

Cherokee Language Considerations for Speech-Language Pathologists

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BACKGROUND

Tsalagi language revitalization is an ongoing effort.

Heritage languages are important to overall child development (Ortega 2020).

Emergent bilingual Tsalagi/English children may experience developmental language disorder (DLD) or other speech-language issues in childhood.

DLD occurs at a rate of 7.4% in the US (ASHA)⁸.

Bi/multilingualism does not cause DLD or any other communication disorder (Paradis 2016)¹¹

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) have a responsibility to provide culturally and linguistically responsive care as part of our Code of Ethics (Principle I, Rules A-C)⁷

Deficit-oriented views of multilingualism may prevent students with communication-related disabilities to have access to their languages (Yu, 2013)

Few resources are currently available to support SLPs working with this population that are specific to Tsalagi-speaking contexts.

Existing literature can support SLPs' understanding of Tsalagi when working with bilingual Tsalagi/English clients.

PURPOSE

To develop a basic guide to Tsalagi as a support to speech-language clinicians working with emerging bilingual Tsalagi/ English students.

*We are seeking Tsalagi-speaking linguists to assist with this project's development. Please contact mwofford@wcu.edu or bmccaldwell2@catamount.wcu.edu to assist in this work.

METHODS

Non-exhaustive literature review.

Positionality Acknowledgement:

The first author for this review is a student of Tsalagi language and a first year graduate student in speech-language pathology.

The second author is a bilingual speech language pathologist and researcher specializing in bilingual Spanish-English populations.

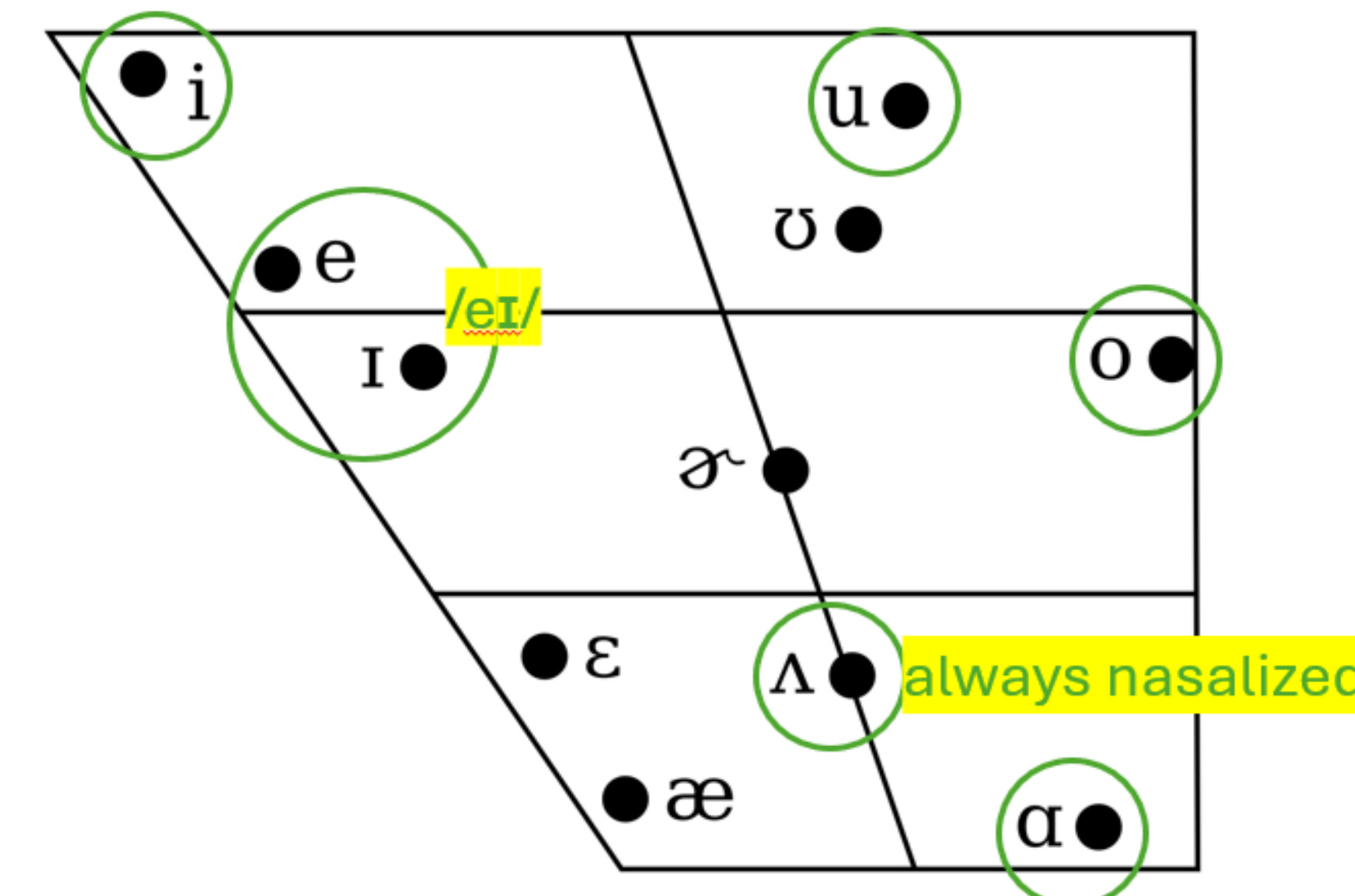
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank partners at Cherokee Central Schools who provided initial consultation for development of this guide.

