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COMMON ELL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This glossary is a resource for professionals involved in English language learner (ELL) education, and represents a first step toward developing a comprehensive catalogue of terms and definitions to aid educators in their work with the increasing population of ELLs across the country.

The complexity and heterogeneity of the ELL population in the United States has increased dramatically in recent history. ELLs have different levels of language proficiency and different socioeconomic status, academic experiences, and immigration history. Thus, they do not fit a single profile. In addition, ELLs represent the fastest growing segment of the student population in the United States. An estimated 70% of ELLs are concentrated in 10% of U.S. schools, and nearly 45% of the adults enrolled nationwide in state-administered adult education programs attend English as a second language (ESL) or English literacy classes (Clewell & Consetino de Cohen, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2006).

This glossary includes the most current vocabulary regarding ELLs and ELL education. It also identifies the terms or definitions that are obsolete, including some that may perpetuate negative stereotypes. The glossary is divided into two major sections; the first section focuses on terminology that refers to ELLs, as well as to instructional and programmatic practices, and the second section focuses on ELL programmatic models. Overall, the variety of these expressions and their definitions illustrates the challenge of developing consistent and current language that accurately applies to ELLs.

Note: Many of the definitions in this document are based on a glossary prepared by the Michigan Association for Bilingual Education (n.d.).

COMMON ELL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

I. ELL Terminology

1st (first) generation

Foreign-born and often foreign-educated ELLs.

2nd (second) generation

United States–born children of immigrants.

Accommodation[1]

Appropriate modifications or changes to tests and testing procedures so that ELL content knowledge is more accurately measured. Appropriate accommodations (e.g., allowing extra time to take a test, providing dictionaries, and making changes to materials, protocols, or the testing conditions) are used to facilitate the valid participation of ELLs in assessments without undermining the test construct.

Additive bilingualism

A philosophy that is reflected in instructional approaches such as dual language and developmental bilingual education. Such approaches promote the acquisition of a second language without impeding the development of the first language.

Alternative language program

A term used by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to refer to an instructional program that the office deems appropriate for ELLs. OCR does not require or encourage a specific type of program or approach to instruction for ELLs; it allows districts substantial freedom when choosing alternative language programs (Office of Civil Rights, n.d.). Alternative language programs incorporate either a bilingual education approach or an English-only approach, depending on the philosophy of the implementing school or agency.

Ancestral language

Home or family language. In English-speaking countries, for example, a language other than English that is spoken at home or was spoken by an individual's ancestors is considered an ancestral language.

Annual measurable achievement objective (AMAO)

AMAOs are state requirements or indicators for measuring ELL progress in learning English, the attainment of English language proficiency, and ELL annual yearly progress (AYP) in meeting state standards. Local education agencies that receive Title III funding (*the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act)* under the *Elementary and Secondary*

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[1] The term accommodation has historically been used to discuss strategies to accommodate testing or teaching procedures for students who have special needs and has recently been used to refer to accommodations for English language learners.

Education Act (ESEA) for ELL programming are held accountable for the achievement of ELLs; AMAOs help support state accountability efforts.

Audio-lingual approach

An instructional method stemming from a behaviorist theory that posits that making a sound or using correct grammar is an automatic, unconscious act. Accordingly, instruction is sometimes teacher centered, and typically involves pattern drills and the use of a language laboratory. In addition, this approach uses dialogues to carefully introduce vocabulary and sentence structure in a given sequence. Listening and speaking skills are introduced prior to reading and writing skills, and emphasis is placed on accuracy of pronunciation and grammar. The objective is for the listener to develop an automatic, accurate control of basic sentence structure, sounds, and vocabulary.

Authentic language

The type of genuine, or natural, language used by native speakers in real-life contexts, rather than the contrived language used solely to learn grammatical forms or vocabulary.

Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)

BICS are often referred to as "playground English" and are typically learned in 3 to 5 years. These language skills include basic, everyday speech that can be supported contextually by gestures. This concept was introduced by Jim Cummins in 1979 to distinguish between fundamental conversational speech and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

BICS–CALP gap

The BICS and CALP gap is the discrepancy between ELLs' conversational and academic English language abilities. This discrepancy is due to the fact that ELLs often acquire conversational English that seems to be fluent and more adequate for basic interpersonal communication (BICS). On the other hand, these students may continue to struggle with Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (academic language) and have difficulty in academic subject areas because they lack the conceptual understanding (which they have not learned in their first language) to support the language that they hear, speak, or read. There is a tendency among some professionals to assume, wrongly, that ELLs have language-learning disabilities due to the BICS-CALP gap. (See cognitive/academic language proficiency below for more information on CALP).

Bilingualism

The ability to communicate successfully in two languages, with the same relative degree of proficiency. It is important to note that bilinguals are rarely perfectly balanced in their use of two languages; one language is usually dominant (Baker, 2000).

Biliteracy

The ability to communicate and comprehend thoughts and ideas using grammatical systems and vocabulary from two languages, as well as to write both languages.

Code switching

The ability or tendency to switch among languages/dialects in the course of a conversation. Code switching tends to occur when people who are bilingual or bidialectal are in the presence of others who speak the same language. Code switching may involve alternating between two languages or

tonal registers, or could represent a dialectical shift within the same language, such as between Standard English and Black or African American English (Greene and Walker, 2004).

Cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP)

The level of proficiency required by an ELL to understand academically challenging subject matter in a classroom setting (Cummins, 1979). This refers to language that is often abstract, and is not accompanied by any contextual supports such as gestures or visual signals. It may take an ELL about 4 to 7 years to reach this level of fluency (Hakuta, 2000).

Common underlying proficiency

A theory developed by Jim Cummins in 1983 which posits that two languages are integrated through one underlying, central thinking system. Any skills that are not directly connected to a particular language, such as math, computer skills, or reading, are part of a common proficiency and thus can be transferred from one language to another. The opposing theory is "separate underlying proficiency" (SUP), which suggests that the individual languages are learned separately in the brain.

Community dialect (CD) speakers

ELLs who belong to a community that is influenced by multiple ethnic/regional dialects and thus demonstrate dialect features in their use of English. Many generation 1.5 ELLs, for example, can be considered community dialect speakers because they have learned English as an oral, rather than a literate, skill.

Compound bilingual

A form of additive bilingualism in which a bilingual learns two languages in the same context and consequently processes concepts the same way in both languages. The compound bilingual language user is likely to integrate both languages during communication, and communicate fully in each language. Examples of compound bilinguals include children with bilingual parents who learn both English and Spanish at home and who, for example, make an expression in Spanish but utilize an English grammatical structure as opposed to a Spanish one.

Comprehensive adult student assessment system (CASAS)

A competency-based system used to place and assess the progress of individual adult students in basic education and English language learning.

Culturally and linguistically diverse

Another term that can apply to English language learners. These are expressions that are often used to characterize ELLs and to highlight their distinct backgrounds.

Dual language

Dual language is a form of bilingual education in which students are taught literacy skills and content in two languages. Dual-language instruction usually begins in kindergarten or first grade; it extends for at least 5 years, and may continue into middle school and high school. The goal of this approach is to promote bilingualism, biliteracy, enhanced awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, and high levels of academic achievement through instruction in two languages. In dual language programs, the second language may be taught for at least half of the instructional day in the elementary years.

ELL (English language learner)

An individual who is in the process of actively acquiring English, and whose primary language is one other than English. This student often benefits from language support programs to improve academic performance in English due to challenges with reading, comprehension, speaking, and/or writing skills in English. Other terms that are commonly used to refer to ELLs are *language minority students, English as a Second Language (ESL) students, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students,* and *limited English proficient (LEP) students*.

EFL (English as a foreign language) students

Non-native-English-speaking students who are in the process of acquiring English proficiency in a country where English is not the primary language.

English as a second language (ESL)

A term often used to designate students whose first language is not English; this term has become less common than the term ELL. Currently, ESL is more likely to refer to an educational approach designed to support ELLs.

English language proficiency (ELP) assessment

A test that measures the English language (oral, reading, and writing) skills of students with limited English proficiency. Such a test is required by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) for all schools served by the state educational agency in every state.

