared typically-developing bilingual children and bilingual children with SLI; in this case they were Spanish speakers. The researchers found that the typically-developing children were more proficient in Spanish than in English, while children with SLI had lower proficiency in both languages. This could be seen as a useful way to differentiate CLD with SLI and typically-developing CLD students.

Studies (e.g., Paradis, Crago, Genesee, & Rice, 2003) have also shown that bilingual children with SLI are similar to monolinguals with SLI. Evidences indicate that bilingual and monolingual students with SLI produce similar errors (Paradis, 2005). Thus, Goldstein (2006) suggests that bilingual children are not at increased risk for having SLI, specifically if they are acquiring more than one language. Reflecting on the CLD population, where they are experiencing more than one language, this does not mean that they have greater chance for having SLI than children who are monolingual English learners.

Misleading characteristics between CLD students and SLI

Standardized language proficiency assessment tools are designed for children who speak English as their dominant language; hence educators and professionals are left with few resources to determine whether a CLD student is processing language adequately, or is in need of special education support (Ortiz, 1997; Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005). Given time and sufficient language instruction would allow the CLD student to catch up, a child who falls behind academically may be the result of typical language development, and not a disability. Paradis (2005) noted that differentiating "nonfluent and errorful language that is part of the natural process of second language learning from the nonfluent and errorful language exhibited in impaired acquisition is not straightforward" (p. 173). Simply examining the expressive language of the two groups is misleading, due to their high level of similarity. In other words, distinguishing cultural and linguistic differences from disabilities is difficult because students who are limited English proficient share characteristics with students who have disabilities.

There are certain characteristics that typically-developing CLD students and students with SLI share in common, including: poor comprehension, difficulty following directions, low vocabulary, short attention span, anxiety, frequently off tasks, and difficulty in grammatical morphology (Paradis, 2005). Difficulty in morphosyntax (including tense morphology, temporal adverbials, agreement morphology, and distributional contingencies associated with finiteness) is another shared feature between CLD students and students with SLI (Paradis & Crago, 2000). Bortolini and Leonard (2000) found that students with SLI are less consistent than typically-developing peers in using consonants, and maintaining consistent pronunciation. CLD students may also display this characteristic.

These common characteristics may lead to hazards like "mistaken identity," referring to typically-developing L2 learners being diagnosed as having language impairment, and referred for unnecessary special education services. It may also lead to missed identity, which occurs when a student with language impairment is not diagnosed and does not receive adequate supplementary services (Paradis, 2005). If practitioners adopt a wait and see method towards students with language impairments, then they are missing the critical timing for intervention. Actions should be taken when the student has fallen behind in the general education context, efforts in prevention and early intervention are often radical and involve solving problems from the root (Ortiz & Yates, 2001). Instead of waiting for the student to fail, then refer he/she to special education would be the suggested approach.

Disproportionate representation of CLD students in SLI

Disproportionate representation of typically-developing CLD students and CLD students with language impairment poses threat to both groups because the students are not placed in appropriate educational environments that most benefit them (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting,

Leos, & E'milio, 2005). These environments are characterized by limited opportunities for higher order thinking, academic underachievement, disproportionate rates of retention and/or social promotion, and high drop-out rates. In addition, teachers may have lower expectations of typically-developing CLD students. Which explains the issue of "self-fulfilling prophesy," the low expectation on students results in lower academic outcome of these students (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Thus, CLD students are at risk for special education referral and students having SLI, but not receiving services, undergo a crisis of not receiving remediation for their disability.

Identification of students from linguistically diverse backgrounds

Two aspects of the identification of characteristics of CLD students will be discussed: the linguistics point of view and the second language acquisition point of view.

Linguistic viewpoints

Case and Taylor (2005) concluded the linguistic characteristics of CLD students and students with disabilities in language development fall into three categories: pronunciation (phonology), syntax, and semantics. Language proficiency exist when "syntax, morphology, phonology, lexicon, function as an integrated whole" (Damico, 1992, p.3). Goldstein (2006) noted that studies have shown CLD students with SLI have significant deficits in morphology and phonology. From students' speech, drama performance, reading, and social interactions, teachers can observe their pronunciation patterns, and see whether they exhibit characteristics like omissions, substitutions, and additions. From the students' performance in reading and discussion, teachers can observe syntax, including negation, word order and mood. Observing reading in all contexts allows teachers to examine the semantic features in the form of figurative language, like proverbs, metaphors, and similes (Case & Taylor, 2005). The characteristics listed are overlapping features that both CLD students and students with SLI possibly exhibit.

