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Adapting the *Building Early Sentences Therapy (BEST)* for Work with Children Who Speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE)

Sean Pert

The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

Authors:

Sean Pert¹, Carolyn Letts², Ewe Czaplewska³, Elaine Ashton⁴, Christine Jack⁴, Cristina McKean⁵, Zahida Warriach⁶, Sajidah Ahmed⁷

¹The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

²University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

³Uniwersytet Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland

⁴Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

⁵Oxford University, Oxford, UK

⁶Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, Rochdale, UK

⁷Northern Care Alliance, UK

Abstract

BEST is an intervention for young (3-6 years old) children with developmental language disorder (DLD) that has been shown to be effective with monolingual English-speaking children. Based on usage-based theory, it facilitates the building of abstract language structures through carefully scripted repeated and contrasted sentence frames. It is not language-specific so lends itself to adaptation to other languages. We will describe the process of cultural and linguistic adaptation for three languages other than English (LOTE) commonly spoken by children in the UK: Polish, Mirpuri and Sylheti. Speech & Language Therapists (SLTs) in the UK are required to provide an equitable service, supporting children in their home language (RCSLT, 2022; HCPC, 2023). This ensures children can continue to access good language models from parents and family members, while avoiding home language loss, potentially alienating them from their wider community. This requirement includes the need to plan and prioritise interventions in the child's home language. The key motivating factor behind adaptations is to promote the child's communicative abilities; any home language structures that work for the child are therefore encouraged, including those that contain

code-switches. Adjustments were however needed in areas where the target structures differed from English; for example, Mirpuri and Sylheti have an SOV phrase/word order rather than SVO, and Mirpuri and Polish have much more complex case systems. The process of adaptation was carried out with the aid of native speakers and was iterative with frequent checking back with these experts. Issues emerged at multiple linguistic and cultural levels, including around phonological complexity of target words, mismatch between single word vocabulary items and syntactic structures, and different behaviours in different cultural groups. Examples will be given of these challenges and how adjustments were made to overcome them. Adaptations of the BEST assessment and the intervention sessions are now available in these languages. The identified adaptation process can be applied to further languages to produce versions for other language communities.

References

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Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. (2022). Clinical guidance: Bilingual guidance. <https://www.rcslt.org/members/clinical-guidance/bilingualism/bilingualism-guidance/>