English language proficiency (ELP) standards

Principles or criteria for identifying and describing the English-language oral, reading, and writing skills that are necessary for ELLs to be able to communicate effectively and participate fully in school.

English-only

Mainstream classes for native English speakers or ELLs who have been designated "fluent English proficient" (FEP) or "redesignated fluent English proficient" (RFEP). Depending on the state and the model used, all instruction is provided in English, and there may be little or no accommodation or special assistance for LEP students. The term English-only can also refer to a political movement advocating that the English language be the only official language in the United States (Lu, 1999).

English plus

A movement motivated by the belief that all U.S. residents should be encouraged to and should have the opportunity to become proficient in English plus one or more additional languages.

First (1st) generation

Foreign-born and often foreign-educated ELLs.

First language, primary language, or home language

These terms have several possible meanings for ELLs: the first language learned, the stronger language, the native language, and/or the language most frequently used.

Fluent English proficient (FEP)

Applies to "primary or home language other than English" (PHLOTE) students who have demonstrated full or fluent proficiency in English. They are able to speak, read, write, and understand English at levels that are on a par with those of their grade-level classmates, and consequently do not need any additional language accommodation in a mainstream English classroom.

Generation 1.5 students

Students who graduated from a U.S. high school while still acquiring English language skills. These students could include refugees, naturalized and native-born U.S. citizens, and permanent residents, who typically demonstrate limited proficiency in their first language. These students may have strong oral English skills but are less proficient in the academic language associated with school achievement (Harklau, 2003).

Heritage language

The language that an ELL considers to be his or her native, home, or ancestral language. This term can be used to describe any association between a non-dominant language, such as an indigenous or immigrant language, and a person, a family, or a community (Keheller, n.d).

L1

An ELL's first language or native language. This term may be used to refer to persons who are speaking in their native language.

L2

An ELL's second language, often used in the context of "L2 student" to designate students who are nonnative speakers of a language.

Language experience approach to reading

An approach that encourages literacy development among ELLs according to the theory that students can learn to read and write through activities and stories that are based on personal experiences. In this approach, the student dictates personal experience stories to an instructor and then reads the stories with the help of the instructor. The instructor's help facilitates the student's ability to then read written expressions or write what they hear (SIL International, 1999). The basic premise of this approach is that children learn that reading is speech written down.

LEP (limited English proficiency)

A term used by the U.S. Department of Education to refer to ELLs who are enrolled or getting ready to enroll in elementary or secondary school and who have an insufficient level of English to meet a state's English expertise requirements. However, the expression *English language learner (ELL)* has started to replace *LEP,* to avoid the implication that nonnative-English-speaking students are deficient (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). The former term for LEP was *limited English speaking (LES),* and was used in the first authorization of the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of ESEA, prior to NCLB), in 1968.

Linguistic enclave community

This term is used to describe speech communities where the language spoken by people in a particular community is free from the influences of the dominant language used outside of the

community. Linguistic enclaves preserve community languages, because the presence and use of, as well as the need for, the dominant language is nonexistent.

Multilingualism

The ability to speak more than two languages, with possible proficiency in many languages.

National reporting system (NRS)

An outcome-based reporting system for adult education programs that are state administered and federally funded. NRS identifies six educational levels for ESL, which include beginning literacy, low beginning, high beginning, low intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced. The levels comprise sets of skills and competences in the reading, writing, speaking, listening, functional, and workplace areas.

Native-born nonnative speakers

United States-born students who are from communities where a language other than English is the dominant language, or a "linguistic enclave community." An example of native-born nonnative speakers would be generation 1.5 students.

Native language support

The incorporation of a student's home language, typically by a teacher's aide, to translate any unfamiliar terms and/or provide clarification on lessons taught in English.

Non-English proficient student (NEP)

An ELL who has minimal or no proficiency in English.

Parachute kids

ELLs who come alone to the U.S. to live with extended family members and attend K-12 schools. The term may have a pejorative connotation.

Primary or home language other than English (PHLOTE)

A term used by the Office for Civil Rights to identify a student whose native or home language is one other than English. This acronym can also be shortened to LOTE.

