Gross et al., 2014, Conceptual Scoring of Receptive and Expressive Vocabulary Measures in Simultaneous and Sequential Bilingual Children


Topic: Conceptual Scoring

*Conceptual scoring* considers the total number of concepts for which a child has a word in at least one language. For example, on a conceptual vocabulary measure, a child would receive three points for knowing *frijoles*, *subtraction*, *mano*, and *hand* because these words reflect knowledge of three concepts (“beans,” “subtraction,” “hand”), even though one word is known only in Spanish and one is known only in English.

*Rationale:* Expecting a bilingual child to show the same vocabulary knowledge as a monolingual child in each language is not realistic because bilingual children generally show distributed vocabulary knowledge; there are some concepts for which they know the corresponding word only in Language A and other concepts they know only in Language B (Pearson, 1998). For example, a child may know the word *frijoles* in Spanish, but not its translation equivalent *beans* in English; similarly, a child may know *subtraction* in English, but not its translation equivalent *resta* in Spanish. If, during a language assessment, a speech-language pathologist considers a bilingual child’s single-language skills only, there is a risk of overidentification of language impairment (e.g., Bedore, Peña, Garcia, & Cortez, 2005; Kohnert, 2010; Pearson, 1998; Teoh, Brebner, & McCormack, 2012). Conceptual scoring has been suggested as a less-biased alternative to single-language measures for bilinguals (Pearson, Fernandez, & Oller, 1993).

*Results Clinical Implications:* Conceptual scoring removed the statistically significant difference between simultaneous bilinguals and monolinguals for receptive vocabulary. Conceptual scoring did not ameliorate the difference between sequential bilinguals and monolinguals, even when controlling for
SES. However, conceptual scoring did result in a significant increase in the scores obtained by both bilingual groups. For simultaneous bilinguals, this score increase translated into improved classification. Although this approach would likely still overidentify some bilingual children if used to rule in language impairment, it may improve the accuracy with which clinicians can rule out vocabulary deficits in simultaneous bilinguals. However, this procedure may not be appropriate for sequential bilinguals, because allowing them to respond in Spanish during the administration of English assessments still yielded below-average scores for over 25% of the children.