

# Cultural and linguistic adaptation of expressive language assessment and language therapy packages for Children who speak languages other than English (LOTE)



RCSLT Conference 2025:  
80 years and beyond

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# RCSLT Clinical Guidelines



- ‘SLTs should...**offer home language intervention, prior to therapy in the language of education** (English, Gaelic or Welsh), especially for sequential bilinguals.’ (RCSLT, 2018, p. 33)
- ‘Similarly, services **cannot provide one part of the care pathway in English-only**. For example, providing interpreters for the assessment phase, but only offering treatment packages in English.’ (RCSLT, 2018, p. 34)
- RCSLT Clinical Guidance for a **Home language approach** is **30+ years old** next year (RCSLT, 1996; See Pert, 2025)



# Standards of Proficiency

- 2.13 understand the centrality of home language(s) to a service user's identity, family life and community (culture and/or religion), **by working to maintain, develop or enhance a client's home language** (HCPC, 2023, p. 7)
- 13.20 **assess and plan interventions** in the service user's **home language** with the assistance of **professional interpreters**, and with reference to professional clinical guidelines and evidence-based practice (HCPC, 2023, p. 18)





# Advantages of assessment in home language

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- Bilingual to bilingual communication likely to trigger code switching
- Codeswitched utterances are when children are more likely to use their longest and most complex utterances (Pert & Letts, 2006)
- Holistic picture of the child's speech and language skills
- Avoids inappropriate application of monolingual norms (Mdlalo et al. 2019)





# Advantages of therapy in home language

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- Encourages home language maintenance
- Avoids language loss
- Builds a foundation for additional language learning
  - (Pert, 2023)





# Barriers to home language care

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- Dearth of published assessments and therapy packages (Mulgrew et al. 2021)
- Therapists likely to be unfamiliar with languages they do not share with the family
- Lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge



# Example of a LOTE assessment



- **Bilingual Assessment of Simple Sentences (BASS)**  
(Pert et al., 2019, 2002)
- Originally designed for Pakistani heritage speakers of Mirpuri, Punjabi and Urdu
- **Partnership:** Community expert brings cultural and linguistic knowledge + SLT brings linguistic analysis skills
- **Translation Protocol** designed to make mapping of phrases and morphology transparent  
(Pert & Stow, 2003)





# Example of LOTE assessment - Adaptation

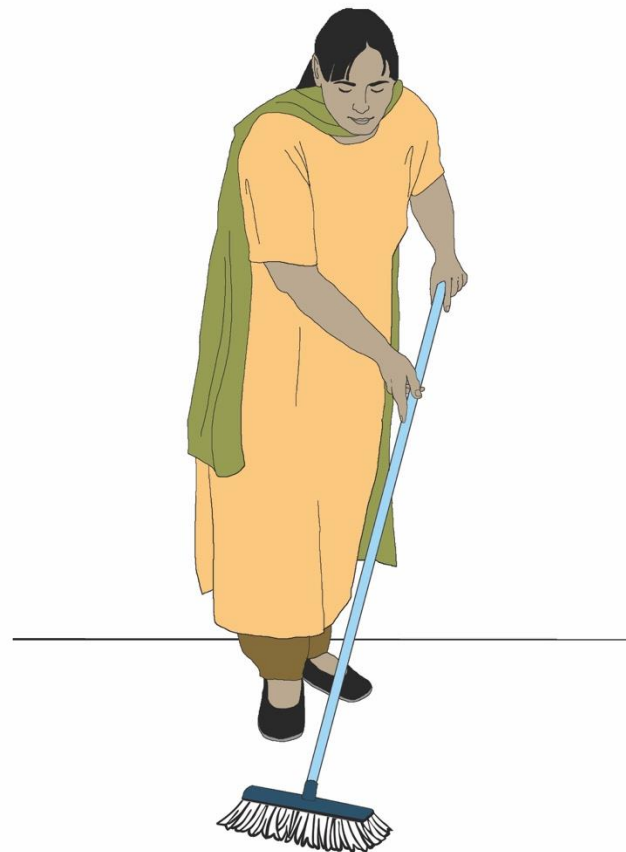
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- BASS has now been adapted to:
  - **Spanish** – European language  
(Led by Simic, Zocchi, and Holyfield, 2025)
  - **Malayalam** – Indian Heritage Language  
(Led by Rajan, 2024)
  - Pictures culturally adapted
  - Re-drawn by an artist or AI





# Mirpuri versus Malayalam version



# Spanish version with different verbs





# Adaptations *not* translations



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- Similar levels of complexity
  - Start with underlying Thematic Roles (Saeed, 2003)
  - Consider surface phrase mapping
  - For example:
    - ‘The girl is hopping’ in English is Subject + Verb (2 phrases)
    - ‘kuri charl mar-ni pi’ is Subject + Object + Dummy Verb (Compound verb)
  - English is almost certainly less complex in terms of morphology, especially compared to languages with gender agreement

# Building Early Sentences Therapy (BEST)



- Evidence-based therapy package (McKean et al., 2025)
- Based on Constructivist language acquisition (McKean, Pert & Stow, 2025, 2012)
- Recent RCT showed significant improvement and the effects of signing morphology as well as content words (McKean et al. 2025)
- As the therapy is based on underlying principles of Constructivism, the surface language should not affect the outcome
- Case studies in LOTE were completed alongside the main English language study







# BEST: Mirpuri, Sylheti and Polish adaptations

- Language informants: Warriach, Ahmed & Razaq, and Czaplewska respectively
- Maintain ‘active ingredients’
- Make images and toys culturally recognisable
- Adapt target utterances where necessary: careful morpheme-by-morpheme approach used with native speaker experts to ensure alignment with English targets
- Signs for non-English morphology
- Place-holder signs for complex morphology in Polish adaptation



# Challenges

No response

Responding only in the language of Education  
(English or Welsh in Wales)

Interpreter training

Interpreter's experience with children

Interpreter's experience of speech and language therapy

SLT training

SLT's experience of working with interpreters





# Summary



SLTs can successfully develop home language assessments and therapy materials for children who speak LOTE when following a morpheme-by-morpheme translation protocol, working with native speakers.

This leads to a better range of available clinical tools, and clinical outcomes which value home language.

Such tools are more likely to meet the aims of accurately identifying language difficulties, effectively providing support, while maintaining home language skills alongside the development of the additional language.

# Summary



Even with culturally and linguistically aligned assessment and therapy packages challenges include:

- Training interpreters to deliver as envisaged
- Differing adult-child interaction styles of different cultures
- Reluctance to use home language in an Educational or Care setting where English (or Welsh) is the expected language (Pragmatics)

Not responding to assessments and therapy is normal for **many young** children.

Stow & Pert (2020, 2006) found that a response rate of 0 to 21 for naming pictures in Pakistani heritage children aged 2;06-4;11

# Next steps

Expansion of the languages available, empowering LOTE speakers to culturally and linguistically adapt assessments and therapy resources

Undergraduate training

Post graduate training

Working with interpreters

Interpreter training





Thank you!



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