



Habilitation Outreach for  
Professionals in Education

## HOPE Note

### Children from Homes with Spoken Languages Other Than English



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Early attention to intervention issues related to bilingualism and children with cochlear implants focused on the enviable position of pursuing a second language at home to complement the acquisition of English at school (Waltzman, et al (2003), Rhoades, 2006). There is growing concern, however, about children who come from homes in which no or only limited English is spoken. According to U.S Census Data from the year 2000, approximately 3.4 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are reported to speak languages other than English at home with only limited proficiency in English. One might infer then that this finding in the general population would be reflected in the population of children with hearing loss. Thus, this HOPE Note will explore the auditory and language-learning needs of implant recipients whose home language is not English.

#### Supporting the Parent-Child Relationship

In cases where limited or no English is spoken in the home, the responsibility falls on the early intervention or school-based professional to creatively impart auditory and language skill development techniques to the child's family in their home language. This may be accomplished directly if the professional has competence in the home language, may be facilitated by a family member who knows both

languages, or may be accomplished using the services of a qualified interpreter. Just as parents modeling English for their children are encouraged to use child-directed speech, so too are parents who use another language asked to emphasize the rhythm and intonation contours of that language while speaking to the child. This will assist the child in learning the important words and linguistic structures that are required to participate in family life. This is particularly appealing to families of children with cochlear implants; the auditory access provided by implant technology makes it more possible for children to develop competence in the majority language of the home as parents use it functionally throughout the day.

#### Language Learning at Home

The routines of the home provide an excellent backdrop for inputting key words in the home language that will allow the child to get needs and wants met and to establish the important parent-child bond to which a common language will contribute. The ability to transmit cultural and linguistic information through an enhanced auditory system offers parents of today's children from non-English homes a chance to play an active rather than passive role in language

acquisition. When non-native English-speaking parents/caregivers are forced to use English with their children, the vocabulary level decreases and there is less language discourse. The quality of parent/caregiver language input suffers, placing the caregiver-child relationship in jeopardy (Rhoades, 2006). When the parent/caregiver speaks naturally using the home language, there is a richness of input that sets the stage for learning. Fortunately, focusing energy on techniques as well as specific vocabulary or language structures contributes to carryover to both L1 (the first language learned or the “anchor language”) and L2 (the second language learned, in this case English). It should be noted, however, that parents who want to participate in their child’s future learning in school will want to set for themselves the acquisition of English skills as a long term goal.

## Language Learning at School

English is designated as the language to be used at school to build linguistic competence to support content learning. Noting that language is best learned in the service of other learning (Gibbons, 2002), the acquisition of English is supported by all activities in school. This assists the child in setting up a context for when, where and with whom English is spoken. Early metalinguistic awareness is built when making explicit “what Mama says” and what “we say at school.” Experts in the English as a Second Language (ESL) movement call for English language learning at school to be imbedded within content instruction; this mandate parallels the recommendations made by education and language specialists in the field of implantation. Thus, it seems that mirroring best practice principles that encourage language learning by our monolingual children with implants will also support the growing group of bilingual language learners with implants.

## Forming Partnerships with Families

Professionals working with implant recipients from homes in which English is not spoken, have provided important guidelines for the teacher/therapist to follow when developing a habilitation plan that is culturally sensitive. Among these is the advice to develop at least minimal phrasal competence in the home language and to become non-judgmental and sensitive to the cultural differences between the family’s culture and one’s own (Rhoades, 2004). Teachers and therapists who have no experience

communicating with adults from other cultures may find that there are certain cultural preferences that are in play during verbal interactions. These must be explored in order to have successful partnerships with parents. As more and more parents seek implantation for their children with hearing loss, it is likely that the diversity in our classrooms and on our caseloads will only grow. Professionals must redouble their efforts to understand and work cooperatively with families who speak a language other than their own. In so doing, every child will have the opportunity to get the maximal benefit from implant technology.

## Related Resources

- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.
- Guiberson, M. (2005). Children with cochlear implants from bilingual families: Considerations for intervention and a case study. *The Volta Review*, 15, 29-39.
- Rhoades, E. (2006). *Auditory-Based Therapy when the Home Language is Not English*. HOPE Online Library. Available at [www.cochlear.com/HOPE](http://www.cochlear.com/HOPE)
- Rhoades, E. & Perigoe, C. (2004). The changing American family and ethnically diverse children with hearing loss and multiple needs. *The Volta Review*, 104, 285-305.
- Waltzman, S.B. Robbins, A.M., Green, J.E. & Cohen, N. (2003). Second oral language capabilities in children with cochlear implants. *Otology and Neurotology*, 25, 757-763.

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