

Breaking the Silence: A Critical Review of Language Policy and Planning for Long-Term English Learners

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Abstract

Despite scholarship on emergent bilingual students that continues to evolve, the subgroup of emergent bilinguals who are labeled as long-term English learners (LTELs) have been overlooked and underserved for too long. LTELs refer to English learners who have been educated in a U.S. school for six years or more. This literature review is aimed at bringing awareness to this subgroup population and identifying the characteristics and classification process of LTELs described in the present scholarship. The review critically examines the de facto policy about LTELs from perspectives of the current climate of standardized tests (language management), the label itself (language ideology), and programs and schooling experience of these students (language practice). The literature review not only speaks to the stereotypes, struggles, and challenges that LTELs face, but also calls for future research studies to be conducted in addressing these problems pedagogically, institutionally, and systematically.

Keywords

long-term English learners, English proficiency, language policy, standardized test, labeling

Introduction

Recent estimates from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019) indicate that emergent bilingual learners are one of the fastest growing populations in U.S. schools. Over the past decade, there have been several seminal works generated in the field. These studies cover students' school experience, linguistic repertoires, cultural diversities, and digital literacies (e.g., García & Kleifgen, 2010; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Johnson, 2019; Reyes et al., 2016). However, as the scholarship on emergent bilinguals continues to evolve, the subgroup of emergent bilingual students who are labelled as long-term English learners (LTELs) has been overlooked and underserved for long. In broad terms, the label LTELs tends to include the following entities: students who speak a language other than English, who have been educated in the U.S. for six years or more, and whose social listening and speaking skills are similar to native English speakers but are still designated as English learners (ELs). They typically perform far below grade level in academic tasks that require discipline-specific English oral language and literacy (Olsen, 2012). Despite there being a small but growing body of literature on understanding the educational backgrounds and unique needs of these students, knowledge about LTELs comes from studies conducted in only a handful of states (e.g., New York, California), and the development of pedagogical approaches and instructional programs serving LTELs still remains very low (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; King & Bigelow, 2018).

There is no national standard nor estimate identifying the number of bilingual learners having long-term status, but data at the state and city level indicate LTELs are a sizable percentage of the student population. For example, the New York City Department of Education reported that 11.7% of the student population was classified as LTELs during the 2015–2016 school year (Kieffer & Parker, 2016); earlier research conducted in 40 districts in California found that LTELs constitute 59% of the multilingual student population (Olsen, 2010). In Chicago, LTELs comprise approximately one-third of secondary emergent bilinguals (de la Torre et al., 2019). These striking statistics indicate an urgent need for great attention to LTELs, as LTELs are disproportionately represented in national dropout and grade retention (Callahan, 2013).

Because these students come to school with a wide range of home languages, literacy proficiencies, and education experiences, their academic needs may be different from those of typical bilingual learners who have arrived in the U.S. in recent years. Due to issues such as disrupted schooling and transnational experiences, LTELs generally do not have opportunities to develop literacy in their home languages. Therefore, these students have been described as having less than full proficiency in either L1 or L2 (e.g., Freeman et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010) and have been socially constructed in connection to the concept of “semilingualism” (Cummins, 1979, p. 40). The label LTELs was created to make educators aware of this group of students and was aimed at improving the educational outcomes of these students. However, as a bilingual educator in the U.S. with a transnational background, I find the label problematic, particularly because I realize the label LTELs often frames students as deficient and views students solely based on English language proficiency testing results, while ignoring other complex factors, such as racial/ethnic backgrounds, transnational/disrupted educational experiences, and everyday language practices. I argue LTELs engage in flows of values, beliefs, cultures, and languages through “technological, financial, and other global infrastructures” (Skerrett, 2019, p. 502) of students’ home culture and U.S. culture. Immigrant students’ schooling experience is more than a simplistic “acquisition of knowledge and skills in English language and U.S. culture” (Valenzuela & Rubio, 2017, p. 4360). But more importantly, under the globalized context, ELs are constantly learning and unlearning the cultures, values, and beliefs of U.S. society and socializing into the communities that they become a part of.

Therefore, the first goal of this literature review is to bring awareness to this subgroup population and identify the characteristics and classification process of LTELs described in the present scholarship. The second goal orients from the perspective that a systematic understanding of research studies should be critical and humanizing. Labelling students as LTELs, for example, omits the bilingualism of these students and perpetuates inequities in the education of this population. My third goal is to inform future research concerning LTELs. Through reviewing and examining the existing literature, we can better set up goals for policy reforms and pedagogical practices in classrooms for LTELs. The research questions I’m seeking to address in this literature review are:

1. What differentiates students who are classified LTELs from dual language speakers who are placed in the mainstream classrooms?
2. How does the classification and reclassification system relegate LTELs to a perpetual status of academic and linguistic deficiency?
3. How does the label affect the ways students are perceived in schools, and to what extent does the perception impact students’ opportunities to learn?

