The development of an assessment instrument measuring the Spanish proficiency of first grade students in a bilingual bicultural language arts program

Cecilia Carrasco

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT MEASURING THE SPANISH PROFICIENCY OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS IN A BILINGUAL BICULTURAL LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM

A Project Proposal Submitted to The Faculty of the School of Education In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in Education: School Administration Option

By

Cecilia Carrasco, M. A.
San Bernardino, California
1985
PROJECT SUMMARY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT MEASURING THE SPANISH PROFICIENCY OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS IN A BILINGUAL BICULTURAL LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM

Cecilia Carrasco, M.A.

California State University, San Bernardino, 1985

Statement of the Problem

There are very few oral language vocabulary tests in Spanish that adequately assess the language proficiency of students in the San Bernardino, California area. Many tests that are developed in Spanish use language patterns and dialectical words that are not familiar to most Spanish-speaking students in the San Bernardino valley.

The purpose of this project was to develop a testing instrument that would test the Spanish language proficiency of first grade students. The use of the students' primary language has prompted many educators to conclude that this is a sound pedagogical practice. The writer of this project also shares this opinion and feels that cognitive growth can also be measured through other languages besides English.

Procedure

The 1980 Spanish edition C.T.B.S. (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills) was reviewed and analyzed for content language and format. The vocabulary used in the instrument was reviewed and evaluated with the Spanish vocabulary that
first grade students were being taught through the 1980 edition of the Santillana Spanish series. The San Bernardino City School District Spanish vocabulary list was also reviewed and evaluated for language content and regional syntax familiarity.

Using the words from the Spanish Santillana reading series and the recommended Spanish vocabulary list from the San Bernardino City School District, the instrument was developed. The test was divided into three sections. The first section was vocabulary recognition of commonly used Spanish words. The second section measured comprehension through the use of answering questions from a story. The third section included vocabulary words that would measure the students' ability to recognize opposite meanings.
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INTRODUCTION

Public education has been developing a negative perception of its ability to teach all the students who are entering and exiting from its domain. Much of the data being compiled are based on standardized tests that are measuring the educational potential of students with varying degrees of environmental and cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, the standardized instruments have not taken into account all the variables of a students' background including culture and language.

While the misapplication of tests is a matter of general concern and is evident in education generally, it is in the treatment of the problems presented by bilingual, or environmentally different children, that the gravest mistakes have been made. The caution with which such prominent students as Terman, Garrett, Otis, Pintner, Freeman and others have approached the use of tests in instances where language or environmental problems enter into the testing situation has been largely ignored or misinterpreted by those, who equipped with the mechanical technique of application and scoring, have failed to place due weight on the analysis and evaluation of personal difference and of environmental problems.¹

Today, because of the pressure placed on educational institutions to produce academic achievement, less emphasis will be placed on cultural characteristics tied to linguistic patterns of culturally different children. The National Commission on Educational Excellence, which recently made its findings public, did not mention any strategies on how to teach the linguistically different student. Its main thrust was on public education's shortcomings and failures to produce significant academic achievement in its students regardless of the variables inherent in culturally diverse students.

The fact that tests have, in a measure, fulfilled their function of checking on the community of experience of children and on the extent to which children vary in profiting from common experiences has seemingly led many to assume that there is a universality in this community of experiences. However, a test is valid only to the extent that the items of the test are as common to each child tested as they were to the children upon which the norms were based. Only when a community of experience actually exists can checks based on that assumption be valid, even if we grant that such checks do symbolize intellectual capacity—an "if" that has serious questions in itself.

Because bilingual education for Spanish-speaking students has proliferated as an alternative to educating the culturally and linguistically different student, it has inspired the development of tests which do include the linguistic and
cultural background of the child. Bilingual education and these tests have shown improvement in assessing the bilingual bicultural students' academic achievement.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The possibility of new programs, new teaching methods, and different educational organizations are exhibiting pressures to change the status quo. New ideas and technology can be applied to the benefit of those suffering today. Although exploring sometimes creates resistance, many have become attuned to the fact that change is critical if students are to benefit from the experience in their academic preparation.

Although bilingual bicultural programs are often thought of as programs which only serve language minority children, English-speaking children also benefit by such programs. Through bilingual bicultural education their learning of a second language is enhanced by contact with native speakers.