Pronunciation (phonology)

As for CLD students, several factors are crucial to achieve native-like pronunciation, such as age, motivation, and opportunities to use the language (Case & Taylor, 2005). Among the factors, age is the most decisive; individuals who start learning their second language after puberty are likely to have a noticeable accent, resulting from the first language phonemic influence. Goldstein (2006) also noted that, when assessing phonological patterns of monolingual and bilingual children with SLI, similar results, including stopping, cluster reduction, and liquid simplification, were obtained. The patterns of pronunciation development resemble articulation disorders of individuals with language impairment (Case & Taylor, 2005). For example, Bortolini and Leonard (2000) noted that children with SLI are less accurate in word-initial consonants. Their difficulty in consonants was also found in Girbau and Schwartz (2007), which found that "constant substitutions and consonant omissions" (e.g., saying /s/ for /z/ in the word eyes and omitting the final /s/ in the word books respectively) are significantly higher in children with SLI than typically-developing children.

Girbau and Schwartz (2007), Bortolini and Leonard (2000) both found that children with SLI have weaker phonological representations. The abnormal production of speech sounds could be classified into four common types: omission, substitution, distortion, and addition (Case & Taylor, 2005; Girbau & Schwartz, 2004). Omission is not pronouncing a sound. For example, Spanish speakers may ignore the "h" sound in the beginning of an English word since it is not pronounced in Spanish. Substitution is placing a phoneme with another. Mandarin Chinese and Spanish speakers have difficulties with "th" often pronounce it as "d" because "th" does not exist in either language. Distortion is mispronouncing a phoneme, and the production is not accepted as standard. Addition is adding another phoneme. This is common when Japanese speakers pronounce consonants. In Japanese, all sounds are combined with a vowel and a consonant. A Japanese speaker producing "s" says "su" instead.

Syntax

Researchers have yet to reach a consensus on elements that interfere with the development of syntax, but they agree that there is overlap between the syntax of CLD students and students who are SLI. Case and Taylor (2005) noted that students with disabilities could produce longer sentences, but the sentences have reduced complexity; also, compound structures are fewer than typically-developing peers. This pattern could also be observed in CLD students. Both groups (i.e. students with disabilities and CLD students) struggle with negation, word order, and syntactic mood (Case &

Taylor, 2005). The difference is that CLD students will decrease these errors in syntactic structures as their second language skills gradually grow.

Semantics

Semantic development, including understanding of proverbs, metaphors and similes, usually takes years for CLD students to master (Case & Taylor, 2005). To understand figurative languages requires deep-rooted understanding of the culture, which often needs time and constant exposure to the language and culture. This is also difficult for students with learning disabilities or language impairments. Lacking ability to understand figurative language, these individuals may interpret literally what they hear. For example, a student with SLI may interpret the expression "hit the sack" as literally hitting the sack rather than going to bed.

Second language acquisition viewpoints

To most CLD students in the U.S., their first languages do not receive a high status and are not widely spoken in their community. Intertwined with the dual language and culture, CLD students are faced with anxiety in their language acquisition process, with associated feeling of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, and worry (Brown, 2000). If a CLD student that does not have a disability receives effective and efficient English instruction, it is possible that he/she reaches proficiency faster, which will eliminate the possibility of the student being diagnosed as having language proficiency disorder. It is important to guide students through the language acquisition process efficiently, which could decrease the number of students being misdiagnosed. Providing adequate time for language acquisition and designing effective language instruction programs are crucial to successfully reach academic proficiency in a second language.

