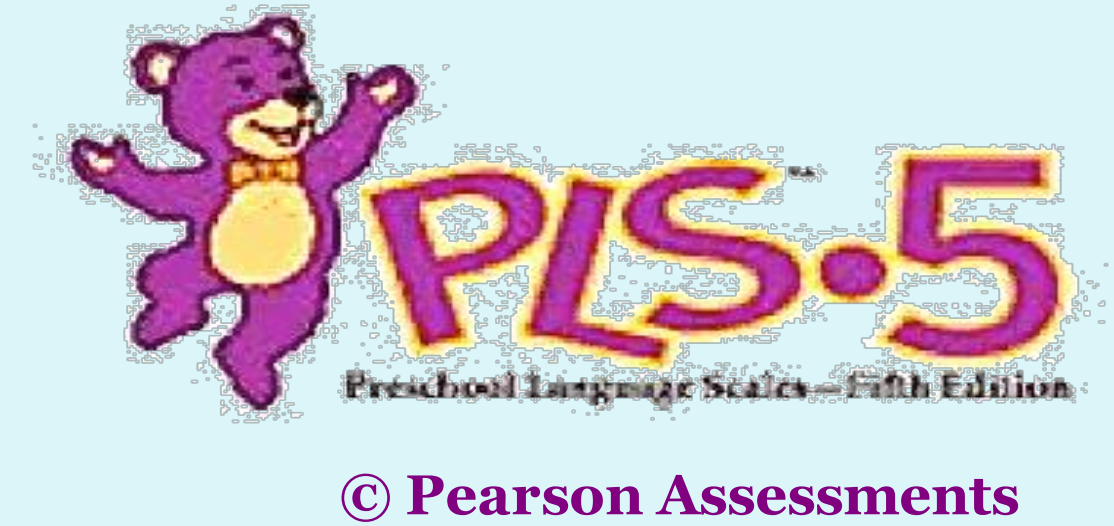




Proceed with Caution **PL**eas**e**: Significant Biases within the PLS-5

Corey Baker, MS, CF-SLP, Danielle Bonanni, MS, CF-SLP, Tiffany Chang, MS, CF-SLP, Lauren Miller, MS, CF-SLP, Catherine Crowley, JD, PhD, CCC-SLP
Teachers College, Columbia University



Prior Knowledge

A child's score outcome on the PLS-5 is highly impacted by the test's assumption that children have similar prior experiences. It does not account for differences related to prior education experiences, SES, or the child's speech community.

- Within the *Auditory Comprehension* Subtest, ages 6;6-6;11: Orders objects by qualitative concept (biggest, smallest)
- Within the *Expressive Communication* Subtest, ages 5;0-5;11: Analogies (e.g. I sit on a chair, I sleep in a ____.)
- Within the *Expressive Communication* Subtest, ages 2;6-2;11: Uses synonyms (e.g. Angry, Furious)
- Within the *Expressive Communication* subtest, ages 6;6-7;11: Completes analogies (e.g. If I swim really well, I could say I swim like a ____).

Preschool Language Scales (PLS)- 5th edition

The PLS-5 is designed to identify if a child (birth-7;11) has a language disorder and to determine eligibility for services (Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2011). The test intends to assess the child's receptive and expressive skills and the ability to integrate language skills.

Cultural Linguistic Biases

Exposure to linguistic content is dependent on cultural backgrounds and languages/dialects spoken in the child's environment. Appendix E lists some common acceptable dialectal variations, and the manual advises the examiner to use assessment techniques suggested by ASHA to maintain dialectal sensitivity (ASHA, 2004). Scores should not be reported if the child speaks a dialect other than Mainstream American English (MAE) (Zimmerman, et. al, 2011). While various English dialects were included in the PLS-5 sampling, MAE far dominated with 78.9% of the total sample, under representing English dominant bilingual children (Zimmerman, et. al, 2011).

- Within the *Expressive Communication* subtest, a child from a Southern English or English influenced by Chinese dialect may provide the answer "two cat" as opposed to "cats" when being assessed on using plurals.