Methods of Literature Search and Selection

To address the research questions, I sought empirical studies pertaining to LTELs within the past decade. I set the parameters of publication years because the population of school-aged ELs has significantly increased over the past decade, transforming language policies and school instructions around them. The literature search process involved several steps. First, I included only peer-reviewed journal articles. ERIC, JSTOR, and Web of Science were used as the primary search engines. In the database searches, I searched a variety of terms referring to the same population, including long-term English Learners, long-term English language learners, LTELs, and LTELLs. Then I visited scholars' websites that I identified as renowned in the field to see their related publications. These scholars are Kate Menken, Tatyana Kleyn, Nelson Flores, Laurie Olsen, and Maneka Deanna Brooks. These publications also represent scholars' different approaches to conducting research and how they shift the framing of LTELs over the years. It is worth noting the paucity of literature discussing the education of LTELs. The majority of studies were conducted in California (29%), Texas (18%), and New York (4%), and few were found in other states. Presumably, this is because the three states have more than half of the nation's EL population (Ruiz-Soto et al., 2015), and my identified scholars also reside in these areas. I did not apply other reduction criteria at this step if the studies were focused on LTELs. Finally, I searched Google Scholar for articles that were not found with the first two search steps. After these steps, I initially reviewed 26 articles at the abstract level and started eliminating those that didn't meet my review criteria. For example, I didn't include studies that focus on LTELs outside of the U.S. Finally, I included 19 articles in this review.

The literature search procedures have several limitations. First, considering only peer-reviewed journal articles may have caused me to miss many important studies that are presented in other ways, such as doctoral dissertations, academic presentations, and edited collections and books. Second, I selected key words in the title as the search setting, which could possibly exclude related empirical studies as well. Despite these limitations, the systematic searching process was thorough enough to address the research questions.

Theoretical Framework

Language planning and policy (LPP) has been broadly defined as an approach to solve social problems created by language differences in nation development since its emergence from the beginning (Fishman, 1968a). With its aim to solve language problems after the independence of new nations, LPP in the post-colonial years of the 1950s and 1960s concentrated on the language planning at the state or national level. As Rubin and Jernudd (1971) explain, "Language planning is deliberate language change; that is, changes in the system of language code or speaking or both that are planned by organizations that are established for such purposes or given a mandate to fulfill such purposes" (p. 29). These earlier frameworks in the field of LPP focused on top-down authoritative language planning and the resolutions of language problems at the national or state level (Fishman, 1968b; Haugen, 1966). In other words, during the earlier period of LPP development, how a policy was implemented and what the implementation process looks like was ignored and overlooked.

While LPP studies primarily focus on the policies of government officials promoting systematic linguistic change in a community or a society, there are various forces at the macro- and micro-levels at work. Across stages of language planning, different individuals and social agencies are distinctively linked to the rules, regulations, and practices and hold important roles in achieving the intended language policy. Therefore, each individual language user and different

social agencies cannot be isolated from the sociopolitical contexts in which they dwell or are educated (Canagarajah, 2005; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). In this way, LPP moves beyond the top-down or bottom-up construct to a conceptualization of being a more dynamic, interactive, and nonlinear process (García, 2009).

To highlight the complexity within the LPP creation and implementation, Ricento and Hornberger (1996) introduced the metaphor of an onion framework to evoke a multi-layered understanding of how language policies work. The layers of the onion from outer to the center illuminated the political processes from the state and national agencies to institutions and individuals to enact language policies. Within the framework, agents at the national, institutional, and interpersonal levels are all engaged in the process wherein interacting with one another. Thus, through the application of the onion metaphor, we can see the connection across different layers and how power moves at different levels.

Furthermore, Spolsky (2004) suggested that language policy encompasses three interrelated but independently describable components: “language practices, beliefs and management of a community or polity” (p. 9). Specifically, language practices refer to the actual linguistic choices and behaviors; language beliefs are the values and statuses assigned to named languages and language varieties; language management refers to the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that claims authority over the participants in the domain to modify related practices and beliefs (Spolsky, 2004). According to Spolsky (2004), language policies can be both overt and covert, and can include all decisions people make about language in the society. Spolsky’s inclusive definition of language policy redefines who can be policymakers. That is, people with all different positions in the social, political, and economic world are capable of enacting macro-/meso-/micro- levels of language policies. This three-component LPP framework provides us an important approach to examine a wide range of language issues, such as the establishment of official language(s) in a country, the discussion of official language(s) in schools, as well as language ideologies embedded in education and so forth.