CLD students commit mistakes in their process of language acquisition. Committing errors and receiving feedback is a beneficial process for CLD students to know their own deficiencies in language acquisition and thus correct them. Understanding that errors are inevitable in the language learning process it is crucial that educators prevent CLD students from being misdiagnosed as having a disability. "Intralingual transfer" (Brown, 2000) is a significant error that emerges at the early stages of language acquisition. The errors are results from directly transferring the first language (L1) linguistic system to second language (L2). An example is from a 9th grade L1 student whose native language is Mandarin. When asking her about what the English equivalent for "寒假" (i.e. winter vacation) is, she answered "cold vacation." She was directly transferring the two characters into English, without considering the meaning of the phrase. Typical English intralingual errors in articles include: omission of "the," adding unnecessary "the," "a" instead of "the," adding unnecessary "a," and omission of "a" (Brown, 2000, p. 225). These errors, if not considered a normal process in language development, may lead to misclassification of the CLD students. Knowledge in students' first languages and the process of second language acquisition are crucial to teachers working with students from diverse language backgrounds. Otherwise, normal language acquisition process may be viewed as language learning problems (Damico, 1992).

The interlanguage of language learners (Brown, 2000) has its typical developmental process. Observing whether CLD students go through the natural process of acquisition helps educators decide whether a student falls behind because of language acquisition process or language impairment, since the students with disability will not go through these stages. Brown (2000) categorizes learner's interlanguage into four stages: (a) random errors, (b) emergent stage, (c) systematic stage, and (d) stabilization stage. In the first stage, the error is constant, when students make inaccurate guesses, and are experiencing an experimental process. The second stage, the language learners has "begun to discern a system and to internalize certain rules" (Brown, 2000, p. 228). Learners have grasped rules and principles of the language, though still not able to notice or correct their errors. During the third stage, learners have reached a systematic level, and are now "able to manifest more consistency in producing the second language" (Brown, 2000, p.228). They are able to correct the errors when pointed out by others. Students who reached the stabilization stage are at the fourth stage, where learners have fewer errors, reached a fluent level, and are able to self-correct. The study by Girbau and Schwartz (2007) found that typically-developing CLD students move toward English dominance in middle childhood. They acquire lexical comprehension around 11-13 years old, and then reach level of lexical production around 14-16 years old.

Understanding the relationship between errors and developmental stages of CLD students is crucial to every teacher that works with students from a different language background. This knowledge base

prevents teachers from jumping into conclusion that a student who struggles with language is having a deficiency.

Referring students with language impairments

The need of non-biased assessment

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) stated that assessments used with CLD students should be nonbiased and non-discriminatory. Culturally, the problem with standardized tests is that they often have underlying biases, and are designed from an Anglo middle class perspective, which is not appropriate to assess CLD students. Linguistically, standardized tests are often conducted in English, which turn out to be testing the students' language rather than academic proficiency (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). Damico (1992) pointed out that CLD students are evaluated in school environments that are not prepared to serve students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Case and Taylor (2005) noted that a single measure to differentiate disability from language difference does not exist; therefore resorting to standardized tests does not solve the problem. Not only do assessment materials need revision, the evaluator has to be able to "address specific questions regarding an individual's underlying language proficiency and learning potential" (Damico, 1992, p.3). Roseberry-McKibbin and O'Hanlon (2005) proposed four guidelines for assessments that meet the nonbiased standards:

(1) testing and evaluation materials and procedures must be selected and administered in a nondiscriminatory manner, (2) testing and evaluation materials must be provided and administered in the language or other mode of communication in which the child is most proficient, (3) tests must be administered to a child with a motor, speech, hearing, visual, or other communication disability, or to a bilingual child, so as to reflect accurately the child's ability in the area tested, rather than the child's impaired communication skill or limited English language skill, and (4) accommodations may include alternative forms of assessment and evaluation" (p. 180).

For educators working with CLD students, their critical view towards assessment materials and applying them adequately influences whether a student without disability will be placed in special classes. Additionally they will be able to determine whether a student with language impairment is going to end up undiagnosed, without receiving needed support.

Due to inadequate assessments, many CLD students are being misdiagnosed and are put into the special education system, which reduces their right to an education that exercises their greatest potential. To address this concern, federal laws allow the schools to use non-standardized assessment materials to assess CLD students. Often times, these non-standardized assessment techniques yield less bias compared with standardized assessments, and are more tailored to the needs of individual students (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005). Damico (1992) praised the effectiveness of assessing language and communicative behavior in natural contexts because performance is highly influenced by memory, perception, culture, motivation, fatigue, experience, anxiety, and other variables. This should be considered before conducting an informal assessment. Using assessment results to approach a student with language difficulty, and determine whether the cause is a language developmental process or a disability, is a major concern among specialists working with this group. Therefore, nonbiased assessment techniques are necessary to be included in the assessing process.

