



Current Research Review:

Bilingual Language Assessment: Contemporary Versus Recommended Practice in American Schools

(Arias & Friberg, 2017)

Background: Bilingual language assessment has been challenging SLPs for decades as standardized assessments often aren't a valid measure for bilingual speakers. Best practices have been identified and mandated through the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as well as ASHA policy documents. In 2007, Caesar and Kohler's sought to determine speech-language pathologists' (SLPs) current practices with regard to bilingual speech and language assessment through a survey sent to school-based SLPs in Michigan. At the time, the authors found an over reliance on standardized test measures. Respondents to the survey also indicated they did not feel that their training had prepared them to work with bilingual students.

Purpose: This study sought to document current SLP practices in assessing bilingual and ELL populations and compare them to the findings from Caesar and Kohler's 2007 study. In addition, this study broadened the focus from a single state to nationwide.

Methodology and Participants: 166 SLPs working with children (ages 3 to 21 years old) in public schools throughout the U.S. responded to an electronic survey devised by the authors. Participants reported the following: demographic information, educational background, language proficiency, caseload, and the processes they typically use to assess the language skills of bilingual children.

Conclusion: Results revealed that in comparison to Caesar and Kohler's (2007) study, researchers observed an increase in competency in bilingual language assessment. The following appropriate bilingual assessment techniques were reported as happening more frequently: administration of assessments in both English and the native language with examination of test materials for bias, dynamic assessment, language samples, parent and teacher interviews, observations in various contexts, and use of interpreters. However, the authors also noted continued use of standardized assessments (CELF-4, PLS-4, ROWPVT, EOWPVT, PPVT and CASL) despite the fact that those tests may be lacking in diagnostic accuracy and/or validity for bilingual populations.

Relevance to the field: Though SLPs more frequently use assessment techniques better suited for bilingual students, there is still room for improvement. SLPs still commonly use standardized tests which may not be valid or reliable indicators of language impairment. Clinicians are strongly encouraged to evaluate the reliability and validity of assessments. Furthermore, the following barriers were identified when completing an assessment: lack of time, resources, support from administrators and interpreters, and training in bilingual

assessment from graduate school. Although many of these issues are not easily solvable, Arias and Friberg listed various resources available to SLPs: ASHA, state associations, research articles, clients and families, and other professionals. Researchers also recommend seeking continuing education opportunities as well as increasing school administrators' awareness of resource and time constraints. To glean a more accurate portrayal of the language capabilities of bilingual students, clinicians should implement the techniques detailed in this study and utilize the resources available to them

Arias, G., & Friberg, J. (2017). Bilingual language assessment: Contemporary versus recommended practice in American schools. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 48*(1), 1-15. doi: 10.1044/2016_LSHSS-15-0090.