

# BELA

**Bilingual Early Language Assessment**

---

## Administration Manual

Patton O. Tabors, Ed.D.  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Cornelia Heise-Baigorria, Ed.D.  
Cambridge Public Schools

## **Introduction**

Designing assessment activities for preschool age children, particularly young second language learning children, is a complicated process requiring that a number of factors be kept in mind at all times. First, young children may well be intimidated by any formal testing situation, particularly if it is held in a new location with new people as assessors. Second, an assessment activity that occurs only once, particularly if it is out of the normal context for the child, may well not provide accurate information about a child's actual abilities. Third, if an assessment is constructed to show only what a child does not know, rather than what the child does know, it must be considered inappropriate. And fourth, if the child comes from a home where the primary language spoken is other than English, an assessment that uses English to mediate performance will make it difficult to know if a child's understandings have not yet developed in a certain area, or whether the child has not yet acquired enough information about the second language to understand what is being asked or to give an answer that can be understood. The Bilingual Early Language Assessment (BELA), which was originally developed<sup>i</sup> for the Bilingual Home-Based Program<sup>ii</sup> of the Cambridge Public Schools, takes these constraints into consideration.

The distinctive features of the BELA are the following:

1. It is designed to be administered by home visitors or other professionals either with the caretaker present or in any other socially familiar situation, so the child will feel more comfortable during the assessment.
2. It is designed so that concrete materials are used during the tasks, so the child is operating with familiar objects or with illustrations.
3. It is designed to assess the child's knowledge of basic concepts like body parts, colors, and numbers, as well as the child's linguistic ability.
4. It is designed to be administered both in the child's home language and in English, so it will be possible to ascertain whether a child is having difficulty with a concept (i.e. which shape is a square) or with the vocabulary item ("square" in English).
5. It is designed to be used more than once, so that a child's developing competencies can be assessed and home visitors and other professionals can use the assessment information to inform their work with the child.

It is these particular features that make the BELA a highly appropriate assessment instrument for young second language learners.

## **Administering the BELA**

The BELA has been designed to be administered one-on-one at home or in a child care setting. In order to establish the child's conceptual knowledge and linguistic level, the BELA is initially administered in the child's stronger language (for most young children this will be their home language) followed by an administration in the other language (for most children this will be English) at a subsequent visit. When the BELA is to be administered in the home language, *only* that language should be used with the child



during the administration. By the same token, when the BELA is to be administered in English, *only* English should be used with the child during the administration.

If the administration is done in the home, it will be necessary to limit the possibility of interruptions. While setting up for the session, or in a conversation before the session, it will be important to let adult family members know that one adult needs to be present during the assessment; however, that person will need to refrain from participating in the activity. The reason for this is to give the child the opportunity to demonstrate what she or he is capable of doing **ALONE**. Further, a request will be made that any television in the room be turned off during the administration of the BELA.

All instructions concerning the administration of the BELA are included in the assessment. During the administration, the assessor must

1. restrict comments to those in the administration instructions
2. guard against non-verbal cues -- such as gazing at the object that represents the correct answer or using fingers when eliciting the numbers
3. respond to all efforts on the part of the child, whether correct or incorrect, with a neutral comment such as "O.K."

### **Scoring the BELA**

The score sheet must be filled out during the BELA administration (see Appendix I). After each response (or after giving the command twice and not receiving a response), each sub-item is marked by circling the C for a correct answer, the I for an incorrect answer, or the NR for no response. Be sure to always circle one of these letters for each sub-item so it will be obvious that all of the sub-items have been administered. Some sub-items have a blank line after the C, I, NR sequence that should be filled in appropriately according to the instructions.

The questions in each sub-section (receptive or expressive) should be administered in order until the child gets four items (not sub-items) in a row incorrect or until the sub-section is completed. If the child gets four items in a row incorrect in the receptive section, discontinue that section and move to the first item in the expressive section. If the child gets four items in a row incorrect in the expressive section, discontinue testing and calculate the score based on the items administered as outlined on the score sheet.

The total score may be calculated immediately or after the visit. A second scorer should check the calculation of the final score.

### **Cross-language comparisons**

After scoring the home language and English versions of the BELA, comparisons across the two score sheets can readily be made concerning a child's level of demonstrated



Bilingual Early Language Assessment

competence in terms of concept development and ability in the two languages by placing the two score sheets side by side and noting how each sub-item has been marked in the two languages. If a child has gotten a sub-item correct in both languages, there is no reason for that sub-item to be administered in the future. If a child gets an item incorrect or does not respond, then that sub-item would be targeted for conceptual development in both languages. If a child gets a sub-item correct in one language, but incorrect or does not respond in the other language, that sub-item would be targeted for vocabulary development in that language.

### **Dual language scoring for repeated administrations**

The BELA has been designed to be administered over time so progress in both languages can be charted. The dual language record (see Appendix 2) can be used for this purpose. Examples of different patterns of results that might be obtained from repeated administrations of the BELA are also presented in Appendix 2.