Education is seen as central to LPP and schools serve as an important space for education policy implementation (Menken, 2008; Menken & Garcia, 2010). Informed by Spolsky’s (2004) LPP framework, Shohamy (2006) spoke of “language education policy” as the “mechanism used to create de facto language practices in educational institutions” (p. 76). Shohamy (2006) investigated how the three components contribute to the construction of de facto language policy and in what ways de facto language policies are connected with language beliefs and practices. Shohamy argued that language education policy has often been determined by political considerations or sociopolitical ideologies instead of pedagogical factors in the field of bilingual education. Shohamy’s perspective aligns with Johnson and Johnson’s (2015) ethnographic studies with EL students where he found LPP is political in nature. Because for students who speak English as their second or foreign language, their performance on standardized testing can decide what content is being taught in schools, how and by whom it was taught, and in which language. The significant impacts of the testing policy on EL students’ schooling experience, in other words, becomes the de facto language policy.

I adopt this perspective of seeing standardized testing as the de facto language policy in my literature review. I argue the issues with language policy, specifically within the educational contexts, are deeply intertwined with the status of languages in the society and illuminate the sociolinguistic ideologies. By examining the previous literature around LTELs labelling and exploring their educational trajectories, I argue the binary thinking that categorizing students into English learners and English speakers and even with a subcategory of LTELs tells a set of

ideologies about languages. And the tactic binary sociolinguistic logic can powerfully transfer over to the ways how bilingual learners are treated and educated in the U.S. school context. Furthermore, the EL and LTEL labels establish a deficient perspective of bilingual learners and ignore the linguistic skills and assets of knowledge bilingual learners bring into their schools and classrooms. Consequently, the labelling and the current EL classification system fails to challenge the logic of sociolinguistic ideologies and continue to frame students who embrace language practices other than English as inherently deficient. Thus, we must seek an alternative approach to racial assemblages and understand students who are labelled as ELs and LTELs inhibit various historical, political, and economic positionalities as they migrate to the country and enroll into the public school system, so that we can ensure their academic rigors and continue honoring minority communities' racial, cultural, and linguistic practices.

Findings

To understand how the status of LTELs impacts their learning opportunities and learning outcomes, I align my arguments with Spolsky's (2004) three components of de facto language policy framework. First, the use of standardized testing to decide students' further educational experiences indicates the perception of ELs' linguistic proficiency as inadequate. Thus, regulating students' language use through the current classification and reclassification system to fix EL students' language problems is an example of language management. Second, I find the label LTEL used in policies, reports, and academic journal articles is indicative of a language ideology that privileges English monolingualism. The monoglossic language ideology works to exacerbate educational inequities and fosters a systematic negation of minoritized students' cultures and languages. Third, I reviewed literature on LTELs' schooling experience for illustration of individuals' language practices. Recognizing the inadequacy in educational programs and pedagogies development for LTELs can help us better counter the subtractive educational practices and undergird LTELs' schooling experiences.

Long-Term English Learners in the Context of High-Stakes Standardized Tests

According to Nekvapil (2006), language management can range from micro levels such as a family to macro levels such as a nation-state. In the domain of English language education, a state English language proficiency (ELP) exam can be considered as a type of language management, determining whether an EL exits English language learner status. ELP exams, in the U.S. K–12 context, were developed after the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which required ELs to be tested annually for English proficiency (NCLB, 2002). NCLB mandated the assessment of language proficiency, thus determining programming, instruction and curriculum. With the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) replaced the previous law of NCLB and required schools to build English proficiency rates into their accountability framework. Although federal policy dictates all states use ELP exams to assess ELs, proficiency is essentially a cut score decided by convening a committee within each state. For example, in California, an overall proficiency level 4 on the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) must be identified to be considered for reclassification. In Texas, students must score 40th percentile or above in the State Standardized Reading Assessment before their reclassification case can be sent for review. In New York, students must score at the commanding level on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) to be classified. In the end, where the cut scores are set is a matter of a state committee's judgment about how students ought to perform on

the test (Rosenberg, 2004). Moreover, there is no homogeneous definition of proficiency to exit EL status across and sometimes within states, either. According to Title III of ESSA, an EL is defined as:

an individual . . . whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language . . . may deny the individual the ability to . . . (a) meet the state's proficiency level of achievement on state assessments; (b) successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (c) the opportunity to participate fully in society. (Title III, ESSA, 2015)

As demonstrated from the text above, current policy in practice places great emphasis on assessing language proficiency through the lens of state assessments. Under ESSA, states are authorized with much control of accountability. As a result, the proportion of bilingual students who are identified as ELs varies across states, suggesting that one student who is considered an EL might be reclassified as a non-EL in a different state, thus leading to different programs and learning opportunities. In New York City, approximately half of ELs are able to be reclassified within three years of school (Conger, 2009; Slama, 2014). However, Umansky and Reardon (2014) found that in California, the time for students to be reclassified is much longer. The median time necessary for reclassification to occur for the Latino ELs in California was 8 years (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). In fact, an EL student in New York City is only required to demonstrate proficiency on the state ELP exam to become reclassified. The same student in the state of Iowa is required to demonstrate proficiency on the state ELP exam and academic content test to be reclassified. Moreover, that same student attending school in California would be required to demonstrate proficiency on the state ELP exam and on the academic content test in English Language Arts, plus teacher evaluation of the pupil's curriculum mastery using a locally developed protocol and parent consultation are both needed for the student to be reclassified (Cook & Linquanti, 2015). This is significant because as the measures used to determine student acquisition of the English language vary, so does the number of students reclassified from state to state and district to district (Cook & Linquanti, 2015). The implementation of ESSA requires states to answer the question, "How long does it take for ELs to become proficient?" Because each state has its own criteria for reclassification, it is difficult to compare results across states (Linquanti & Cook, 2013).

