

**IDENTIFYING LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT IN BILINGUAL SCHOOL-AGED
CHILDREN USING ONE WORD VOCABULARY TESTS**

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This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Speech Pathology by Research in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand.

February 2015

DECLARATION

I, Tracey O'Brien, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own independent and unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other academic institution, nor has it been published in any form.

Word count: 26 521

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February 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Michael Kennedy, a man who loved life and instilled a life-long love of learning in me.

I would like to acknowledge and extend my sincere thanks to the following people:

- My supervisor, Prof. Heila Jordaan, and co-supervisor, Dr Sharon Moonsamy, for their ongoing support and guidance in the process of completing this research. It has been a privilege to have been supervised by two such tenacious women.
- To the school where data was collected for graciously accommodating me and seeing the value in this research. Thank you to the children who participated in the study.
- The students who assisted with data collection and the consultants who provided valuable isiZulu translations and insight.
- Wikus Jordaan for his assistance with the statistical analysis of data.
- My family and friends for their ongoing support and words of encouragement. A special thanks to Christopher, Shena, Caitlin, Hayley and Ariella- speech therapy is a team sport!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements & dedication	iii
Table of contents	iv
List of appendices	vii
List of figures	viii
List of tables	ix
List of abbreviations	x
Abstract	xi
1. Introduction and rationale	1
2. Literature review	4
2.1. South Africa: Multilingualism and Education System	4
2.2. Language for academic success	7
2.2.1. The role of vocabulary in the development of academic language	9
2.2.2. Academic language and EAL learners	9
2.3. Bilingualism	10
2.3.1. Acquiring additional languages	10
2.3.2. Characteristics of bilingualism	11
2.3.3. Vocabulary development in bilingual children	12
2.4. The role of the speech-language therapist in the school setting	13
2.5. Primary Language Impairment (PLI)	14
2.5.1. Causes of PLI	15
2.5.2. Characteristics of PLI	16
2.5.2.1. Morphology and syntax	16
2.5.2.2. Semantics	16
2.5.2.3. Pragmatics	17
2.5.2.4. Literacy	17
2.5.2.5. Non-linguistic deficits	17
2.5.3. Assessment	18

2.5.4. English learners with PLI and typically developing EAL learners	18
2.6. Primary Language Impairment (PLI) in the bilingual learner	19
2.6.1. Assessment of the bilingual learner with PLI	19
2.7. Assessing vocabulary: the value of composite scoring	21
3. Methodology	23
3.1. Research aims	23
3.2. Research design	23
3.3. Participants	24
3.3.1. Criteria for selection	24
3.3.2. Sampling procedure	25
3.3.3. Description of participants	26
3.3.4. Description of study site	26
3.4. Research instrumentation	27
3.4.1. Vocabulary measure: EOWPVT-4 and ROWPVT-4	28
3.4.2. Adapted isiZulu vocabulary tests	30
3.4.3. Language scale: DELV-CR	31
3.4.3.1. Syntax subtest	32
3.4.3.2. Semantic subtest	32
3.4.3.3. Pragmatic subtest	33
3.5. Procedure	35
3.6. Ethical considerations	36
3.7. Reliability and validity	37
3.8. Data analysis	38
4. Results and discussion	40
4.1. Within-group comparisons	40
4.1.1. Comparison between receptive and expressive vocabulary scores	40
4.1.2. Comparison between isiZulu and English scores in the bilingual group	44
4.2. Between-group comparisons	47
4.2.1. Comparison between English monolingual learners & EAL bilingual learners on English vocabulary scores English	47
4.2.2. Discussion	48

4.3.Comparison between English monolingual learners and EAL bilingual learners when composite scores are used	49
4.3.1. Translation equivalents and singlets	52
4.4.Identification of possible language impairment	53
4.4.1. Description of participants identified as language impaired	53
4.5.Theoretical and practical implications for the use of composite scoring in vocabulary tests to aid in the identification of language impairment amongst EAL learners	56
5. Conclusion	58
5.1.Implications for language assessment of bilingual learners	58
5.2.Implications for speech-language therapists	59
5.3.Limitations of the study	61
5.4.Implications for future research	61
References	63
Appendices	73