Vocabulary/Labeling

The PLS-5 relies heavily on labeling skills and overall semantic knowledge and use. Given the current research, children from different cultural backgrounds may be at a disadvantage due to their lack of experience in labeling objects (Peña and Quinn, 1997)

- Within the *Auditory Comprehension* Subtest, ages 2;6-2;11: Identifies basic body parts
- Within the *Expressive Communication* Subtest, ages 3;0-3;5 and 3;6-3;11: Names a variety of picture items
- Within the *Auditory Comprehension* Subtest, ages 4;0-4;5: Identifies colors (e.g. Look at these crayons. Show me...)
- Within the *Expressive Communication* Subtest, ages 4;0-4;5: Name described object (e.g. It chases mice)
- Within the *Auditory Comprehension* Subtest, ages 5;0-5;5: Identifies shapes
- Within the *Auditory Comprehension* Subtest, ages 6;0-6;5: Understands modified nouns (e.g. Show me the small black dog)

Auditory Comprehension

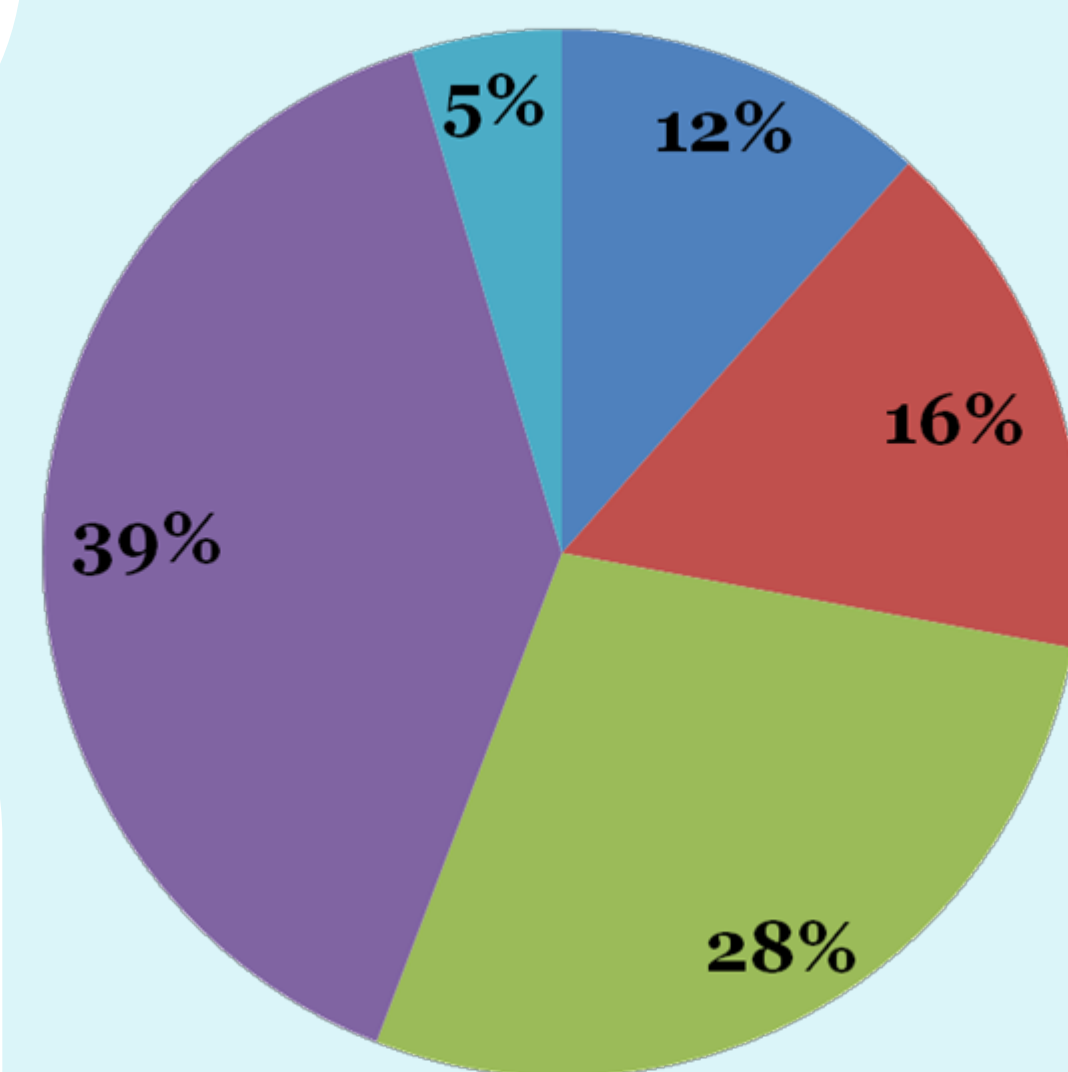


Figure 1

Expressive Communication

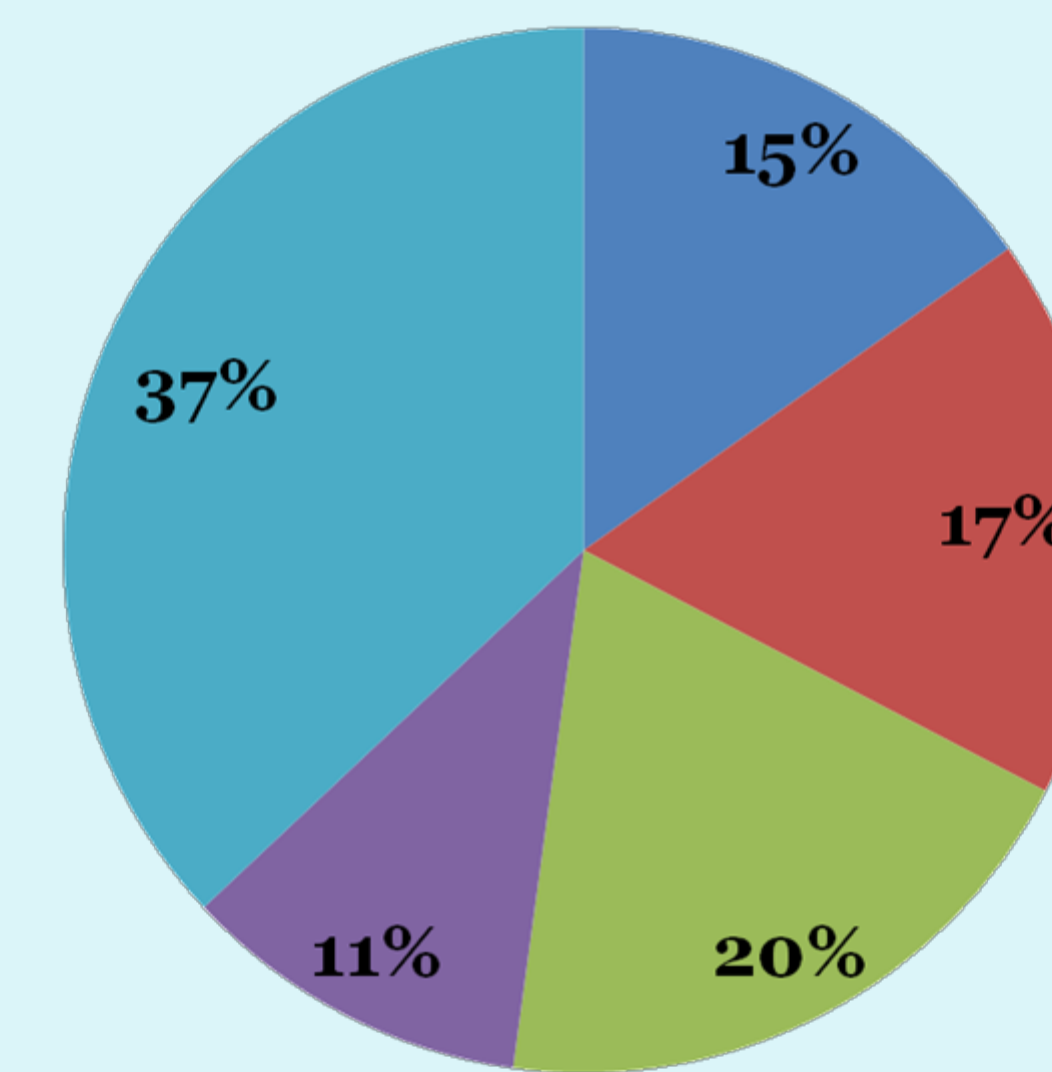


Figure 2

Exposure to Books

Children from a low SES may have less exposure to shared book reading experiences (Heath, 1982). Even the use of a picture manual as the basis for eliciting language may be foreign to a child with little exposure to books (Heath, 1982). In Figure 1, 39% of test items within the Auditory Comprehension subtest were deemed biased as they require the child to derive meaning from the picture manual.

- Within the *Auditory Comprehension* subtest, the child is instructed to point to the author's name and title of the book to demonstrate emergent literacy.
- Within the *Auditory Comprehension* subtest, the child is instructed to point to letters (5;6-5;11; 6;0-6;5)

References

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2004). *Knowledge and skills needed by speech-language pathologists and audiologists to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services* [Knowledge and Skills]. Available from www.asha.org/policy.
- Heath, S.B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school *Language in Society* (Vol. II). New York: Cambridge. pp. 49-76.
- Peña, E. & Quinn, R. (1997). *Task familiarity: Effects on the test performance of Puerto Rican and African American children, Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 28 (Oct. 1997), pp. 323-332. The parent interview: The primary source of multi-contextual, multi-temporal data
- Zimmerman, I. L., Steiner, V. G., & Pond, R. E. (2011). *Preschool Language Scales Fifth Edition*. Pearson. San Antonio: TX.