RESULTS

Below are examples of content from the guide to Tsalagi for SLPs.

ARTICULATION & PHONOLOGY



A version of the chart showing tongue placement of English vowels overlaid with green circles & text indicating placement for CWY vowels in comparison.

Tsalagi has 6 vowels that have both short and long versions. Consonants shared with English include *j, s, t, d, k, g, m, n, l, y, w*, and *h*.

There are phonemes in CWY that are not present in English (examples: glottal stops as in “uh-oh”, *tl*, and *ts*). Conversely, CWY does not have phonemes for *b, p, f, v, r*, or *th*.⁴

This example is an incomplete inventory that does not entirely count dialectal variations between Western (Otalí) and Eastern (Kituwah) dialects.

MORPHOSYNTAX

Tsalagi is a polysynthetic language. These languages have a high ratio of morphemes and tend to stack & combine them to create single words that would be entire sentences in English.

There is very little research on DLDs and polysynthetic languages, though some reviews of other polysynthetic languages indicate difficulty with complex morphosyntax (Leonard & Schroeder, 2023).

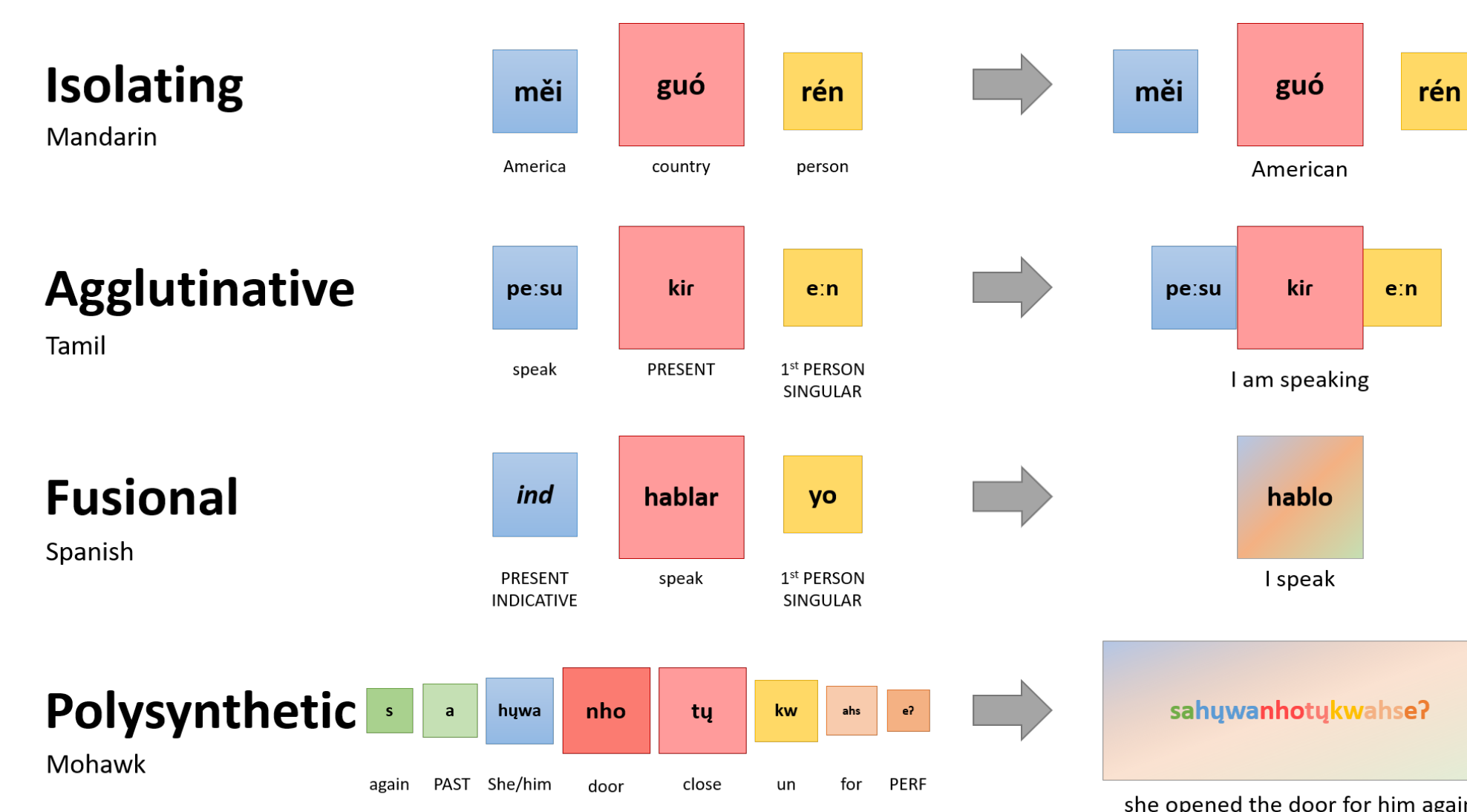


Chart from *Psychology of Language* Copyright © 2021 by Dinesh Ramoo giving a visual representation of different morphosyntactic “types” of languages. Tsalagi belongs to a Southern branch of the same Iroquoian language family as Mohawk.

PRAGMATICS

Native children are often cited as speaking in shorter utterances and demonstrating less eye contact with researchers (Vining et al., 2017)

Unclear if data support these linguistic differences as culturally-based or influence of historical power dynamics are at play

Consider the influence of historical power dynamics between white teachers and Cherokee students --
Build trust before engaging in evaluative behaviors

Observe families when possible to learn the social interaction style that is culturally congruent for the child.

SEMANTICS

Cherokee language is deeply relational, which may reflect Cherokee culture being overall more egalitarian and communal.

Between the deep focus on relationality alongside being about 75% verbs, many words that would be nouns in English are verbs or verb-like in nature.

An example in the created resource is the Tsalagi equivalent for “mother”, which is conjugated as a set B verb. The word refers more to the relationship between the people- the idea of a mother doesn’t exist in isolation.

