



# Bilingual speech-language pathology: Should all graduate students be required to have multicultural/bilingual exposure prior to practicing?

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## INTRODUCTION

Based on current statistics, approximately 1 out of 20 or 10% of the US population suffers from a speech or language disorder (Downloaded from <http://media.cla.auburn.edu/commdis/clinic/index.cfm> on June 20, 2009). Furthermore, the number of bilingual speakers has steadily increased; specifically, the number of people speaking a language other than English at home has risen from 24.95 in 1990 to 31.5% in 2000 and the numbers are only projected to continue rising (US Census Bureau, 2000). Based on these statistics, it can be inferred that a large number of individuals with communication disorders are bilingual. However, most speech language pathologists (SLPs) are monolingual, do not have extensive multilingual/multicultural training and do not feel competent to assess and provide intervention for bilingual speakers (Kritikos, 2003).

## PURPOSE

Based on analysis of current research, bilingual/multicultural emphasis in speech language pathology has become synonymous with Spanish/English. This paper addresses this particular issue, reviewing and analyzing current university SLP programs and seeking answers to the following questions:

- Are perspective SLPs being prepared to practice speech-language pathology in a multicultural environment?
- Since the number of bilinguals is rising, is there a need for required bilingual/multicultural education for all SLP graduate students?
- Are there sufficient university programs that provide bilingual education if desired by SLP students and, if so, what language/s are considered for this bilingual education?

## METHODS

The first author looked at all university programs in the US that provide emphasis on bilingual/multicultural education. The list of schools, which was last revised on June 5, 2009, was obtained from the ASHA website. From this list, the first author visited the website corresponding to each listed program. The websites were examined to answer the following questions:

1. What does the program consist of?
2. What are the requirements of the program in terms of specific language proficiency?
3. Is there a specific emphasis on a particular language or a cultural group?

For the universities which did not provide a thorough explanation of their program, the first author contacted the department via telephone for further information.

Language	# of SLPs
Spanish	789
Chinese	110
Korean	57
Navajo	50
Vietnamese	62
French	55
Hindi	39
Arabic	49
Tagalog	26
Italian	41
Polish	29
Hebrew	42
Russian	45
Native Am. dialect	18
German	31
Urdu	23
Hmong	14
Japanese	14
Pueblo	6
Cambodian	5
Farsi	11
Leo	7
Green	22
Apache	4
Armenian	9
Gujarati	7
Keresan	6
Romanin	2
Swiss	2
Thai	2
Ukrainian	2
Assyrian	1
Bengali	1
Bulgarian	1
Canabal	1
Filipino	4
Finish	1
Ibo	1
Latvian	1
Mien	1
Portuguese	6
Rasque	1
Slavic	1
Taiwanese	1
Tongan	1
Turkish	2
Yiddish	7
Zuni	2
Tiwa	9
Hungarian	1
Khmer	1
Kurdish	1
Mandarian	1
Punjabi	2

