

BEST Intervention for Children with DLD Adaptation to Polish, Mirpuri, and Sylheti

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Building Early Sentences Therapy (BEST)

BEST (McKean et al., 2013) is a language intervention for:

- children aged **3-6 years**
- **Small group** (2-6 children), or one-to-one therapy
- who cannot say **3-4 phrases utterances** independently, such as
 - “The boy is jumping” (2);
 - “The girl is hugging a horse” (3);
 - “The baby is putting a spoon on the table” (4)
- difficulties are evident in their home language(s) and **not just their additional language**



Theory Behind BEST

- **Toy-based** to tap into language acquisition
 - Symbolic play
 - Shared attention
- Based on **usage-based theory**, (Constructivism)(Tomasello, 2006)
 - No pre-learning of vocabulary
 - No need to establish comprehension before expression
- **Distributed exposure** facilitates abstract language structures
- Uses repeated and contrasted sentence frames
- **Not language-specific**, adaptable to other languages as targets **Thematic Roles** (Saeed, 2003) rather than surface grammar





Evidence-base

- A **randomised control trial** demonstrated that BEST is effective for monolingual English-speaking children (McKean et al, 2025)
- **Signing all elements** of the target sentences including morphemes (not just content words) facilitated spoken expressive language better than verbal input alone (Trebacz et al., 2023)
- **BEST led to better generalisation of untreated utterances**, compared to The Derbyshire Language Scheme (McKean et al, 2025)

Need for Adaptation

- UK SLTs must support children in their **home language** or mother tongue
 - (RCSLT, 2022; HCPC, 2023)
- **Prevents home language loss** and community alienation (Pert, 2023)
- Children who have an established home language are **quicker to acquire the additional language** of Education (RCSLT, 2018)
- **Large number of children speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE)**(Sharpe & Perovic, 2023)





Languages Adapted

- Polish
- Mirpuri (a dialect of Punjabi)
- Sylheti
- Often spoken by children in the UK (ONS, 2022)

Adaptation Process

- Iterative process with native speakers
- Frequent feedback and validation
- Adjustments for linguistic and cultural differences



Linguistic adaptations

- Word/Phrase order differences: SOV (Mirpuri, Sylheti) vs. SVO (English)
- Complex case systems: Polish, Mirpuri
- Gender agreements



Cultural differences

- Vocabulary-syntax mismatches
 - E.g., ‘Clapping’ (English) versus ‘Playing a clap’
- Different cultural norms
 - E.g., ‘Waving’ versus ‘Clapping’
- Code-switching encouraged if communicatively effective, as children use their longest utterances when they have access to both/all languages
 - (Pert & Letts, 2006)



Examples of Adjustments

Adjusted sentence frames for SOV languages

Culturally appropriate vocabulary and scenarios

Toy selection

Credit for code switching

None of the adaptations detract from the distributed language learning model



Outcomes

- Adapted BEST assessment and sessions available in
- **Polish,**
- **Pakistani heritage languages:**
 - Mirpuri,
 - Punjabi
 - Urdu
- Bangladeshi heritage **Sylheti**
- **Italian** (coming soon)
- **Framework for adapting** to other languages based on a translation protocol (Pert & Stow, 2003)
- **All BEST materials in English and LOTE are available to download for FREE**
- <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/best/>

Implications

Theory-driven language therapy packages based on underlying Thematic Roles are adaptable into other languages

Not reliant on translating surface structures such as Phrase Order and morphology

Retain the 'active ingredients' while making the therapy more accessible

Supports inclusive and equitable language intervention

Encourages home language development

Enhances SLT practice in multilingual settings

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