Preevaluation process

The IDEA pointed out that assessment tools should display equity, validity, and nondiscrimination. In order to make the most appropriate decisions for students, adopting a team assessment approach, using multiple measures, collecting extensive data, and making decision based on the individual needs is important. Roseberry-McKibbin and O'Hanlon (2005) proposed a preevaluation process to gather data for making decisions. Before an assessment is conducted, speech/language pathologists and school teachers adopt a procedure to get an overall picture of the student's language development that includes: looking at language history, parent interview, and teacher interview. Gathering student's language learning history is the first step. Several points are important when reviewing the student's history. For instance, what is the student's first language? When was the student first exposed to English? Is the student experiencing subtractive bilingualism? Did the student lose his/her first language? If the student lost the first language, are the English skills developing? (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005) For these students, a crisis happens when they are not mastering any

languages, since this impedes their cognitive development. In some cases, teachers assume students have a language impairment before reviewing their records. One should remember to never judge a student to have disabilities before understanding the history of the student.

Conducting parent interviews is significant in understanding the child's language learning history. For example, questions that could be asked in a parent interview include: When did the child start to learn the first language? Could the child communicate well with the parents in the first language? Is the child demonstrating language difficulty when compared to their siblings? Does the child prefer to communicate through gestures rather than words? When the parents use the child's first language at home, does the child display any difficulty in understanding? Is there any family history of learning difficulties? and Are the parents concerned with the child's communication skills in the future? (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005). Interviewing parents and understanding their thoughts and concerns is always a chief component of the prereferral process. Additionally, interviewing teachers helps the SLP to understand the student's language performance in the classroom. Questions that could be asked of the teachers during the interview include: Does the child have difficulty understanding English? Is the child slow to respond to classroom instructions? Does the child rarely initiate verbal communication? Does the child have difficulty with basic classroom routines? Does the child have difficulty learning? Does the child require a program of instruction that is different and more highly structured than what is used successfully with peers from a similar background (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005)? Clarifying these questions and receiving information from the student's teacher allows SLPs and other professionals to grasp the basic picture of the student's language difficulty, which could help lead to a more appropriate and nonbiased assessment.

Nondiscriminatory and informal assessment

Using a multiple assessment process rather than relying solely on standardized test results is a more effective and nonbiased assessment methodology. Since the standardized tests' design did not include CLD students in its norm reference sample, applying the test on these students does not yield valid results (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2002; Saenz & Huer, 2003). Standardized assessment tools deny CLD students access to the education environments that match their true needs. Viewing the student's archival records, interviewing parents and teachers, doing interviews, and looking at past intervention results, are some informal assessments of evaluating whether a student has a true disability or not.

According to Ortiz (2002), all contexts (e.g., non-academic instruction, home, community) must be examined in order to conduct a nondiscriminatory assessment. Furthermore, obtaining information related to ecological or contextual environments should come from a variety of areas, including review of educational records; direct observation of instruction and teaching; review of the content, level, relevancy and appropriateness of the curriculum; analysis of the match between the curriculum and the student's needs; interviews with parents, teachers, or the individual; and medical records.

Some strategies of informal, non-standardized assessments include: language sampling, dynamic assessment, and language processing capacity (Pena, Iglesias, & Lidz, 2001; Saenz & Huer, 2003). Language sampling is conducted by recording student's expressive language in daily settings, like home and school. An interpreter who speaks the student's first language works with the SLPs to evaluate whether the student's use of language is appropriate or not. The major area they are looking at is whether a student can communicate successfully with peers having similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005). It is important to keep in mind that assessment for CLD students has to occur in both languages, and SLPs should not assume that skills in one language indicates the same level of skills in another language. As for dynamic assessment, SLPs are looking at the learning potential and ability to transfer tasks they recently learned to other contexts (Pena et al., 2001; Pena et al., 2006). The mentality is that SLPs "do not ask what students already knows, but emphasize on how the student learns" (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005, p184). This crosses out the flaw of tests that are based on prior knowledge, which may be misleading because of the student's different socio-economic status (SES), cultural and linguistic background, and his/her life experience. Examining language-processing capacity helps professionals to distinguish typically-developing CLD students with language proficiency, recent findings show that students with language impairment have "specific difficulties on tasks that require immediate, verbatim, and ordered recall" (Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005, p. 183), while typically-developing CLD students do not exhibit the difficulty. For example, they could test student's performance in repeating nonsense syllables, and distinguish the cause of the student's language difficulty.