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Page Number
A Principal information sheet and consent form	73
B Parent information sheet and consent form	74
C Child assent form	76
D Gauteng Department of Education research approval certificate	77
E University of the Witwatersrand research ethical clearance certificate	79
F Adapted isiZulu receptive and expressive vocabulary word lists	80

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page Number
1	Research design	35
2	Mean percentage scores for receptive and expressive measures	41
3	Mean percentage scores on English receptive and expressive measures	46
4	Mean receptive and expressive composite, bilingual and monolingual English scores	49

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page Number
1 Summary of composition of participants	26
2 English ROWPVT items adapted for the South African population	29
3 Reassessments on vocabulary tests	37
4 Mean and standard deviation for receptive and expressive measures	40
5 Results of t-tests comparing the receptive and expressive vocabulary measures obtained by each group	40
6 Correlations between receptive and expressive vocabulary measure results	42
7 Results of t-tests comparing the monolingual and bilingual group on the English receptive and expressive scores	46
8 An example of the method used to calculate composite score for a bilingual participant	48
9 Mean and standard deviation for composite scores and individual language scores	49
10 Results of t-tests comparing the receptive and expressive vocabulary between the monolingual and bilingual group	50
11 Scores of each participant identified as language impaired on the DELV-CR	53

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BICS: basic interpersonal communication skills

CALP: cognitive academic language proficiency

CAPS: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements

DELV-CR: Diagnostic evaluation of language variation- criterion referenced

EAL: English additional language

EFL: English first language

EOWPVT: Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test

L1: first language/home language

L2: second language or additional language

LiEP: Language in education policy

LoLT: language of learning and teaching

PLI: Primary language impairment

RNCS: Revised National Curriculum Statement

ROWPVT: Receptive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test

SD: Standard Deviation

SLT: Speech-language therapist

TD: typically developing

TE: translation equivalent

ABSTRACT

Background: Many children within the South African education system are learning in English which is not their first language, placing them at risk for academic failure. Differentiating between a typically developing bilingual child and a bilingual child with a language impairment is challenging. There are limited resources and assessment tools available in South Africa that accurately and sensitively assess bilingual children who are at risk for a possible language impairment. Testing a bilingual child's vocabulary in both their languages typically provides a more accurate picture of language skills and may be sensitive to possible language impairment.

Purpose: The main aim of this study was to explore the use of one word vocabulary tests to identify a possible language impairment in bilingual children in the school setting. This study also aimed to compare the vocabulary of monolingual children and bilingual children. Participants who were at risk for possible language impairment were identified and their language skills were further assessed and described.

Method: The research design of this study was quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional and comparative in nature. Eight-year-old learners ($n= 60$) at an English medium school were approached to participate. These participants were divided into two groups: one group being monolingual English ($n= 30$) and the other group having isiZulu as the primary home language with English as an additional language ($n= 30$). The Receptive and Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Tests (Martin & Brownell, 2011a and b) were used to assess each learner. The monolingual group was assessed in English and the bilingual group was assessed in English and isiZulu. Raw scores were analysed using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests and paired sample t-tests. Participants that were identified as having a possible language impairment, were further assessed using the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Criterion Referenced (DELV-CR) (Seymour, Roeper & De Villiers, 2003) to diagnose and describe their language competence.

Results and implications: The results of this study showed that EAL learners benefit from being assessed in both languages as well as having results compared to the peer group mean. The EAL learners scored better in the English assessments than in the isiZulu assessments. When scored for conceptual vocabulary using composite scoring, the mean score of the EAL

learners did improve but there was still a significant difference between the composite score and the monolingual English score. This may be due to poor performance on the isiZulu assessment. Six of the 30 isiZulu children were flagged as having a possible language impairment based on composite scoring. Once assessed further on the DELV, 4/30 participants were described as having a language impairment. The language profile that the identified participants presented with was consistent with existing literature on EAL learners in South Africa. These findings indicate that with some caution and the use of peer-mean comparisons, bilingual vocabulary tests and composite scoring has potential to be used as part of a battery of assessments to differentiate between a language difference and a language impairment. Appropriate assessment materials and resources are lacking within the South African context and the results of this study suggest a new valuable method and materials for accurate and reliable assessment, especially valuable in the school context. This study also added to the body of research regarding the language profile of bilingual and monolingual children in South Africa

Key words: *conceptual vocabulary, composite scoring, bilingualism, language impairment, school-aged children*