



# HEGEMONIES OF ENGLISH

## Ways for Teacher Educators to Counter Hegemonies in the School Settings

### Abstract

Almost unanimously, hegemony in education insist that Standard Edited English should be the oral and written language of schooling in the US. This is problematic considering the many languages and varieties of languages students speak, both historically and today. Educator preparation programs must include the history, practices, and policies of linguistic hegemony, so preservice teachers can learn to reframe language instruction and assessment.

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## Introduction

Let us begin this brief by unraveling what is meant by hegemony, hegemonies, and hegemonies of English, as these are the understanding that are needed to counter the potential harm they can do to all children, both English speaking and multilingual children. A definition of hegemony is the *ability to control what people do, think, and believe by those who hold powerful positions and use those position to dominate others*. In other words, those who have power purposefully exercise that power to impose their ideas about how things should be (Gramsci, 1971). For our purposes in the field of education, the powerful includes educational policy makers, teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and teacher education journal editors, among others. Accordingly, within the field of education, specifically, hegemony of language means that certain powerful people can and do impose their will about which language must be used for schooling, which variety of language should be used in school settings, and how language should be defined, edited, used, and revered by teachers and students (Vélez-Ibáñez, 2017). Educational hegemon [people in power] are overwhelmingly white, cisgender heterosexual, educated speakers of Standard Edited English, and of course, these people also use their local varieties of English in certain situations. They also use age-appropriate slang and obscenities, but rarely in public places. Almost unanimously, educational hegemon insist that Standard Edited English should be the oral and written language of schooling, and that all teachers must communicate in and teach with Standard Edited English. Without examining what these hegemon do, children and youth will continue to be harmed because nearly everyone that is schooled in the U.S., and especially those who eventually become K-12 teachers in the U.S., has been covertly and overtly taught that all schooling must be carried out in English, and specifically in Standard Edited English, AKA academic English, AKA what is left when you set aside all the local varieties of English used by “Valley Girls, Hillbillies, Southerners, New Yorkers, African Americans, Asians, Mexican American, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans” (Milroy, 1999, p. 174). You could also add to this list the English eventually learned and used by recently arrived immigrants, migrants, displaced peoples, and refugees from lower castes or socioeconomic classes who become emergent bilinguals within the U.S.

## The Problem

Moving on, let us consider the idea of hegemonies of language, because in the U.S., there are multiple languages used by children and their families and language hegemonies interact with racism, classism, genderism, and ablism. There have been efforts throughout the colonial history of the U.S., when hegemon have worked to make educational policy to mandate English-only instruction for children and youth who enter school speaking a language other than the varieties of English found in English-speaking schools. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, tens of thousands Indigenous children in the U.S. and Canada, for example, were taken from their parents and placed into residential boarding schools where they were treated as savages in need of being civilized, and where their languages were extirpated and replaced with English (Romero-Little, McCarty, Warhol, & Zepeda, 2007; Voici, 2020). Note that the people in power who produce and believe such savage ideologies are the ones committing the savagery because these hegemonies mandate the obliteration the indigenous ways of knowing, being and languaging. As was recently learned, owners of residential boarding schools in the U.S. and Canada murdered and physically harmed for life thousands of indigenous of children (Estes & Avis, 2019; Mosby & Millions, 2021). Likewise, slave owners would beat, and separate black people kidnapped and robbed of their homes from various African countries and prohibit them from using their home languages (Baugh, 1999).

Think about this: In the 1950s in Driscoll, Texas, the school district there, run by white hegemony, held back Mexican American young children who entered school speaking Spanish in the first grade **for 3 years**, until they deemed them English-ready for second grade. The school claimed that the emergent bilingual Mexican descent children deprived white students from white teachers' attention and instruction in English.

During the 1980 and '90s white hegemony (such as white monolingual English speaker Ron Unz in California) began what is known as the English-only movement, which targeted immigrant speakers of languages other than English, primarily Mexican descent children and youth in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts. Other states with some transitional bilingual education programs (no more than 2 years of instruction in languages other than English along with ESL instruction) have relied heavily on the message of this political movement: Get these children to stop using their non-English home languages and use only English in schools.

Relying on the political stance of U.S. English (1983) and English hegemony in general, the English-only movement gained momentum throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Currently, 32 of 50 states have declared English as their state's official language. At the national level, no language has been declared as official. The English-only movement has been devastating for emergent bilingual children and youth. Not only have these children fallen behind in states where bilingual education has been banned or restricted to transitional bilingual education programs, many lose oral proficiency in the home languages within a generation.

Despite the English only movement and anti-bilingual education political action groups, there is a small, but growing population of children across the U.S. enrolled in dual language programs, in which part of the curriculum is presented in English and part in a language other than English, most often (Standard Edited) Spanish. Notice that any mention of bilingualism is erased from dual language programs. The languages for instruction in dual language programs are distributed so that students begin heavily in the non-English language (90/10) or have half English and half the non-English language (50/50) The 90/10 model shifts to 50/50 typically by 4th grade, and depending on the program, may continue through elementary school, apparently to reflect hegemonic beliefs that "true bilinguals" use their languages separately and their language use must reflect Standard Edited language norms.