There have been several concerns and questions raised about ELP exams (Clark-Gareca, 2016), among which are whether the tests solely assess students' language proficiency or whether they evaluate students' knowledge of the content areas represented in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). After reviewing a variety of ELP assessments in use across the United States, Solórzano (2008) found the tests had different definitions of proficiency and thus assessed proficiency quite differently. Based on the synthesis of the literature, Solórzano concluded the continued use of high-stakes test results for decision making has adverse consequences for ELs and LTELs. In fact, because of the complex components to define proficiency in the test, some teachers have questioned whether non-ELs from mainstream classrooms would score highest if they took the ELP exams. With the adaptation of CCSS and to support EL students in meeting the rigorous content standards for college and career readiness, each state was required to adopt ELP standards that correspond to the college and career-ready standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). In particular, the latest reauthorization of ESEA clarifies that each state must adopt ELP standards that "(i) are derived from the 4 recognized domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; (ii) address the different proficiency levels of English learners; and (iii) are

aligned with the challenging State academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b, p. 24). I find it troubling when tests attempt to measure the integration of literacy and content standards, because it might not portray accurately what students know and are able to do. The washback effects of high-stakes tests have drawn attention from test developers and educational researchers due to the impacts of such tests on education and society (e.g., Fox & Cheng, 2007; Green, 2013; Menken, 2006). For example, Menken (2006) examined the washback effects of policy-driven high-stakes tests on ELs and found that the curriculum and instructions for ELs were driven by the tests rather than aligned with students’ learning needs. Thus, it’s doubtful whether the instructions students received have a positive impact on their learning. In other words, students’ learning needs can be easily overshadowed by the massive washback effects of high-stake tests.

As a comprehensive system made up of 40 U.S. states, territories, and federal agencies, WIDA (formerly World-Class Instructional Design & Assessment) is a consortium that aims at developing, designing, and implementing a high-quality culturally and linguistically responsive system to support English language learners in K–12 contexts. In 2019, WIDA published a research report and estimated the potential LTEL population across 15 states, representing all four quadrants of the U.S. In the study, the minimum threshold was defined as a composite proficiency level (CPL) of 4.5 for the prior school year on the ACCESS for ELLs test. This minimum CPL was also the standard for ELs to be reclassified as English proficient across all 40 WIDA states and territories. Among the cohort of 167,000 students in grades K, 1, or 2 during the 2009–2010 school year, approximately 13% of ELs were identified as potential LTELs, 65% were classified as potentially proficient, while 22% dropped out from the analysis prior to 2014 (Sahakyan & Ryan, 2018). The study also found that the proportions of potential LTELs varied significantly across states from 2% to 24%, and this was true even after adjusting for states’ varied reclassification requirements (Sahakyan & Ryan, 2018). The findings here raise questions to what extent state language policies affect the observed variability and make implications for stakeholders to further work on understanding factors that are associated with LTEL rates.

Another approach for better understanding the process of ELs becoming LTELs is to investigate ELs’ time to be reclassified. ELs’ reclassification not only provides details of students’ progress in the pre-LTEL period, but also sheds light on why some bilingual learners enter long-term status. Studies by Cummins (1981) and Collier (1987) were representative among early research in the 1980s. Based on analysis of a dataset from over 1200 immigrant students in Canada, Cummins (1981) suggested that it takes between five and seven years for an EL to acquire nativelike English language proficiency (ELP) for academic purposes. Later research conducted by Collier (1987) confirmed and extended Cummins’ finding. Collier additionally suggested students’ age and basic literacy in L1 upon arrival are essential variables to determine time to attain ELP for academic purposes. However, these findings have also been discussed much in later literature. As Conger (2009) noted, the studies relied on small samples of participants during the 1970s and 1980s, and participants were concentrated in only one or two schools. As a result, the length of time needed to achieve proficiency estimated in these studies should be viewed critically.