Carter defines bilingual bicultural education as the teaching of diverse subjects in two languages. Using the child's primary language as a teaching medium (i.e., Spanish for Spanish speakers) is a common occurrence in bilingual bicultural classrooms. The reason for bilingual education is to avoid or lessen scholastic retardation in children whose mother tongue is not the principal school language.²

It is not surprising to find students with a primary language other than English scoring less well on standardized

and IQ tests than their English speaking student counterpart. Yet, despite these flaws some educators continue to ignore the discrepancy when undertaking curriculum reform.

Until recently, most educators accepted the results of IQ tests—whether Stanford-Binet, Otis, or SCAT—as accurate measurements of the intellectual capacity of Spanish-speaking Americans, despite the fact that all these tests are given in English and their culture content is biased toward middle-class Anglo-America. Only in the last few years have educators become aware that the right instruments are lacking for measuring intelligence and the achievement potential of Mexican Americans, although as long ago as 1935, Herschel T. Manuel had pointed out certain deficiencies of the Stanford-Binet. 3

Moreover, verbal and nonverbal IQ tests have been found to discriminate differently between Anglo and Mexican-American children. Zirkel noted the average score in the verbal section of the WISC for the Anglo-American children significantly surpassed that of Mexican-American children, but that their respective non-verbal WISC scores did not differ significantly. 4

Carl Simpson's research determined that minority childrens' academic performance suffered when they were placed in a uni-dimensional classroom setting (i.e., teacher lecture instruction, one type of materials usage only). His research design con-

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sisted of studying 150 public elementary schools in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. The data were generated by compiling the teachers' performance indicators given to students in the sample. In the instance where students had been taught in a multidimensional system (i.e., varied approaches in instruction and materials), minority students performed just as well as their non-minority counterparts.

On the other hand, minority students taught in a unidimensional manner and who had their achievement measured with a standardized test, scored less well than the non-minority student. This research concluded that the unidimensional organization puts minority students at a distinct disadvantage in terms of academic performance.\(^5\)

James Cummins, a noted linguist from Canada, has made an extensive analysis of some reasons that may attribute to the lack of English fluency of Spanish-speaking students. He states that many students with a primary language other than English are being instructed in a second language which is a pedagogically inferior medium of instruction. Students who are in classrooms where the language of instruction is one other than the students' native language are creating students who are semilingual. That is, students whose language skills are underdeveloped in their primary language and are not developing in the second language nor in the first language while receiving language instruction in the classroom.

Cummings proposed that the development of competence in a second language (L2) is partially a function of the type of competence already developed in the first language at the time of intensive exposure to L2 begins.⁶

Studies of different types of programs yield interesting results. Such is the case with immersion and submersion programs for second language learners.

In immersion programs all students start the program with little or no competence in the school language and are praised for any use they make of that language. Children in submersion programs, on the other hand, are mixed together with students whose first language is that of the school and their lack of proficiency in the school language is often treated as a sign of limited and intellectual ability.

Children in submersion programs may often become frustrated because of difficulties in communicating with the teacher. These difficulties can arise both because the teacher is unlikely to understand the child's first language and also because of different culturally-determined expectations of appropriate behavior. In contrast, the immersion teacher is familiar with the child's language and cultural background and can therefore respond appropriately to his needs. The immersion child's primary language is never denigrated by the teacher and its importance is recognized by the fact that it is introduced as a school subject after several grades. The

primary language of the minority-language child, on the other hand, is often viewed as the cause of his academic difficulties and an impediment to his learning the second language. Consequently, those aspects of the child's identity which are associated with his primary language and home culture are seldom reinforced by the school. In general, what is communicated to children in immersion programs is their success, whereas in submersion programs children are often made to feel acutely aware of their failure.7

In a recent publication from the 1980 census data from the U. S. Bureau of the Census, the statistics indicated that the minority language population numbered approximately 34.6 million (about 15 percent of the total U. S. population). Of this population, 17 percent is of school age. Also of no surprise to anyone, approximately 45 percent of the minority language population in 1980 came from Spanish-language backgrounds. In 1980 there were approximately 4.7 million children under 18 years of age in families where Spanish was spoken. The next largest groups of children were those in families where French, German, Italian, the Filipino languages, and Chinese were spoken.

With these alarming statistics, an effective school administrator must be aware of the needs of the limited English proficient student in order that the cognitive development of all the children is properly addressed. Regardless of the instructional approach taken, the administrator must

7Ibid, p. 225.
be cognizant that language minority students should (1) attain high levels of oral English proficiency; (2) achieve, to the best of their abilities, in academic areas, including reading, writing, and mathematics; and (3) experience positive psychological adjustment to life in a complex multicultural society.