Specifically, a vital component of the nondiscriminatory assessment method involves language proficiency, which may require assessing two or more languages. Professional standards require that students be assessed in the language they are most proficient in (Ochoa & Ortiz, 2005). According to Ortiz (1997), proficiency refers to the level of skill a student demonstrates in a language and language dominance refers to the language that is better developed and in which the child shows the greatest level of skill. Information on language proficiency is an important element of the evaluation of learning contexts. Information obtained from an evaluation of language proficiency is also crucial for determining the language a student should be tested in. Ideally, the language of the test must match the language in which the student is proficient. Language proficiency also serves to develop appropriate linguistic instruction and curriculum content.

Practical implications for SLPs and other professionals

Given the concern of disproportionate representation of CLD students in the category of language impairments, it is clear that differentiating typically-developing students and students with SLI is a difficult yet important task. To avoid misdiagnosing the student as SLIs, educators need to work collaboratively in the process of supporting the student when he/she is struggling. In this paper, we would recommend to use Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT) to reduce unnecessary referrals. The following discussion would be based on the model proposed by Chalfant, Pysh, and Moultrie (1979).

Purpose of Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs)

SLPs can be part of teacher assistance team (TAT) which has as its purposes to provide a support system to classroom teachers. For example, they contribute to TAT including (a) assisting teachers who work with students who may exhibit unique learning and/or behavior patterns (i.e., help teachers identify if these students qualify for special education services), (b) providing immediate intervention, (c) planning strategies to help students who experience academic difficulties, (d) helping integrate students who are included in regular education, (e) reducing inappropriate referrals to special education (e.g., differentiate between learning disorders and learning differences), and (f) providing professional development activities (e.g., staff development).

TAT's operation procedures

Teachers initiate a referral by completing a "Request for Support/Collaboration form." The teacher then hypothesizes as to the probable causes of the problem. Information is categorized into behaviors or factors contributing to the problem that may be causing the problem or that may seem symptoms of a difficulty, the student's strengths and weaknesses are also identified. The TAT coordinator arranges in-classroom observations or interviews the teacher, requests other information, and schedules meetings. Members reach consensus in the problem-solving meetings, discuss possible objectives, and brainstorm alternative suggestions (e.g., recommendations for instruction) and solutions/interventions. Suggestions are refined; the team and teacher then select suggestions to be implemented during a trial period. Timelines and support for the implementation of the suggestions are determined. The team decides a plan to monitor outcomes during this period. Follow-up meetings are scheduled to discuss the effectiveness of the suggestions and to evaluate results.

Criteria selected at the initial TAT meeting is used to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations. A determination is made regarding the interventions success and whether there are other factors that might be interfering with implementation. The information obtained during the monitoring process is collected and used to support the TAT's recommendations. This information should include: child's work samples, information from observations, informal assessment results, information collected from the parents and family, information from other educators who work with the child, and teacher's notes.

A referral should be initiated if the following are observed: the problem cannot be attributed to any of the hypotheses developed during the initial meeting, problems occur across settings including home, educators, peers, and/or activities despite delivery of quality instruction in the child's proficient language, the child's native language achievement scores are significantly below grade level, school attendance is regular, the child has difficulty with general education instruction or does not respond to alternative instruction strategies, the student has significant deficits in academic core subjects (e.g.,

language arts), and the child exhibits behaviors commonly associated with learning disabilities such as difficulty following instructions, poor attention, and/or is forgetful.

One major objective of the Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) is to answer any questions the referral committee has developed. In addition, the committee should provide the assessor with recommendations regarding the child. If no assessment is deemed necessary, the referral committee must decide what recommendations will be given. In addition, the committee must decide if interventions will be implemented and how these will be evaluated.