Generally, students move through six steps that include EL screening, initial proficiency testing, assignment of service, annual proficiency testing, analysis of scores, and exiting EL status. However, a significant number of ELs have difficulty exiting because they are not gaining proficiency at the expected rate. For example, Parrish et al. (2006) estimated that the probability of an EL remaining classified as an EL after 5 years in the U.S. is 75%, and fewer than 40% of ELs are reclassified out of the status 10 years after designation. Parrish’s result is based on examining data from California over a period of five years, where the population of ELs and

LTEs is the largest across the nation (NCES, 2017). The protracted progress of ELs limits their understanding of the grade-level content courses that are taught in English and also precludes them from advanced coursework that is prerequisite for higher education opportunities. Therefore, instead of blaming LTEs for lack of language proficiency and academic literacy, it is of greater importance to view the current designation system critically and examine whether it is serving ELs and LTEs and providing them with enough learning opportunities. To have a better understanding of ELs' language developmental trajectories, Larsen-Freeman (2016) proposed Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) in tracing ELs' language proficiency growth over time. According to CDST, language can be depicted as a dynamic system (i.e., a set of variables that interact over time), and language development can be viewed as a complex dynamic process. Larsen-Freeman (2016) argued that spontaneous occurrence of new changes arises from the interaction of the components of a complex system. By applying CDST in studies of second language acquisition, the findings will help policymakers and educators develop programs that facilitate students gaining English proficiency and reduce the risk of bilinguals entering long-term status.

As shown by the studies we've discussed in the section, standardized test results play an important role in assessing students' English proficiency. Though the test is not necessarily considered to be bad, the washback effects of the test reflect the negative effect of a type of language management. While the problematic process of classification and reclassification of ELs is not the sole cause for students to become LTEs, it is influential in deciding subsequent programming and school experience which should not be overlooked. Thus, sometimes ELs become LTEs, not due to their actual English abilities, but due to errors in bureaucratic processes (Brooks, 2018; Thompson, 2015). Given that EL students are heterogeneous in many ways (e.g., race, age, learning progress), more evidence other than ELP test score needs to be gathered to fulfill students' needs more adequately. Rather than relying on one single assessment for making high-stake decisions, other assessments or measurements should be incorporated to counteract the adverse impact of any one poorly devised test (Stokes-Guinan & Goldenberg, 2010/2011). In terms of the assessment use and purposes, formative assessments gathered from classroom activities can provide deliberate collection of information on student performances at the micro level, and EL learners' needs can be responded to by teachers more incrementally. In this way, we are using assessment *for* and *in* learning rather than *of* learning (William & Thompson, 2017).

Connotations of the Label of Long-Term English Learners

Guided by Spolsky (2004), the second component of the LPP framework is language beliefs, sometimes called language ideologies. The established ideologies are significant to language policy and planning as they associate with the values assigned to languages and language variations. In examining the label of LTEs, I suggest that the label can be understood as a symbolic term naturalizing monolingual and English-only ideology. As Link and Phelan (2013) said, any label is a "package deal" (p. 528), encompassing both costs and benefits. García (2009) demonstrates how the language used to identify bilingual learners impacts their educational experience in multiple ways. For example, she notes that referring to students as emergent bilinguals instead of limited English proficiency (LEP) or English Learners (ELs) highlights their potential rather than shortcomings or limitations of English skills. Therefore, labelling to some extent may lead individuals to experience injustice and discrimination. In specifically looking at the literature associated with the LTE label, this part of the review attempts to uncover the powerful ideologies inherent in the term and provide a more complex understanding of students

who are labelled LTELs. Through analyzing the label, we will be able to recognize that the description of these long-term bilinguals is not as neutral as it may appear.

California was the first state to adopt the term LTEL as an accountable category in state official policy. Assembly Bill 2193 defines LTEL in its Section 313.1 and further requires the department to “annually ascertain and provide to school districts and schools the number of pupils in each school district and school, as specified, who are, or are at risk of becoming, long-term English learners” (Chapter 427). The passage of Assembly Bill 2193 was influential in helping raise the visibility of the subgroup of bilingual students and attempting to address their special educational needs. Weeks after the passage of the Bill, a guidance book was released by a state-wide advocacy organization named California Together. In this document, Olsen (2012) provided suggestions and instructions to educators and administrators for best practices. Despite the justice-rooted orientation, Olsen’s (2012) recommendations discursively positioned LTELs as deficient and assumed a monolingual-English standard. For example, in the guidance, Olsen defined LTELs as students “struggling academically and stuck in progressing towards English proficiency despite six or more years in US schools” (p. 4) and noted the urgent need for schools and districts to address the “academic gaps of these students”. While emphasizing students’ failure in language and academics, there is no mention of bilingualism nor translanguaging (García 2009; García & Wei, 2014) that can be regarded as dynamic linguistic and semiotic resources of this student population. Therefore, the label of LTELs demonstrates a monolingual language ideology and views these students from a deficient perspective.

This monolingual and English-only approach is also a reflection of the state’s anti-bilingual education policy. In fact, California was the first state in the nation that initiated a ballot asking voters to eliminate bilingual education in favor of an English-only approach. In June 1998, the proposition (Proposition 227) passed with 61% for and 39% against. Since then, California had started requiring bilingual learners in all public schools to be taught only in English and enter mainstream classrooms within a maximum of one year of instruction in their home language (Gándara et al., 2000). In this case, instead of viewing students’ social and home language practices as language resources, the English-only movement treats bilingualism as a problem that prevents students from fitting a monolingual ideology. A large-scale study investigated the long-term effects of the English-only approach, finding that English-only instruction did not contribute much to improving bilingual students’ academic performance (Parrish et al., 2006). Though recently more people began realizing the importance of bilingualism and Proposition 227 was overturned in 2016, the twenty-year implementation of English-only instruction results in sharp declines in the number of bilingually certified teachers in the state (Garcia, 2020).

