



**Title of Project:**

Oral Social Language in the English Language  
Proficiency Assessment of Young ELLs

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**Project Summary:**

With growing emphasis in the United States on assessing the English language proficiency (ELP) of school-age English language learners (ELLs), it has become common practice to use large-scale standardized tests for high-stakes purposes such as reporting for federal accountability and determining continuation of students' language support services. Often included on these tests are tasks intended to measure students' ability to engage in spoken "social" interaction. However, "social language" is not a very well defined construct; it is typically discussed only in counterpoint to "academic" language, a definitive dichotomy that has been challenged. Lack of clarity surrounding the definition of social language presents a potential threat to the validity of using such tasks and ambiguity surrounding the supposed academic/social dichotomy is especially prominent in the early grades, when ELLs are developing and learning social skills concurrently with second language development.

This multiphase mixed-methods study explores the validity of oral social language tasks on large-scale standardized ELP tests used with young ELLs. Through review of test materials and teacher surveys and interviews, this study identifies and contrasts how social language is operationally defined and measured by ELP tests and teachers of young ELLs. Additionally, this study examines how ratings of young ELLs' ability compare when students are assessed respectively using test tasks and by their teachers. This study bridges three major ongoing lines of inquiry in research on school-age language assessment: assessment of young learners, highstakes standardized testing, and second language classroom assessment, while highlighting a construct often under-explored in the field.