Gone are the days when the administrator was merely the building custodian. No longer is the administrator merely responsible for providing for the safety of the children and the disbursement of instructional supplies. All segments of the society are asking for an accountability of the educational achievement of its students.

The administrator in the 80's must become accountable for all children, even the linguistically different. It can be said, that the school administrator must know more about his linguistically-different child because he or she is the one who is learning less. This is not speculation, but proven fact.
STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVE

The objective of this proposal is to develop a test that will measure the Spanish proficiency of first grade students in a bilingual bicultural language arts program.
DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

The proposed Vocabulary Assessment Instrument will be totally written in a Spanish language which is commonly used in Southern California. It will be organized into three general categories.

Section I  Vocabulary
Section II  Comprehension
Section III  Opposite Meanings

Section I will be multiple choice items from one through fifteen. The format will consist of a lead or stem containing a problem, one alternative representing the best response and three alternatives representing distractors for the student.

Section II will measure comprehension. Three short stories will be given with four questions following each story. The student will select the best possible answer for each question.

Section III will deal with opposite meanings. The student will be required to fill in the circle that is next to the opposite meaning of the underlined word. An example will be provided so that the student will have practice marking a sample problem correctly. There will be ten items in this section.

All directions will be read by the test administrator for all the sections. This will be done in order to guarantee that the students understand how to mark the response of their
choice. The test administrator will read all questions to the student and allow ample time for the student to answer.
LIMITATIONS

Language normally evolve differences from one region to another and from one social class to another. The forms of language become associated with the region where they are used and with the social class which uses them. Language testing in the native language therefore often consists of testing the student on the forms that are characteristic of the dialect that has social prestige and is considered "correct" and standard.

For the purposes of this instrument, the language used will be standard Spanish. It will be colloquially identified to what can be termed as native Southern California Spanish. Because the assessment instrument will be developed for a first grade classroom, the Spanish used will involve minimal linguistic and dialectical differences in comparison to the Spanish used by the first grade Spanish-speaking students. This is attributed to the fact that the first graders are still enlarging their Spanish vocabulary and their language development is still undergoing growth.

As a result of administering the Vocabulary Assessment Instrument to the total first grade classroom, the non-Spanish-speaking student who doesn't have any contact with the Spanish language other than classroom instruction should score less
well than the limited-English-speaking student who has Spanish as his primary language.

The bilingual instruction will be provided by a bilingual teacher. Printed material will also be used to develop the oral language vocabulary of the participating first graders. Some of the material will be developed by the teacher and other material will be commercially prepared. Care will be taken to utilize commercial material that compliments the Spanish used in the region in which the students reside. In all instances, the Spanish used will be standard Spanish and will include dialectical vocabulary only as the occasion merits it.

One will also need to keep in mind that the Spanish-speaking fluency of the limited English speakers will range in proficiency. Some students will be fluent while others will be semilingual in English and Spanish.
ADDENDUM 1
THE ADMINISTRATOR'S ROLE IN THIS INSTRUMENT

The primary purpose of a school site administrator such as a principal is to ensure that academic achievement is an on-going process for all the students in his charge. In some instances, the academic achievement of his students will be facilitated through the use of the English language as well as the students' primary language in the case of Limited English Proficient (L.E.P.) students.

It is the intent of this Language Assessment Instrument to measure the language proficiency of Spanish speaking students in the Spanish language at the first grade level. This test is specifically designed to measure critical concepts that most first graders should have as a basis for their conceptual development. An administrator using this test will be able to analyze the results of this test in order to interpret them from the standpoint of what the student knows in relationship to his/her English speaking counterpart. The results can be shared with classroom teachers as checkpoints for the students' developmental learning process. Much of the students' learning at this level will be at the concrete operations stage. Thus, teachers will be able to determine if the students are grasping some essential ideas and integrating them conceptually.

The administrator can review this data in light of conceptual internalization and can determine if English can be successfully used to identify the concept. Essentially,
the student would be using the English language to label a concept that the student has internalized through his own primary language.

Another feature of this test is the comparison which the administrator can use in analyzing his English standardized testing instrument. The administrator can review the English achievement test and this instrument and then identify which areas need to be reviewed in the classroom throughout the year. The Language Assessment Instrument can also be used as a basis for curriculum mapping and curriculum development. That is, determining the materials that will be needed to be developed and/or purchased that will teach the concepts in the students' primary language as well as the English language.


