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Improving assessments for Spanish-speaking children with communication disorders in Kansas

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A critical need exists for unbiased speech/language assessment instruments for all children, but especially for children who speak a language other than English (e.g., Spanish). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs, the number of English Language Learners (ELL) in U.S. schools has more than doubled from 2,030,451 in 1990 to 5,119,561 in 2005. Kansas is no exception. The growth of ELL students in Kansas was greater than 200% from 1993-2004. Of the total ELL population, 80% are reported as being Spanish speakers. This has created a demand for Spanish speech/language services. Currently, published phonological assessment instruments in Spanish are sparse. A major issue pertains to the selection of optimal words for eliciting speech samples. Sixty stimuli were presented to 20 typically developing Spanish-speaking 3- and 4-year-old children of Mexican descent in Wichita, Kansas to determine which Spanish words are known best by young Spanish-speaking children. The results indicate that body parts and food/drink items were identified most readily by participants. Colors and numbers were named first in English more often than in Spanish. Results will be used for the selection of optimal words for future Spanish phonological assessment protocols.