Distinguishing CLD students and students with language impairments

From the discussion above, it is clear that SLPs and other professionals working with students from CLD backgrounds and working with students with SLI are seeking an effective strategy to distinguish typically-developing CLD students and students with SLI. The issue becomes more complicated when a CLD student has a language impairment.

The use of multiple assessment results

Looking at the issue from a teacher's point of view, there are some methods that could be applied when working with these children. First of all, never judge a student with a "sixth sense," assuming that they struggle in English because of their language background, or their disability. Conducting multiple assessments is a more effective method, and has higher validity than pure intuition. As the previous discussion in standardized, norm referenced assessments, professionals should keep in mind not to take results solely from standardized exams, since they may present skewed data of the student.

Language instruction and education

Conducting a language support program is vital for CLD students to reach academic proficiency as soon as possible. CLD students build their English competence from bilingual education or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (Ortiz & Yates, 2001). It is crucial that SLPs understand the second language acquisition theories, and that they are able to determine whether the students are typically-developing. By conducting an effective language program, SLPs can facilitate students' language learning, and assist them to reach proficiency sooner. Providing adequate time to attain language proficiency lessens the possibility of being misdiagnosed as having a language impairment. If a student does not meet the criteria for receiving bilingual education or ESL at school, and has not achieved academic proficiency, it is possible that their language development will not progress, and that they will never meet the cognitive academic language proficiency criteria. SLPs and professionals should consider possible interventions for these children.

Long-term observations and students' records

Long-term observation and keeping language data records offer the anecdotal information for specialists in determining the student's eligibility for special education services (Garcia & Ortiz, 2004). Therefore, SLPs have to constantly record and take language samples from the students exhibiting traits of language difficulty.

Taking linguistic context into consideration

An important issue to consider before the referral process is the student's linguistic background. Knowing the traits of the student's first language helps teachers to examine their difficulties, for example, determining whether the student's pronunciation problem is caused by a first language influence can be done by comparing the phonemes of the first language to the student's speech samples. Understanding the phonological system of a student's first language is crucial for decision makers, when they are differentiating whether the students' "abnormal pronunciation" result from impairment, or are characteristic of first language. Additionally, it is important to learn the developmental process of a student's language learning, and how the first language affects the second language acquisition and should be basic knowledge that every teacher knows (Cummins, 1991). However, Damico (1992) stated that teachers often lack knowledge of the linguistically diverse students' first language, and the process of second language acquisition. This reveals the urgency to include these concepts in teachers' preparation programs.

Performance in nonword repetition as an indicator of SLI

Girbau and Schwartz (2007) noted that poor non-word repetition is a clinical marker of SLI, and that children with SLI achieve lower percentage of correct responses compared with typically developed children. Their difference becomes more significant when they are asked to repeat longer words, beginning with three syllable words (Girbau & Schwartz, 2007). Weismer, Tomblin, Zhang, and Buckwalter (2000) also found that children with language impairment exhibit a deficiency in non-word repetition skills, compared to typically-developing children. This could be applied as a useful and easy tool to differentiate typically developing CLD students from individuals with language impairments.