Redesignated fluent English proficient (RFEP)

ELLs who are initially assessed as limited English proficient but who have been reclassified after demonstrating fluent English skills.

Second (2nd) generation

Refers to United States-born children of immigrants.

Semilingualism

A term that has been used to describe bilingual students who demonstrate difficulty mastering skills in either their native or their second language. Jim Cummins (2000) originally introduced the term *semilingualism* to describe students who were having difficulties in developing their language abilities in either language. Since then the term has been criticized because of its implication of deficiency, and has taken on a pejorative connotation.

Speakers of "other Englishes"

ELLs who have learned to speak English language varieties that differ from American English. Examples include immigrant students from English-speaking Caribbean countries or from places such as Britain, Canada, and Australia.

Subtractive bilingualism

A form of bilingual education that encourages and develops an environment in which an ELL's second language is likely or intended to replace the first language. This is in contrast to a classroom environment that supports the development of both languages simultaneously.

Title III

Title III of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) is a part of the legislation enacted to ensure that limited English proficient (LEP) students, including immigrant children and youth, develop English proficiency and meet the same academic content and achievement standards that other children are expected to meet.

Workplace ESL/ESOL

Instruction for ELLs that takes place at the workplace and usually has a work-specific focus.

II.   ELL Program Models

Adult basic education and ESL programs

Local education agencies, community colleges, and community-based organizations that provide instructional opportunities for adult ELLs to learn English literacy and language skills.

Bilingual education

Bilingual education involves providing academic content instruction in a student's native and secondary languages. The most common bilingual education models include the following: Early-Exit Transitional, Late-Exit Transitional Developmental or Maintenance, Bilingual Immersion, Integrated Transitional Bilingual Education, and Dual Language Immersion. Within each type of program model, there are several options, with varying amounts of time spent on each of the target languages. One-way bilingual programs (both the Transitional and Developmental types) can follow several models, such as a 90/10 or 50/50 model. In the 90/10 model, students initially receive 90 percent of the instruction in their native language, which is gradually reduced to about 50 percent by the fifth grade. In the 50/50 model, one or two teachers use both the native language and English in approximately equal amounts of time for instructional purposes throughout the implementation process.

Content-based ESL

A model of language education that integrates language and content instruction in the second-language classroom. Second-language teachers use instructional materials, learning tasks, and classroom techniques from academic content areas as the vehicles for developing second language, content, cognition, and study skills.

Cultural deficiency model

An argument that attributes an ELL student's inability to succeed in school to a problem located in the student's cultural background rather than in the school system or society; this is the opposite of an "enrichment model." "Cultural deficiency" was used to rationalize the academic achievement disparity among racial or ethnic minorities in the United States, but is no longer considered to be a credible or valid rationale.

Dual language program/dual immersion

A program in which ELLs are taught literacy and content in two languages. Dual language or two-way bilingual programs often focus on enrichment for both native and nonnative speakers of English. Dual language programs used in the United States tend to fall into one of the following two categories:

- Minority-language-dominant programs: These programs follow an instructional pattern of using a student's native language for either 90 percent or 80 percent of the time.
- Balanced programs: In these programs, instructional time is equally divided between the minority language and English.

English as a second language (ESL)

Students who are identified as ELLs receive specially designed language and academic instruction in English for the entire school day, or some part of it, depending on the requirements of the state.

Students who are more proficient tend to spend fewer hours with an ESL specialist. ESL programs may have several formats, which include "pullout" or "push-in" programs.

English Immersion strategy program

A type of ESL program in which English is the primary language of instruction and is tailored to the developmental linguistic needs of LEP students to ensure achievement of content knowledge. This program contrasts with a transitional bilingual education program, in which content is taught in the LEP students' native language. Immersion teachers may or may not have a background in the LEP students' home language, and use English exclusively to teach students instructional content.

English language development (ELD)

An immersion education model intended for ELLs. Traditionally, this method separates English language development from content instruction under the assumption that English language proficiency must be achieved prior to learning subject matter. ELLs who are acquiring basic communication skills in English and/or are struggling with the curriculum participate in these courses. This approach is similar to the pullout ESL program model.