PROMOTING BILITERACY

Incorporate bilingual literature that promotes print awareness using Cherokee syllabary and English.

	a	e	i	o	u	v [ə]
D	a	R e	T i	Ꭰ o	Ꭱ u	Ꭲ v
\$	ga Ꭰ ka	Ꭳ ge	Ꭴ gi	Ꭶ go	Ꭷ gu	Ꭸ gv
Ꭹ	ha	Ꭺ he	Ꭻ hi	Ꭼ ho	Ꭽ hu	Ꭾ hv
Ꭿ	la	Ꮀ le	Ꮁ li	Ꮂ lo	Ꮃ lu	Ꮄ lv
Ꮅ	ma	Ꮆ me	Ꮇ mi	Ꮈ mo	Ꮉ mu	
Ꮊ	na Ꮊ hna Ꮎ nah	Ꮏ ne	Ꮐ ni	Ꮑ no	Ꮒ nu	Ꮓ nv
Ꮖ	qua	Ꮗ que	Ꮘ qui	Ꮙ quo	Ꮚ quu	Ꮛ quv
Ꮜ	s Ꮜ Ꮝ sa	4 se	Ꮞ si	Ꮟ so	Ꮠ su	Ꮡ sv
Ꮢ	da Ꮢ ta	Ꮣ de Ꮤ te	Ꮥ di Ꮦ ti	Ꮧ do	Ꮨ du	Ꮩ dv
Ꮮ	dla Ꮮ tla	Ꮯ tle	Ꮰ tli	Ꮱ tlo	Ꮲ tlu	Ꮳ tlv
Ꮮ	tsa	Ꮮ tse	Ꮯ tsi	Ꮰ tso	Ꮱ tsu	Ꮲ tsv
Ꮮ	wa	Ꮮ we	Ꮯ wi	Ꮰ wo	Ꮱ wu	Ꮲ wv
Ꮮ	ya	Ꮮ ye	Ꮯ yi	Ꮰ yo	Ꮱ yu	Ꮲ yv

Chart of Cherokee Syllabary.
From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cherokee_Syllabary.svg

Cherokee syllabary consists of 84 symbols representing syllables, not single phonemes (except vowel-only syllables).

The system does not mark all phonemic differences such as aspirated/non-aspirated contrasts. (Peter et al., 2008)

For example, V (“do”) is used for both the “to” in the word “tohi” ᎠᎩ, as well as the “do” in “gedo” ᎦᎤ.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLPs

Follow best practices in language assessment for emergent bilingual children, particularly if an assessment is not normed from a population representative of who you are assessing. (ASHA)⁷ An example of how to include a disclaimer in assessment reporting:

“Note that standardized testing may not accurately reflect the language capabilities and capacities of this population and should not be the sole tool relied upon to make a speech/language diagnosis.”

Consider using observation, criterion-referenced, or dynamic forms of assessment.

Vocabulary knowledge is distributed across languages; when assessing, consider single-language vocabulary and total vocabulary.

This resource may serve as an initial foray into Tsalagi language while more nuanced and specific research and clinical best practices are explored/developed.

There is room for growth in tailoring assessment practices and therapeutic activities in speech-language pathology.

Overall, this demonstrates the high need for developing ties to EBCI & this language population to further develop supports for emergent bilingual Tsalagi – English speakers, particularly for the Kituwah dialect.

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