References

- Artiles, A. J., Harry, B., Reschly, D. J., & Chinn, P. C. (2002). Over-identification of students of color in special education: A critical overview. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4, 3-10.
- Artiles, A. J., & Ortiz, A. A. (Eds.) (2002). *English language learners with special education needs: Identification, placement, and instruction*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Bortolini, U., & Leonard, L. B. (2000). Phonology and children with specific language impairment: Status of structural constraints in two languages. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 33(2), 131-150.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Campbell, W. N., & Skarakis-Doyle, E. (2007). School-aged children with SLI: The ICF as a framework for collaborative service delivery. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 40, 513-535.
- Case, R. E., & Taylor, S. S. (2005). Language difference or learning disability? Answers from a linguistic perspective. *Clearing House*, 78(3), 127-130
- Cummins, J. (1991). Interdependence of first- and second- language proficiency in bilingual children. In E. Bialystok (Ed.), *Language processing in bilingual children* (pp. 70-89). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Damico, J. S. (1992). *Performance assessment of language minority students: 2nd National Symposium: Performance Assessment of LM Students*. Washington DC: Office of Bilingual Education & Minority Languages Affairs.
- Garcia, S. B., & Ortiz, A. A. (2004). *Preventing inappropriate referrals of language minority students to special education*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition.
- Girbau, D., & Schwartz, R. G. (2007). Non-word repetition in Spanish-speaking children with specific language impairment (SLI). *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 42(1), 59-75.
- Girbau, D., & Schwartz, R. G. (2008). Phonological working memory in Spanish-English bilingual children with and without specific language impairment. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 41, 124-145.
- Goldstein, B. A. (2006). Clinical implications of research on language development and disorders in bilingual children. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 26(4), 305-321.
- Kea, C. D., Trent, S. C., & Davis, C. P. (2002). African American student teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4(1), 18-25.
- Kindler, A. (2002). *Survey of the states' LEP students 2000-2001 summary report*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition.
- McCardle, P., Mele-McCarthy, J., Cutting, L., Leos, K., & E'milio, T. (2005). Learning disabilities in English Language Learners: Identifying the issues. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20(1), 1-5.
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) (2004). *Speech and language impairments*. Washington, DC: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.



- Ochoa, S. H., & Ortiz, S. O. (2005). In R. L. Rhodes, S. H. Ochoa, & Ortiz, S. O. (Eds.), *Assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students: A practical guide* (pp.137-152). New York, NY: The Guildford Press.
- Ortiz, A. A. (1997). Learning disabilities occurring concomitantly with linguistic difference. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 30(3), 321-332.
- Ortiz, S. O. (2002). Best practices in nondiscriminatory assessment. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology IV* (pp. 1321-1336). Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Ortiz, A., & Yates, J. (2001). A framework for serving English language learners with disabilities. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 14(2), 72-81.
- Paradis, J. (2005). Grammatical morphology in children learning English as a second language: Implications of similarities with specific language impairment. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 172-187.
- Paradis, J. (2010). The interface between bilingual development and specific language impairment. *Applied Psycholinguistic*, 31, 227-252.
- Paradis, J., & Crago, M. (2000). Tense and temporality: A comparison between children learning a second language and children with SLI. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 43(4), 834-847.
- Paradis, J., Crago, M., Genesee, F., & Rice, M. (2003). French-English bilingual children with SLI: How do they compare with their monolingual peers? *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 46, 113-127.
- Pena, E. D., Gillam, R. B., Malek, M., Ruiz-Felter, R., Resendiz, M., Fiestas, C., & Sabel, T. (2006). Dynamic assessment of school-age children's narrative ability: An experimental investigation of classification accuracy. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 49, 1037-1057.
- Pena, E., Iglesias, A., & Lidz, C. S. (2001). Reducing test bias through dynamic assessment of children's word learning ability. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 10, 138-154.
- Rice, M. L. (2004). Growth models of developmental language disorders. In M. L. Rice & S. Warren (Eds.), *Developmental language disorders: From phenotypes to etiologies*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (2002). *Multicultural students with special language needs: Practical strategies for assessment and intervention* (2nd ed.). Oceanside, CA: Academic Communication Associates.
- Roseberry-McKibbin, C., & O'Hanlon, L. (2005). Nonbiased assessment of English language learners: A tutorial. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 26(3), 178-185.
- Roseberry-McKibbin, C., Brice, A., & O'Hanlon, L. (2005). Serving English Language Learners in public school settings: A national survey. *Language, Speech, and Hearing in Schools*, 36, 48-61.
- Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development*. New York: Rinehart and Winston.
- Saenz, T. I., & Huer, M. B. (2003). Testing strategies involving least biased language assessment of bilingual children. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 24(4), 184-193.
- Shore, J. R., & Sabatini, J. (2009). *English language learners with reading disabilities: A review of the literature and the foundation for a research agenda*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- U.S. Department of Education (2008). The biennial report to congress on the implementation of the title III state formula grant program: School years 2004-06. Washington, D.C.: National Clearing House for English-Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs.
- Weismer, S. E., Tomblin, J. B., Zhang, X., & Buckwalter, P. (2000). Nonword repetition performance in school-age children with and without language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 43(4), 865-878.