Recently, there has been criticism about the notion of LTELs and some scholars have specifically reformed the ways they talk about the students who are LTELs (Flores et al., 2015; Menken, 2013). Flores et al. (2015) critique that the notion of LTELs oversimplifies the broad categorization of students and ignores their highly varied educational and linguistic backgrounds. To understand this subcategory population, they studied LTELs’ lived experiences through the lens of students as emergent bilinguals, students, family/community members and transnational individuals. Data in the study includes interviews with 28 students from 2 secondary schools in New York City and class observations that serve for data contextualization. Countering the discourse of deficiency that is often attached to the LTEL population, the study by Flores et al. (2015) employs the discourses of partiality framework, through which to better understand how these students perceive themselves in a more complex and innovative way. The discourses of partiality are constructed by two interconnected manifestations. One is the discourse of linguistic

partiality, which constructs students who immigrated to the U.S. at a young age as lifelong learners of English because of their partial development of both their home language and English. The other is the discourse of academic partiality, which positions ELs as unprepared learners for academic work because of their limited English language skills (Flores et al., 2015). Flores and colleagues concluded the study by emphasizing that such complexities of these students' experiences in schools must be recognized and addressed through more responsive schooling. Besides, Flores et al. (2015) point out from the study that the label serves more than as a categorization but a racial project, "perpetuating white supremacy through the marginalization of the community of color's language practices" (Flores et al., 2015, p. 6). In the U.S, a monolingual English speaker would not be considered as an EL no matter whether he masters academic discourse in English or not. However, someone who is bilingual must be academically proficient to be considered as fully proficient in the language. What is behind this is a language ideology that's driven by white supremacy, prioritizing English monolingualism and monoculturalism (Flores et al., 2018).

Similarly, Menken (2013) raised the argument that the label causes students to be seen as linguistically deficient even in their home language despite their proficiency likely not being questioned in their home country. Menken (2013) stressed to use the term emergent bilingual instead of long-term English learner, emphasizing students' bilingual language and literacy skills at secondary schools. The following excerpt is an example in which Menken (2013) applied a translanguaging lens to critique her own earlier research about the deficient positioning of emergent bilinguals:

One example is the article entitled "The Long-Term Impact of Subtractive Schooling in the Educational Experiences of Secondary English Language Learners" (Menken & Kleyn, 2010), in which the authors described these challenges in detail while failing to acknowledge the creative and dynamic ways the students actually use language. Taking this further, these students have been termed "non-nons," "clinically disfluent," "languageless," and "semilingual" by educators and linguists (Rosa 2019; Valadez et al., 2000) and are seen as deficient in linguistic knowledge largely due to their failure to become English monolinguals (Menken, 2013, p. 462).

In this example, students are deprived from native speaker status due to their demonstration of low academic literacy skills. LTELs are forcefully positioned in the "dual nonnative speaker" status because of their failure to be monolingual and monocultural. These bilingual speakers, under the category of LTELs, are conceptualized as speakers of nonstandard English or even "languagelessness" (Rosa, 2016, p. 162). So, the label of LTEL is a product constructed by the normalization of monolingualism and idealization of academic English.

Conversation surrounding the label goes beyond words. Labelling students as LTELs also impacts the ways educators read and understand their needs and abilities. In exploring how prolonged classification as LTELs impacts students' opportunity to learn, Brooks (2015) analyzed the "in-school experience with and ideas about academic reading" (p. 386), drawing data from five case studies of LTELs in the ninth grade. Based on classroom observations, Brooks found learning opportunities for LTELs are limited in terms of access to rich literacy practices and structured by the teacher. The teacher determined LTELs' in-school reading experiences with three revolving rules: reading involved more than one person; reading entailed meaning-making aloud; and the teacher provided official interpretation. However, such reading practice does not provide LTELs with the necessary literacy skills needed to increase proficiency as measured by state testing. Brooks' work highlights the fact that current labelling practice with the term LTEL prevents students from getting access to necessary literacy skills and learning opportunities. The label not

only blinds us to students' bilingual abilities, but also blocks students' way to further learning opportunities and success.

Through reviewing literature surrounding the label of LTELs and examining the impacts on students to whom the label is applied, the de facto language policy of labelling reflects an ideology that prioritizes English monolingualism and further disadvantages students who fall within the categorization. Connecting it to the colonial history of the United States, the ideology illustrates a rather contradictory belief expected in democracy as it holds that everyone ought to learn English despite immigration waves (Spolsky, 2004). In fact, discussion around language ideology cannot be disentangled from language practice. Thus, in the next section, I'll review studies that investigate LTELs' language practice and schooling experience.

