

## Using the BDI with Children from Spanish-Speaking Homes

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There is a Spanish translation of the BDI, however, there are no norms for the Spanish translation. A review of the Communication Domain for English and Spanish highlights a number of differences across the tests. While there is a set of English norms, they are not valid for children from Spanish-speaking homes. When a test is translated, the psychometric properties of it change. Items p-values (difficulty levels) differ because of differences in the structure of the original and translated language. Items can also vary as a result of cultural differences.

Some of the items from the Communication Domain that are affected by linguistic and cultural differences include:

### Receptive Items

**RC 14** The preposition “on” is tested on the English version of the test. In Spanish, “en” represents both “on” and “in” so it is important to make sure the receptive item does not have two separate choices with both of those options.

The Spanish translation uses “sobre el papel,” which could be interpreted as “over the paper” or “on the paper.”

**RC 15** This item tests the possessive pronouns “your” and “my” with the body part pie. It is much more common in Spanish to say “el pie” instead of “tu pie.” While it is not incorrect to say “tu pie,” it sounds slightly awkward.

**RC 17** This item tests the possessive form ‘s in English. In Spanish the possessive takes a different form that involves altering the syntax, while in English this is a morphological change. It cannot be assumed that these will follow the same developmental sequence in each language.

**RC 28** Tests irregular plurals (e.g., children and mice) in English. In Spanish there are no irregular plurals. All plurals are rule-based and require adding “s” to words that end in vowels and “es” to words that end in consonants. In English it is typical for children to use the plural rules with the words “child” and “mouse” to produce “childs” and “mouses.” They master irregular plurals later than they master regular plurals. Thus, this item would be easier in Spanish than in English.

**RC 30** This item tests the understanding of the future tense of the verb “to be” (though only one of the items in English tests a future “to be” verb—the other tests the future form of “to paint”). In Spanish the “to be” verbs are slightly more complex because there are two (ser and estar) that are used in different situations. For the Spanish items it does not test the future tense of either ser or estar. It tests the future tense of other verbs. In English future verbs require a change in syntax (will X) while in Spanish future verbs require a change in morphology (e.g. ganaré). Because of the structural differences, it cannot be assumed these structures are acquired in the same developmental sequence as in English.

**RC 32** Cultural variation. Eggs and toast will be easier to remember for children who eat eggs and toast for breakfast than for those who eat eggs and tortillas.

**RC 33** “Understands the past tense of the verb “to be.”” The Spanish translation of this is “Entiende el tiempo pretérito del verbo ser” but the responses in the protocol use the verb “estar” in the imperfect form.

**RC 34** Rhyming words. This item uses different pictures/words/concepts for the English and Spanish versions, which invalidates the norms.

**RC 35** Initial sounds. This item uses different pictures/words/concepts for the English and Spanish versions, which invalidates the norms.

**RC 37** Selection of words with the same ending sounds. This item uses different pictures/words/concepts for the English and Spanish versions, which invalidates the norms.

**RC 39** Identification of final sounds. Final consonants are much less frequent in Spanish than they are in English. Additionally, there are only 5 sounds that can occur in final position. The first Spanish item is “Di la palabra ‘vez.’ Ahora di la palabra ‘ve.’ It lists the correct response as /z/ but it is actually the sound /s/ because the letter “z” represents the sound /s/. If the child says /s/ and the examiner is expecting /z/, they might mark a correct response incorrect. The second set for Spanish is “botón” “botó.” “Botó” is not a word in Spanish, yet the instructions are “Di la palabra (say the word)...”

## **Expressive Communication**

**EC 17** Tests use of meaningful 3-word phrases. Sometimes children can express something that is at the same level of complexity with fewer words in Spanish than in English. For example, “quiero leche” is “I want milk.” The three examples on the test are “I want cookie,” which would be represented with two words in Spanish (quiero galleta), “Pick me up,” which would be represented with one word (recójame), and “Give to me,” which would be represented with one word (dame).

**EC 19** Tests the pronouns “I, you, me” in English. The requirement is that each of them is used on a daily basis. In Spanish, children are required to use “yo, me, mi, tú, te, ti” on a daily basis. The “me” and “te” pronouns are more complex pronouns than those tested in English. Thus, this item would be more difficult for Spanish speakers.

**EC 25** This item tests the articles “a” and “the” in English. In Spanish the article system is more complex because it includes gender, which does not exist with the same complexity in English. Instead of two articles, Spanish has six (un, el, los, una, la, las). The Spanish translation focuses on the four singular articles. This item would be more difficult in Spanish than in English.

**EC 27** In English this tests two plural forms ending with /s/ and two ending with /z/. In Spanish this difference would be /s/ and /es/. The examples given test three /s/ and one /es/. In English the number of syllables in the word remains the same, while in Spanish the number of syllables increases when /es/ is required. This results in a different difficulty level for the Spanish item.

**EC 29** Repeats familiar words with clear articulation. The same number of words are presented for each language but the sound inventories are not equally represented. English assesses 10 different sounds/clusters in initial position, 3 medial consonants, and 6 final consonants. Spanish assesses 10 different sounds/clusters in initial position, 8 medial consonants/clusters, and no final consonants. There are fewer final consonants in Spanish than in English but they do exist.

**EC 30** Follows conventional rules of conversation. Conventional rules vary by culture.

**EC 33** Uses past tense verbs ending in -ed. Past tense in Spanish could be preterit or imperfect and would include 5 (or 6 depending on dialect) person options (e.g. comí, comiste, comió, comemos, comerion). The Spanish translation assesses the third person preterit.

**EC 34** “Uses plural forms ending in /ez/.” The structure of plurals differs between English and Spanish. This approximates the plural rule for words that end in consonants in Spanish, for which /es/ is added.

**EC 44** “Uses irregular plural forms.” There are no irregular plural forms in Spanish. In English the items are goose/geese, deer/deer, mouse/mice. In Spanish the items are ganso/gansos, venado/venados, raton/ratones. This item is a morphology item in Spanish but an irregular form that requires memorization in English. These are very different difficulty levels/stages of acquisition.