LANGUAGE ARTS TEST FOR FIRST GRADE BILINGUAL STUDENTS
INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE TEST

This is a test designed to measure the child's vocabulary in Spanish. The exam is also designed to measure the child's reading ability of simple words and concepts.

The directions may be given in either Spanish or English so that the children will understand how to mark the response he thinks is correct.

The following are the directions to be given to the children before taking the test:

SAY: Open your booklet to page 1 and write your name at the top of the page where it says NOMBRE.

In order to answer the question, you must mark the circle below the word or object that best answers the question. You will fill in the circle completely. If you change your answer, be sure and erase that answer completely and then mark the one you want.

On page 1 we have one practice example problem that we will do together. (Read the description or question for the student as well as the possible choices that are given.)

Now mark the answer you think is correct by filling in the circle below it completely.

If there are no questions, we will continue with the rest of the test.
PARTE I (VOCABULARIO)

Ejemplo:

Es un árbol

1. Es un animal

2. Es un barco

3. Es una casa grande
4. La manzana está arriba del árbol.

5. Son para comer.

6. ¿Cuál es vegetal?

perro libro silla zanahoria

7. Los peces viven en

el agua las montañas el cielo los árboles

8. Es un nombre

libro mesa Juán lápiz

9. El primer día de la semana es

el viernes el jueves el lunes el domingo
10. ¿Qué mes viene antes del mes de marzo?

enero  mayo  febrero  abril
 0      0      0      0

11. ¿Cuál palabra no pertenece?

manos  ojos  pelota  uñas
 0      0      0      0

12. ¿Cuál palabra no pertenece?

pato  papel  libros  lápiz
 0      0      0      0

13. ¿Cuál palabra no pertenece?

mamá  libro  hermana  papa
 0      0      0      0

14. ¿Cuál palabra no pertenece?

vestido  blusa  agua  falda
 0      0      0      0

15. ¿Cuál palabra no pertenece?

sillón  pelota  mesa  lámpara
 0      0      0      0
PARTE II (COMPRENSIÓN)


1. El mejor título es:

0 Una fiesta para papa
0 Un regalo para Tomás
0 La fiesta de Tomás
0 El carro de Tomás

2. El papá de Tomás le compró

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bote</th>
<th>carro</th>
<th>oso</th>
<th>avión</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. El juguete era el color

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>negro</th>
<th>rojo</th>
<th>blanco</th>
<th>azul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Tomás estaba

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>estado</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
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<tr>
<td>contento</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>triste</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enojado</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>asustado</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carmen iba caminando a su casa cuando empezó a llover. No tenía una paraguas y corrió debajo de un árbol para que no se mojara. Entonces se paró un carro. Su mamá estaba en el carro. Carmen se subió al carro y se fue a su casa con su mamá.

1. El mejor título es

0 Carmen y su amiga
0 Carmen andando para la escuela
0 Carmen se divierte en la lluvia
0 Carmen se va a su casa con su mamá

2. Su mamá estaba en un

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>transporte</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>autobus</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caballo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taxi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. Carmen se paró debajo de

un arbol    una puerta    una paraguas    una mesa
0           0            0             0

4. Carmen sabía que iba llover.

si           no
0            0

La mamá de Marta trabaja en una tienda de animales. Un día Marta fue con su mamá a trabajar. Le dio de comer a todos los animales. Marta se divirtió ayudando a su mamá.

1. El mejor título es

0 Marta ayuda a su mamá
0 Marta encuentra un gatito
0 Marta y su papá
0 Marta en la tienda de juguetes

2. Su mamá trabaja en una tienda de

juguetes    carros    animales    ropa
0           0            0             0
3. Marta les dio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>agua</th>
<th>comida</th>
<th>medicina</th>
<th>ropa</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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</table>

4. Marta estaba

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>contenta</th>
<th>asustada</th>
<th>enojada</th>
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</table>
PARTE III (LOS OUESTOS)

Ejemplo:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gigante</th>
<th>grande</th>
<th>enano</th>
<th>hombre</th>
<th>mono</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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1. frío

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>tren</th>
<th>bonito</th>
<th>calor</th>
<th>tienda</th>
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<tr>
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2. tarde

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<thead>
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<th>cierto</th>
<th>modo</th>
<th>comprar</th>
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<tr>
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3. claro

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>techo</th>
<th>bajar</th>
<th>nadar</th>
<th>oscuro</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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4. bajar

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<tr>
<th>tomar</th>
<th>poner</th>
<th>venir</th>
<th>subir</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>viejo</td>
<td>joven</td>
<td>rico</td>
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