English-language monolingual program

A program in which ELLs are in a regular English-language monolingual classroom, and do not receive any specialized instruction for language-minority students.

English-monolingual-plus-ESL program

A program in which ELLs are in a regular English-language monolingual classroom, but also receive additional instruction in an English as a second language (ESL) class or program.

Global community classrooms (GCC)

An alternative to a newcomer school or program, depending on the number of recent immigrants and the level of community support. This model uses elements of the sheltered instruction approach to integrate the benefits of a newcomer program while promoting linguistic inclusion. In these classrooms, one-fourth to one-third of the students are ELLs and the rest are native English speakers. GCC classes are often taught by a content-area teacher who is trained in ELL methods and second-language acquisition. The goal is to encourage teachers and classmates to view ELLs as resources rather than liabilities.

Late-exit bilingual education

Another term for the provision of bilingual instruction; specifically refers to 3 or more years of maintenance bilingual education. These programs tend to place more emphasis on the first language as a link to developing English language proficiency. A significant amount of instruction takes place in the student's native language, with an increase in English instruction over 4 to 6 years (Linquanti, 1999).

Maintenance bilingual education program

Like students in transitional bilingual education programs, the students in a maintenance program are placed in a bilingual education classroom and receive some form of English language instruction. Both English and the native language are used regularly as languages of instruction. The

fundamental difference between a transitional and a maintenance bilingual education program is that the goal of the latter is to develop full proficiency in both languages.

Migrant education

Education programs that are designed primarily to meet the needs of children of farm workers. These children tend to be poor, often have limited access to health care and limited English proficiency, and are often subject to the constant readjustments of frequently moving from one school to another.

Newcomer program

A type of program established specifically for ELLs who are recent immigrants. These programs are usually at the middle and high school level, and are aimed at those with limited or interrupted schooling in their home countries. Major goals of the newcomer programs include the acquisition of beginning English language skills, core academic skills, and acculturation to the U.S. school system. Another term used in reference to this type of program is *immigrant youth program.*

Pullout ESL

A program in which ELLs leave their mainstream classrooms to receive individualized instruction in English as a second language. These programs are also referred to as self-standing ESL instruction, in which the ESL specialist can either follow a unique ESL curriculum that is based on the individual students' language and academic needs, or follow a more mainstream curriculum.

Push-in ESL

In this type of program, the ESL teacher goes into the regular, mainstream classroom to work with the English language learner.

Self-contained ESL

A classroom with only ELL students or an ESL resource class where the teacher provides classroom instruction in all subject matter without employing pullout ESL instruction; typically has students with a variety of first languages.

Self-standing ESL instruction

Another term for a *pullout ESL* model of instruction, in which ELLs leave their regular, mainstream classrooms to receive individualized instruction in English as a second language.

Sheltered English instruction (SEI)

A teaching strategy that uses language and context to make academic subject matter more comprehensible to ELLs.

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

A research-based, explicit model of sheltered instruction, in which the language and context for academic subject matter are adapted for ELLs. A national research project sponsored by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CRDE) developed the SIOP model on the basis of a literature review of best practices. Teachers and researchers also collaborated in developing and refining the model over several years of field testing.

Structured English immersion

A programmatic technique used with ELLs in which English is the primary mode of instructional communication and instructional methods reflect English as a foreign language (EFL) models.   This model promotes the acquisition of English language skills to help ELLs succeed in an English-only mainstream classroom. Depending on the state's policy, once students have acquired the necessary level of conversational and academic English proficiency, they may be required to be transferred to "English language mainstream classrooms," where other students are either native English language speakers or highly proficient in English.

Title III English proficiency (ELP) standards

Principles designed to identify and describe the language skills that ELLs need for successful communication and school participation. The ELP standards also specify the English language skills that are needed to perform the tasks across content areas.

Transitional bilingual education program

In these programs, students are placed in a bilingual education classroom and receive some form of English language instruction (e.g., ESL) as well as instruction in their native language. Gradually, instruction in and through the native language is replaced by instruction solely in English. The goal is for the student to join a monolingual English-language program as quickly as possible.

Vocational English as a second language programs

Programs that combine language education with instruction in job-specific skills.

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