---

<sup>i</sup> The Bilingual Early Language Assessment (BELA) is a revised version of the *Preschool Language Interview for the Child (PLIC)* which was developed in the summer of 1995 by a group of teachers and administrators from the Cambridge Public Schools. Working with a consultant, this group developed an assessment instrument that would be appropriate for use in the Bilingual Home-Based Program. Participants included: Margarita Cordoba, Bilingual Teacher, Spanish; Josianne Barnes, Bilingual Teacher, Haitian Creole; Carmen Medeiros, Bilingual Teacher, Portuguese; Helene Smit, ESL Teacher; Cornelia Heise-Baigorria, Project Leader of the Bilingual Home-Based Program; Linda Cravens, Bureau of Pupil Services; Patton Tabors, Consultant, Harvard Graduate School of Education; and Mary Cazabon, Acting Director, Bilingual Education.

In developing the PLIC, the teachers, administrators, and consultant started with a previous instrument, *The Cambridge Step By Step Assessment to Language Dominance (SSALD)* (Cambridge Public Schools, Department of Bilingual Education, 1993) which was in use in Grades K-8. This instrument had been developed to assess receptive, expressive, and functional abilities in children's first and second languages in order to fulfill the requirements of the LAU remedies (U.S. Office of Education and the Office of Civil Rights). The developers of the PLIC believed that the preschool instrument should mirror the organization and scoring of the SSALD, for ease of administration and interpretability of results as children moved from the Bilingual Home-Based Program into the Cambridge Public School programs. Thus, many of the features of the PLIC (and therefore the BELA) are similar to the features of the SSALD.

<sup>ii</sup> The Bilingual Home-Based Program serves linguistically and culturally diverse Cambridge families who have children between the ages of 2.9 and 5 years old. The program serves families from Amharic, Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese), Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish language backgrounds. The main goals of the program include: 1) support parents in their role as children's first teachers, 2) help develop skills that foster the development of young children and get them ready for school, 3) promote home-school linkages between the preschools/schools and families, 4) bring groups of families together, and 5) serve as a source of information to increase families' access to available services in Cambridge.

Bilingual Home-Based services provided include: 1) weekly educational visits by trained bilingual/bicultural home visitors, 2) theme-based curriculum that involves the whole family, 3) free use of educational toys, art materials, and books, 4) interviews with child's classroom teacher and classroom observation (pre-school/kindergarten) to cooperate with teacher and maximize educational program for the child, 5) field trips and group activities, such as picnics, visits to museums (Source: Fact Sheet compiled by Heise-Baigorria, 1996).

**APPENDIX I  
 BILINGUAL EARLY LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT SCORE SHEET (Two pages)**

Name of child \_\_\_\_\_ Home language \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of parent \_\_\_\_\_ Language of administration \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date of administration \_\_\_\_\_  
 Birth date of child \_\_\_\_\_ Age of child \_\_\_\_\_ Gender of child **F M**

**PART I: RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE**

| <b>1.1 Identify person</b>   | <b>1.2 Identify objects in environment</b>   | <b>1.3 Identify common objects</b>   | <b>1.4 Identify colors</b>   | <b>1.5 Identify quantity</b>   |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>1.6 Identify size</b>   | <b>1.7 Identify shapes</b>   | <b>1.8 Identify actions</b>  | <b>1.9 Identify subject</b>  | <b>1.10 Identify negatives</b>   |
| 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Scoring:**

- For each item, 1 or 2 correct = 0; 3 or 4 correct = 1.
- Score each item and enter scores in the boxes.  
 Add the scores to get the total for receptive language.

**Receptive language total =**

**C=Correct**

**I=Incorrect**

**NR=No Response**

Name of child \_\_\_\_\_

Date of administration \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 2: EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE**

| 2.1 Personal info   | 2.2 Repeat sounds  | 2.3 Repeat phrases   | 2.4 Repeat sentences   | 2.5 Label objects  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1. C   NR<br>2. C   NR<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> *  | 1. C   NR<br>2. C   NR<br>3. C   NR<br>4. C   NR<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR<br>2. C   NR<br>3. C   NR<br>4. C   NR<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR<br>2. C   NR<br>3. C   NR<br>4. C   NR<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/>                         | 1. C   NR<br>2. C   NR<br>3. C   NR<br>4. C   NR<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2.6 Label colors  | 2.7 Counting   | 2.8 Label body parts   | 2.9 Label actions  |  |
| 1. C   NR    5. C   NR<br>2. C   NR    6. C   NR<br>3. C   NR    7. C   NR<br>4. C   NR    8. C   NR<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> ** | C   NR<br><br><br><br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> ***                           | 1. C   NR<br>2. C   NR<br>3. C   NR<br>4. C   NR<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. C   NR _____<br>2. C   NR _____<br>3. C   NR _____<br>4. C   NR _____<br>Score = <input type="checkbox"/> |  |

Scoring:

- For item **2.1\***: give one point for each correct answer
- For item **2.6\*\***: 1-4 correct = 0, 5-8 correct = 1;
- For item **2.7\*\*\***, not able to count from 1-10 correctly = 0, counting from 1-10 correctly = 1
- For all other items: 1 or 2 correct = 0; 3 or 4 correct = 1

Score each item and enter scores in the boxes.

