# Cultural Responsiveness in Assessing Social Pragmatic Communication Disorder

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## Abstract

In 2013, the new edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) introduced the diagnosis of Social (Pragmatic) Communication Disorder (SPCD) as a disorder characterized by deficits in pragmatic abilities. Many professionals often compare this diagnosis to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) due to their similarities in diagnostic criteria. However, unlike ASD, SPCD currently has no standardized assessments created specifically for this diagnosis. Furthermore, SPCD lacks culturally valid assessment tools. Considering recent research and data on SPCD and methods to provide culturally valid evaluations, this poster aims to provide a resource for Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) to self-educate and improve their cultural responsiveness in this area and in general. While there is a need for more research in this area and the formal assessments used to help assess social communication skills in culturally and linguistically diverse individuals, clinicians must harness the resources available to educate themselves and provide the best possible diagnosis and intervention for clients and their families.

## Introduction

The diagnostic criteria for SPCD are as follows:
- (a) problems using communication for social purposes
- (b) impaired ability to adapt communication to context
- (c) difficulty following conversational and narrative conventions
- (d) difficulty inferring what is not explicitly stated.

These symptoms must limit the individual's social, academic, or occupational functioning and cannot be attributable to other difficulties such as ASD or intellectual disability (APA, 2013).

The combination of SPCD being a new diagnosis without standardized assessments and criteria being based on areas of communication that are broad and affected by culture is something that clinicians need to be aware of during assessment procedures.

## The Influence of Culture

Clinicians and the individuals they work with are heavily influenced by their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As SLPs continue to see more and more diverse clients, it is imperative to consider the influence these variables have on their language and communication (Parveen & Santhanam, 2020).
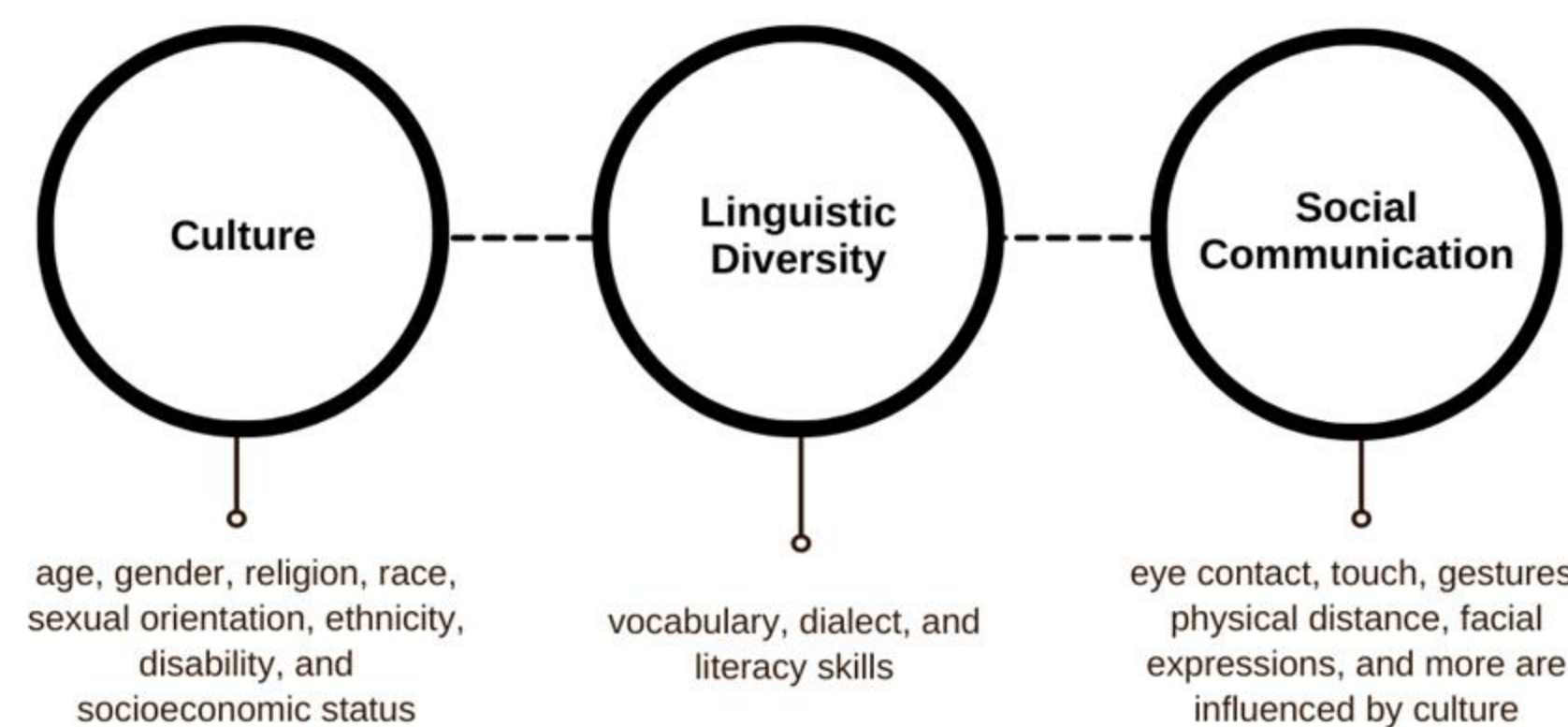