Services and School Experiences of Long-Term English Learners

Within the theory of language policy, language practices are “the most observable behaviors and choices—what people actually do” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 4). Language practices are also the component that provide the linguistic context for anyone who learns a language (Spolsky, 2004). Overall, researchers in the field have generally reached a consensus that the greatest need of LTELs is to build up academic language and literacy skills to meet the current testing climate (Freeman et al., 2002). However, directed by the popular sink or swim approach in U.S. public schools, adequate language development services are not provided to LTELs throughout their schooling (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). In California, survey data shows that more than one-third of ELs were placed in mainstream classes without language support (Olsen, 2010). Similarly, in New York City, Menken and Kleyn (2010) found that a vast majority of LTELs have not received systematic, consistent language services during their schooling, and more than half of LTELs experienced a complete language gap. In the study, Menken and Kleyn interviewed 29 LTELs, five school administrators, and four teachers of LTELs over three years to learn about the past and present educational experience of LTELs and to what extent the services they received were matched to their specific educational needs. They argue the educational programming that LTELs received in the U.S. has been characterized as subtractive, thereby limiting students' academic literacy skills and negatively impacting their overall academic performance. To counter these subtractive approaches, Menken and Kleyn (2010) suggest focusing on home language literacy and bilingual education in future program development, so that students' educational opportunities can be improved and the resources they bring can be viewed from more of an additive perspective.

In fact, although there is an increasing awareness of the special linguistic and academic needs of LTELs, there are few designated intervention programs and curricular designed to support the student population (e.g., Ascenzi-Moreno et al., 2013; Brooks, 2019). According to the Council of Great City Schools (2019), LTELs in secondary schools are typically served in one of the following three placements: (a) an English language support program (e.g., ESL, ESOL) designed for newcomers; (b) reading remedial programs developed for low performing students or students with specific learning disabilities; or (c) mainstream classrooms with limited or no support for English. However, these programs hardly meet LTELs' needs because none are designed for them. To exacerbate the problem, the current education system tends to provide LTELs *a second-class education* because of certain assumptions and low expectations for them. Because they only receive simplified content and basic language skills, it's difficult for LTELs to develop the necessary knowledge to succeed in school.

Callahan and Shifrer (2016) reviewed the policy and placement of ELs in the public high school system that created inequity and segregation. The study found most students identified as

LTEs in high school were placed in courses without discussing with the students what their goals were for the future: whether it was going to college, career technical school, or the workforce. As Callahan and Shifrer (2016) indicated, “poorly implemented programs and policy result in the byproduct of students identified as LTEs” (p. 486), and shifts must occur for students to access courses that prepare them for future academic study or careers. Specifically, Callahan and Shifrer called for local schools to identify and develop programs to meet the needs of their EL population and to improve academic access and equity to content.

Furthermore, LTEs are commonly overrepresented in special education. In New York City, 23% of LTEs were identified as having learning disabilities, compared to the average number of 6.2% for students districtwide (Kieffer & Parker, 2016). Similarly, in California, it’s reported that 30% of LTEs are qualified for special education (Thompson, 2017; Umansky et al., 2015). The overrepresentation of LTEs in special education requires careful examination and consideration of the diagnostic criteria. Of course, the linguistic and academic challenges that LTEs are confronting may come from specific learning disability, that “may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004, § 300.8.10). But there is a greater possibility these difficulties are linked with their cultural backgrounds, interrupted education, transnational experiences, or previous subtractive schooling. The misidentification of LTEs in special education is a critical problem because placing students who are not disabled in special education is depriving them from full curricular and learning opportunities.

Recently, there have been experimental studies shining lights on LTEs and attempting to find ways for meeting students’ particular needs better. In Krashen’s (2018) “Do Libraries and Teacher Librarians Have the Solution to the Long-Term English Learner Problem?” he reviews theory and research to propose the concept of “self-selected pleasure in reading in English” (p. 16). Krashen argues that a focus on direct instruction on academic language is not sufficient to increase LTEs’ acquisition of the English language. In his research, Krashen further hypothesizes there are three essential stages to acquire language through the encouragement of reading for pleasure: storytelling and read-aloud; sustained silent reading; and self-directed reading should encourage the “area of special interest” (Krashen, 2018, p. 18). Krashen recommends the development of English proficiency should start from promoting students’ habits for reading and giving them access to vast reading materials. In this way, English learners are given freedom to explore the language through the lens of their topic of interest. Krashen states that habits inclusive of self-directed reading allow English learners to acquire the English language fluency in the forms of language required to succeed in school.

Krashen’s (2018) study accords with Cummins’ (2009) earlier recommended Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy framework, where he suggested better service for struggling ELs should be culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically responsive. This framework positions students as intelligent active learners in classroom interaction and enables them to construct knowledge through active language practice. It is important to keep the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy framework in mind while designing language programs and services for LTEs as it emphasizes the language practice of learners and meaningful interactions with teachers.