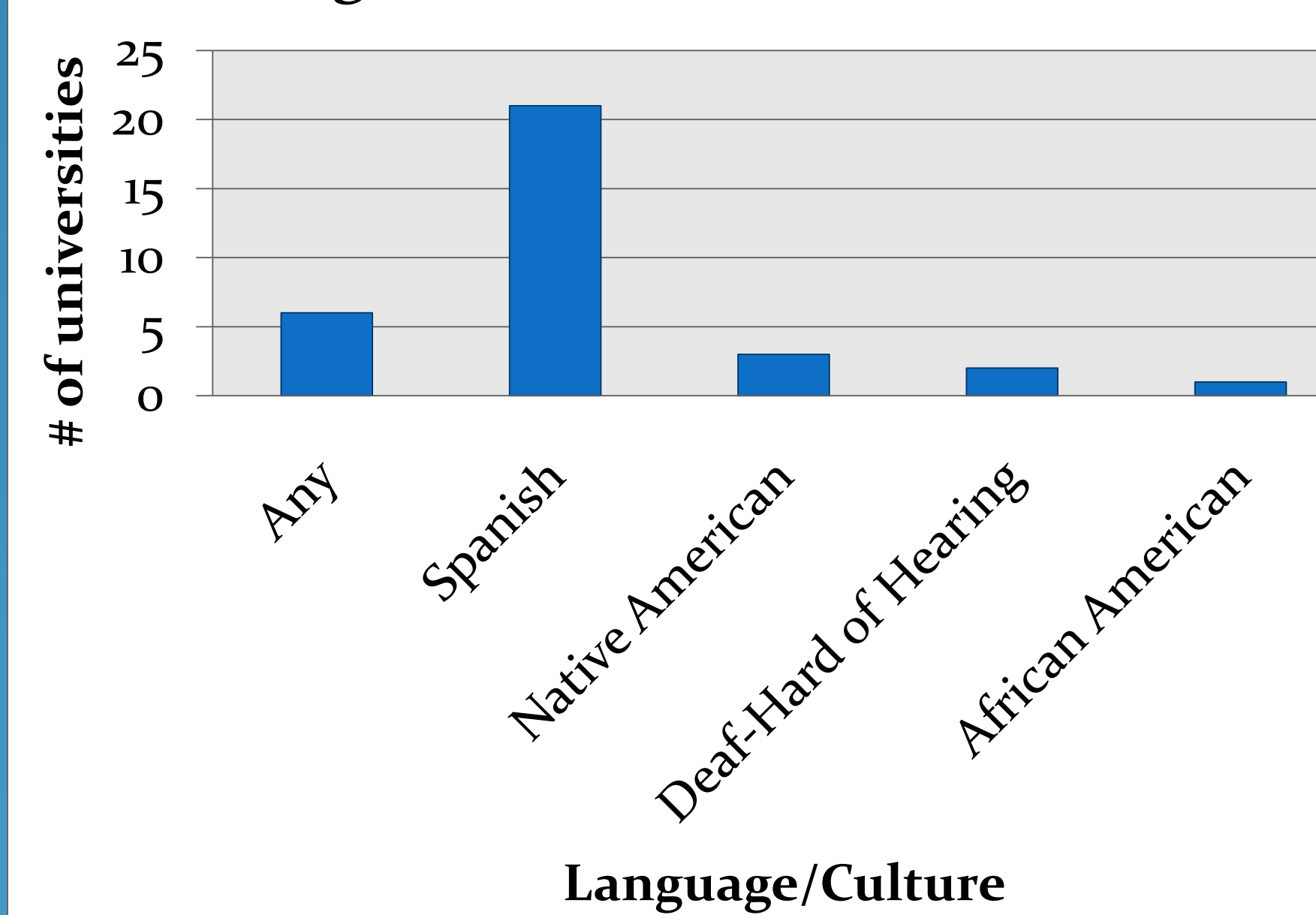
## LITERATURE REVIEW

Effie Papoutsis Kritikos (2003) investigated the beliefs of SLPs across five states in the US about the language assessment of bilingual/ bicultural individuals. He tested the following in his study:

1. Personal efficacy- belief about own ability to be able to change individuals' learning and behavior
2. General efficacy- belief that professionals in a field are sufficiently skilled to change individuals' learning and behavior
3. Personal comfortableness- feeling sufficiently competent to assess and provide recommendation to bilingual speakers.

Kritikos surveyed currently practicing SLPs in 6 geographical regions across the US. The results revealed that

Breakdown of program emphasis of universities with bilingual/multicultural education



## DISCUSSION

As evident from the above graph, the majority of universities that provide SLP bilingual/multicultural education place an emphasis on Spanish and the Hispanic culture.

If 10% of the US population has a speech-language disorder and 31.5% of the population is bilingual then it can be approximated that approximately 3-4% of all individuals who are bilingual also have a speech-language disorder.

This kind of statistics call for increased training of SLP professionals to treat individuals who are from diverse backgrounds and/or bilingual.

Language	# of SLPs
Spanish	385
French	82
German	45
Italian	28
Arabic	10
Punjabi	2
Chinese	3
Dutch	3
Gujarati	2
Hindi	3
Japanese	2
Navajo	2
Norwegian	2
Portugese	4
Russian	5
Swedish	3
Urdu	1
Yiddish	13
Greek	7
Hebrew	12
Hungarian	3
Tagalog	3
Armenian	2
Czech	2
Kannada	2
Malyalam	2
Mandarin	2
Tamil	2
Bangali	1
Cantonese	1
Croatian	1
Danish	1
Farsi	1
Marathi	1
Polish	1
Swiss	1
Tawainese	1
Tiwa	1
Turkish	1
Zuni	1

## FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

This paper is a general overview of the current situation. In the future, it would be valuable to conduct surveys where current SLPs belief systems on bilingual/multicultural issues are compared to Kritikos's study to seek patters of changes.

It is also important to distribute surveys to all university programs that provide bilingual/bicultural education so that each program representative has the opportunity to fully describe the program.

It would be valuable to survey graduate students of speech-language pathology to see what their perspective is and if it differs from those of currently practicing SLPs.

## CONCLUSIONS

- All students should be required to have bilingual/multicultural exposure prior to practicing in the field.
- Universities should provide broad training for all SLP graduate student.
- Broad training should consist of but not limited to:
  1. education about possible culture and/or linguistic factors that can influence assessment and intervention
  2. typical speech and language acquisition for bilingual speakers
  3. techniques to administer and interpret formal and informal assessment procedures to distinguish between communication difference and communication disorders
  4. specific training on how to work with interpreters as well as a guide to resources for specific languages/cultures

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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