While all aspects of communication are impacted by culture, some characteristics are easier to assess than others. The "structural" aspects of language (such as vocabulary and grammar) have normative data that clinicians can review. For behaviors, especially those related to social communication, fewer, if any, normative data exists across cultures (Norbury, 2013).

## Assessment Procedures for CLD Clients

ASHA states the role of an SLP includes "conducting a culturally and linguistically relevant comprehensive speech and language assessment, when appropriate" (ASHA, n.d.). When it comes to assessing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children, procedures may include (Roseberry-McKibbin & Hegde, 2011):

- Collecting a thorough case history
- Observing the individual in a variety of natural settings
- Interviewing those who interact with the child regularly
- Gathering samples of the student's work over time, analyzing them, and seeing how much learning is taking place
- Use language samples to evaluate communication skills

The three most valuable tools a clinician can utilize when assessing social communication are interviewing, observation, and language sampling.

## A Focus on Social Communication

### Interviews

Culture impacts both verbal and nonverbal communication by creating rules that govern discourse (what is appropriate turn-taking, topics, use of eye contact), how humor is used, and how (and when) it is appropriate to challenge one's communication partners (Carter et al., 2005).

Ethnographic interviews provide the opportunity to ask questions regarding all aspects of social communication to determine what a family and their culture deem appropriate. Questions can provide information on (Kleinman et al., 1978; Dale, 1996; Restrepo, 1998):

- How does the student's speech and language development compare to their siblings or to their same-age peers in their community?
- Is there a history of speech-language problems in the family?
- What has the parent or family noticed about the child?
- What are the chief problems the communication difficulties have caused?

### Observation

During assessment, observation of the individual allows the clinician to see how the individual engages with their peers in natural environments.

For example, it allows for real-time viewing of social communication success and breakdowns, how students attempt to repair their communication breakdowns, and how successful their attempts are with their peers.

### Language Sampling

Language samples provide immediate information on a child's communication and inform clinicians not only about the complexity of their language skills, narrative skills, and perspective-taking but the influence that cultural differences and additional language influences have on the child's use of language (ASHA, n.d.).

## Social Communication Skills to Assess

Knowing the aspects of communication that are valued within specific cultural lenses can help clinicians figure out important aspects of social communication skills to assess. These skills may include, but are certainly not limited to (ASHA, n.d.):

- **Verbal and nonverbal communication**
  - How the individual uses it
  - How the individual understands it
- **Conversation topics**
  - Discuss appropriate topics, change topics appropriately, maintain a conversation, and repair communication breakdowns
- **Turn-taking**
- **Understand figurative language**
  - Respond appropriately and make inferences
- **Theory of mind**
  - Considering the emotions and perspectives of others
- **When synthesizing these skills**, do they promote the development of relationships and social networks?

## Conclusion

The purpose of this poster was to encourage current and future speech-language pathologists to consider their approach when assessing clients of diverse backgrounds, particularly when it comes to social communication. By synthesizing the information gathered from interviews, observation, and language sampling, clinicians can create a full picture of the child's social communication skills in the context of their culture.

The journey of cultural responsiveness is an ongoing one. For more resources to aid in reflection and growth, review the QR code below.

## Future Research

More research is needed to:

- Develop culturally and linguistically diverse standardized assessments in the area of social communication.
- Obtain the best method of assessing SPCD in individuals from multicultural backgrounds and the best methods of understanding cultural expectations.

## Cultural Competence Resources



## References



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