The literature illustrates the collective impacts of monoglossic language ideologies and the prioritization of standardized testing on students’ actual language practices and schooling experiences. As demonstrated above, the de facto language policy of labelling and high-stakes testing creates consequential material conditions that fundamentally marginalize EL learners and

relegate them to a perpetual status of academic and linguistic deficiency. The troubling schooling experiences of LTELs signal the systematic inequalities and injustice as well as linguistic and racial oppression EL learners are constantly faced with. On another note, the complexities within the education language policy regime also put teachers of LTELs in a complicated position. As they try to balance between meeting the needs of bilingual learners and accommodating teaching to the monolingual testing, educators thus become agents of enacting language policy. Considering the teachers' pedagogical struggles, I argue policy making must go beyond the top-down approach and include voices from the ground so as to resist the hegemonic construct in the educational domain and by extension the broader society.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the last part of the paper, I wish to stand back a little and identify some of the broader issues arising from the literature review. This review provides an overview and a critical evaluation of studies around LTELs. By using Spolsky's (2004) multi-dimensional LPP framework, I examine the de facto policy about LTELs from perspectives of the current climate of standardized tests (language management), the label itself (language ideology), and programs and schooling experience of these students (language practice). To answer RQ1, I have shown that the categorical distinction between students who are classified LTELs and other ELs is not fully based on students' language proficiency. Rather, the label orients from a constrained view of "ability" (linguistically and intellectually) that is solely decided by the high-stake standardized test in the contemporary language education realm.

In terms of RQ2, though the test is represented to the public as an objective measurement, my analysis has shown that the washback effects of the ELP test can negatively impact the instructions ELs received, thus causing ELs' learning needs being overshadowed. Through the examination of the current classification and reclassification system, I find ELP tests are problematic because the tests don't differentiate language proficiency from students' knowledge in the content areas, and the standards adopted by each state vary from each other, making the designation procedure messy and vague. Additionally, the state-to-state variability is shaped by state policy context. For example, the English-only instruction law in California was not overturned until 2016, which partially explains the monolingual-driven standards and deficient language adopted in earlier instructional frameworks (e.g., Olsen, 2012). Given these complexities, I suggest that any credible education policy and practices for equity and justice must address issues at the macro and micro level. Specifically, policy reforms should be informed by an awareness of contextual complexities. As Gillborn and Youdell (2000) said, "equality policy statements and target setting at the national level are worthless without mechanisms to translate them into changed activities at the school level" (p. 220). Thus, it is vital for stakeholders to work with researchers in the future to better understand which factors are more importantly associated with rate variations of LTELs.

As I move forward in the analysis, I find the term is not as neutral as it appears to be but demonstrates a monolingual language ideology in the current system. I do not question that the label has drawn the attention of educators and scholars to the special needs of this subgroup population of emergent bilinguals and the well intention to improve students' academic outcomes with the creation of the label. However, the label has socially constructed these students in a deficient way, which on the one hand, ignores students' multilingual and multicultural characteristics and, on the other hand, positions white supremacy as the linguistic and academic capital intentionally. In place of semilingualism or languagelessness, an initial and necessary step

for us to take would be to recognize all ELs have the potential to become fully bilingual and gain comparable academic English skills to their monolingual English-speaking peers. Next, we should be precise and conscious of what the category and label could mean and how the designation can possibly affect minoritized bilingual students' learning and being. In this way, it helps us capture the profound meanings in ways that authorities and institutions may not ever give voice to. Finally, we must acknowledge that acquiring a language, especially acquiring high levels of academic proficiency in a language is indeed a long-term process. Labelling students as LTELs is implicitly calling those who didn't meet people's impatient expectations as slow learners (Cushing-Leubner & King, 2015).

To address RQ3, I pointed out in the last section that the current programs and services for LTELs are inappropriate and underdeveloped. Further consideration of the overrepresentation of LTELs in special education leads me to ask the question—whether special education has become a default intervention approach for LTELs. The fixed, normalized, and yet problematic placement of LTELs reflects the false perception of bilingual learners' intellectuality and reinforces the deeply racialized stereotypes. The lack of appropriate language support and programs is also related to the broader socio-political context, which can never be separated from the colonial history of the nation. Setting English as the *correct* or *standard* language practice in program and curriculum design is a result of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Researchers, educators, and policy makers must resist the dichotomous framing of language. By enabling students to use their entire linguistic repertoires to demonstrate their meaning making, we are also challenging the monolingual ideologies while embracing the assets of cultural and linguistic knowledge students bring in. With it being said, we need to develop a framework that can help us trace the colonial history of language educational practices. In sum, this review speaks to the stereotypes, struggles, and challenges LTELs are facing and calls for more research studies to be conducted in addressing these problems pedagogically, institutionally, and systematically.

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