Add the scores to get the total for expressive language.

Add the receptive and expressive scores for the total BELA score.

Expressive language total =

Total BELA score (receptive + expressive scores) =

NOTES:



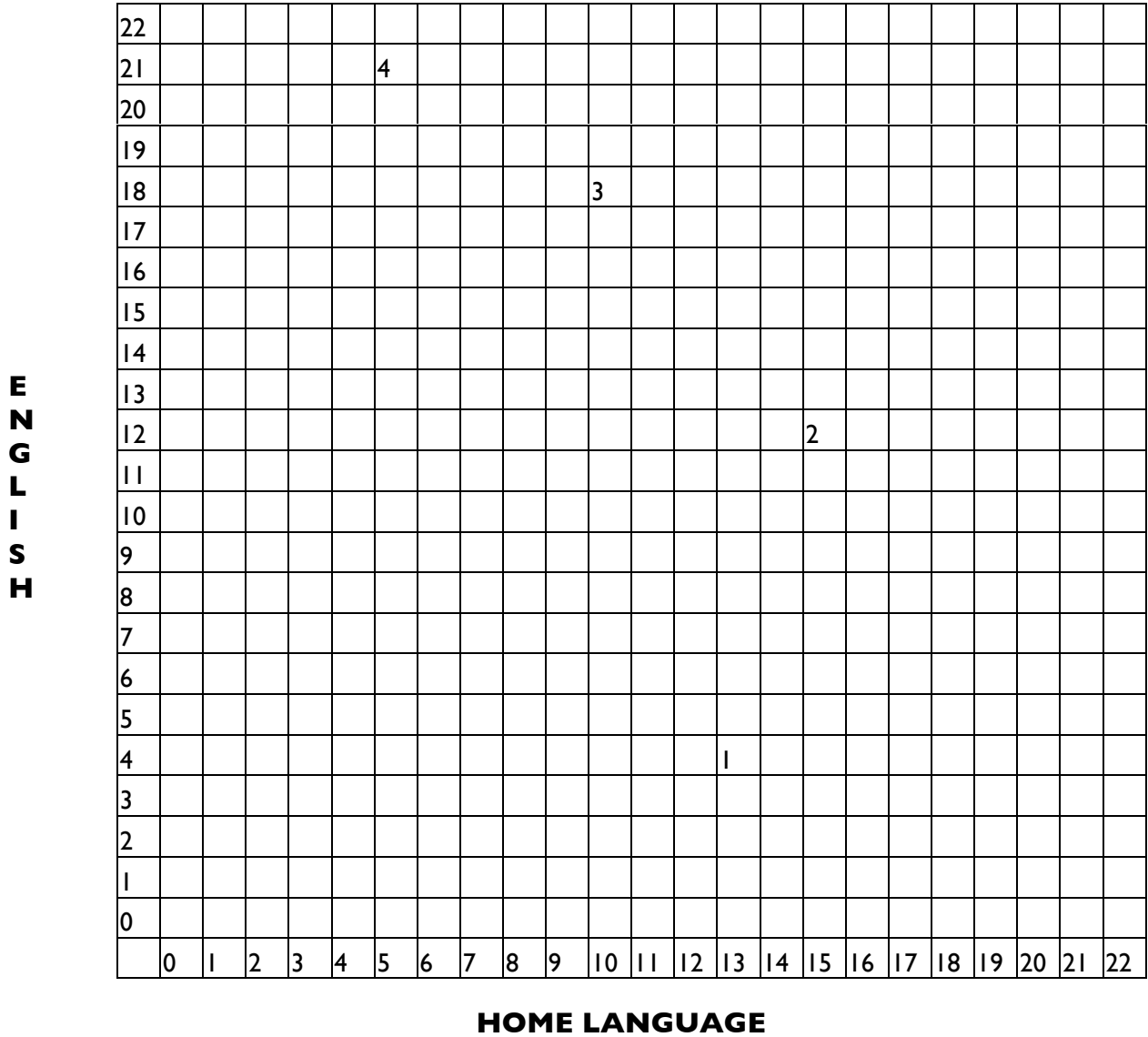






**BELA Dual Language Record**  
**Example #4**

This pattern of results over time indicates a child who begins by making gains in both languages, but then continues to increase in English, but decreases in the home language.



- Dates of assessments:
- English 9/30/04
  - English 12/17/04
  - English 3/26/05
  - English 6/04/05

- Dates of assessments:
- Home Language 9/15/04
  - Home Language 12/15/04
  - Home Language 3/14/05
  - Home Language 6/02/05