

Identifying disorder within code-switched language samples: the challenge for speech and language therapists assessing language skills in bilingual children

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Assessment of bilingual children is challenging for the following reasons:

- Assessment materials may culturally disadvantage children, e.g. Pictures of people and activities not familiar to a child
- Standardized assessments are not standardized using data collected from linguistic minority children
- Assessment of both (all) languages is required to differentiate English as an additional language (EAL) issues from central specific language impairment (SLI)

An Expressive Language Assessment

e zindəgi - This Life - je zindəgi

A culturally appropriate first language assessment has been devised for children with a Pakistani Heritage background living in Rochdale, UK.

Designed for use by a Monolingual English Speech & Language Therapist (mSLT) and Bilingual Speech & Language Therapy Assistant (bSLTA), or Bilingual Speech & Language Therapist (bSLT).

Examples of stimulus items



A translation protocol is employed to ensure accurate translation and preservation of the client data

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE TARGET ITEMS
 ENGLISH (Free translation): (the) lady is reading (a) newspaper

MIRPURI:
 dʒənani axbaʒ parni 'pi
 Mirpuri to English literal translation:
 lady newspaper read -ing + female is + female

PUNJABI:
 orəʃ axbaʒ paɾdi 'je
 Punjabi to English literal translation:
 Lady newspaper read -ing + female is

URDU:
 orəʃ axbaʒ paɾ rahi 'he
 Urdu to English (literal translation):
 lady newspaper read doing + female is

The assessment development: A trial of 22 Pakistani Heritage children speaking Mirpuri, Punjabi or Urdu revealed that:

- Almost all children exhibited codeswitching: 19 included English items in their predominantly Pakistani Heritage language responses, 1 responded only in English and 2 produced no expressive responses in the test situation
- Codeswitching was not only to English but also to other Pakistani Heritage languages
- Parental language identity reporting did not match actual language used by the child. Most used Mirpuri-17(77%), not Urdu-3 or Punjabi-1 (English-1)
- Receptive language skills in L1 did not predict expressive language ability-although this is a small sample and further data collection is underway.

Examples of normal codeswitching in Pakistani Heritage children living in Rochdale:

Children appear to follow the MLF/4-M adult patterns of codeswitching as found in other studies,

E.g. English nouns in a Mirpuri frame
 buk parni
 book read -ing+female
 (She) reading (a) book

E.g. English Lexical verb in a Mirpuri frame (but note 'doing' which is introduced to carry gender agreement and tense - a composite frame? As 'make-ni' would not be well formed)

andi meik karni
 Food make doing + Female
 compare with L1 target andi banani pi

The Matrix Language Framework & 4-M models predicts that languages in contact will lead to codeswitching behaviour of the type observed.

- Codeswitching is analyzed as a grammatical matrix language frame (which provides the functional structure) into which content morphemes are added from the other language(s).
- If codeswitching is a grammatically controlled behaviour, delayed and disordered children may exhibit differences in their codeswitching behaviour.
- Debates about 'borrowed items' and 'language identification' in the context of codeswitching are explained by these models

Method

10 children diagnosed as language disordered were assessed

Both quantitative and qualitative comparisons were made with the trial group

Quantitative Analysis:

See handout

Qualitative Analysis:

Sentences were expected to demonstrate restricted patterns (delay) or unusual patterns (disorder).

Example of delayed language:

Girl aged 3;04 speaking Mirpuri
 Single word level comprehension
 Expression restricted to mainly 1 or 2 words but already include (appropriate) codeswitching:

*feun karna
 'Phone doing

Example of disordered language:

Girl aged 3;08 speaking Mirpuri
 2 word level comprehension
 In the context of generally restricted sentences she produced sentences with word order errors

*perpe dʒənani təkəni
 Paper lady look-ing+female
 Note the word order OSV instead of SOV and inclusion of English content morpheme 'paper'

Key Skills for working with bilingual children:

- Bilingual Speech and Language Therapy Assistants / Translators are vital as no one therapist (even a bilingual SLT) can hope to speak all the languages even within a small district (35 languages spoken in Rochdale schools).
- Assessment must be culturally appropriate and recognize that codeswitching is a normal (unconscious) part of the expressive language of bilinguals.
- A translation protocol identifies features which may be lost in the translation process and retains original data.
- SLTs must be aware of the linguistics theories underlying bilingualism and codeswitching.
- Disordered language may affect codeswitching behaviours and therefore assist differential diagnosis if normal codeswitching and disordered codeswitching are contrasted.
- This is in line with the Myers-Scotton assertion that codeswitching reveals normal language production processes.

Future Research

- Standardization of je zindəgi via continuing data collection
- Detailed analysis of codeswitching in an attempt to further clarify the 'normal' patterns found in the local population
- Develop guidelines for analyzing L1 data which assist SLTs in identifying diversity from disorder

Further Information & References

Expressive Language Assessment Development:

- Pert, S. And Stow, C. 2002: Language remediation in mother tongue: a paediatric multilingual picture resource. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 36, (supplement: proceedings of the College's 2001 conference), 303-308.

Translation Protocol:

- Pert, S. 2002: *Mind the gap! Towards a translation protocol for speech and language therapists.* Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Special Interest Group in Bilingualism presentation
- Pert, S. Forthcoming CPLOL poster presentation.

Trial Data:

- Pert, S. And Letts, C., In press: *Developing an expressive language assessment for children with a Pakistani heritage background.*

Theoretical Background:

- Myers-Scotton, C., 2002. *Contact linguistics: bilingual encounters and grammatical outcomes.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).