It is important to understand that many dual languages have been built on language hegemonic principles (see Valdés, 1997) and their audiences differ from transitional bilingual program programs. Dual language education is often found in middle class school communities, where well-to-do white parents want their children to learn a second language for economic reasons. As these schools become gentrified (Dorner, Cervantes-Soon, Heiman & Palmer, 2021), the language and literacy demands of Spanish speaking parents who are able to enroll their children in these programs are not taken into consideration, nor is the bilingual practices of children, who translanguage – alternative freely and fluently between two languages (Freire & Alemán, 2021). The schools construct dual language programs that fit the needs of hegemony. Dual language programs insist that teachers and students use Standard Edited varieties of the two languages and that the two languages must be kept separate, with monolingual norms of usage. In

this manner, if the language in the dual language program is named as Spanish, then the teachers are expected to speak and write Standard Edited Spanish and speak and write Standard Edited English (see Faltis, 1984; Valdés, 1997). The same hegemonic ideology language is imposed on all other non-English named languages used in such programs (e.g., Arabic, Korean, Mandarin, Vietnamese.) Variations in dual language programs exist: There can be two teachers (one English-speaking, one speaking the other language) or one dual language teacher using the two languages at different times during a day or on different days. These variations are equally hegemonic, because the languages involved must be separately, without any mixing with the other language, i.e., no translanguaging, no dynamic use of the two languages together.

This hegemonic ideology about mixing languages intersects with complementary hegemonic ideologies about language purism and standard edited language; that is, that all named languages used in bilingual programs must remain as pure and as perfect as possible, that children should only be taught to use standard edited oral and written language in school setting, that spelling and grammar usage be presented to children as either correct or incorrect, and that pronunciation is best when it reflects educated standard ways of talking by white educated, cisgender, heterosexual men, especially those from the mid-Western states (Lippi-Green, 2012). Typically, purity of languages is maintained by powerful language academics, in language departments and in teacher education programs, where students are taught to believe in the idea of academic English and academic Spanish as the highest forms of language and that non-standard varieties of language, such as Black English, Spanglish, regional varieties of uneducated English indicate low levels of intelligence that need to be extirpated. The ideology of pure languages also intersects with eugenolinguistic practices (Faltis, in press), which are hegemonic attempts to expunge non-standard and non-English languages used by non-white people from being used in schools and society, because these ways of speaking, it is argued, are associated with criminality, drug use, sexism, homophobia, low intelligence, and laziness (Bonfilio, 2002). These ways of speaking, therefore, need to be deleted, stopped, eradicated in favor of white edited ways of speaking English. Take, for example, what one language purist had to say about Black English:

The adaptation of [Black English in the USA] goes hand in hand with hostility to education, with blatant forms of sexism, and with forms of discrimination against those fellow black pupils who co-operate with the schools and resist pressures to steal, smoke, take drugs, and indulge in other forms of criminality. (Honey, 1991, pp, 160-161).

Regarding bilingual children and youth who mix Spanish and English when conversing with other bilinguals, Mexican author Octavio Paz, when asked about “Spanglish,” alternating between Spanish and English, said this: No es ni bueno ni malo, sino abominable (Stavans, 2007, p. 25). Here Paz is likely referring to the idea of translanguaging practices in which bilinguals switch language features within utterances (Préstame tu bolígrafo because, fijate, mine is not working) and use local varieties of Spanish that come from contact with English, such as washatería or güider for laundromat and string trimmer. Language purists despise when bilingual people mix named languages in these ways; accordingly, they need to be suppressed at best, and subject to punishment and expunged at worst. Translanguaging extends the idea of languaging (language as a fluid action) to the dynamic use of multiple languages concurrently (García and Wei, 2014). In non-academic communities, people use terms such as

codeswitching and language mixing or meshing to refer to the essence of translanguaging. Translanguaging occurs in all multilingual communities throughout the world.

### Addressing Language Hegemonies in your Teacher Education Courses

In this section of this brief, we will examine ways to thinking about and act on how these hegemonies have influenced you and your preservice teachers in practice. It is essential to consider how these practices harm all students, both white and students of color. And finally, it is important to discuss with your students the hegemonies of language that make them internalize monolingualism and distrust translanguaging and multilingualism.

First and foremost, it is important to understand and acknowledge that hegemonies and their support systems, such as pure language and Standard Edited English ideologies, are ever-present (Kelly, 2018). Because they emanate from people who hold power over institutions such as schools and teacher education programs, there will be push back by some and what I refer to as *hegemonic evasiveness*, the practice of believing that all languages and varieties of languages are important, but not acknowledging that English, and particularly Standard Edited English or academic English, are what really matter in school. As was pointed out above, hegemonies of language position spoken and written Standard Edited language, pure, and unmixed language as the goal of U.S. schooling. This goal avoids the history of language genocide, English-only policies, and eugenolinguistic practices of forcefully erasing the use of non-English languages through the curriculum, prohibitive practices, and even physical violence. Preservice teachers need to understand how this history, policies, and practices are harmful to all students.

The first action to take is to be sure to include the topic and activities where students learn about and discuss hegemonies of language across teacher education courses and practices, and especially within bilingual, dual language, and applied linguistics courses. The goal is to present a counternarrative to hegemonies of language by having students learn about the meaning and history of hegemonies in the U.S. with particular attention to language.

One activity would be to study the origins of English First, their goals and objectives with regard to pushing for English-only in schools across the nation (See Galindo, 1997). Likewise, students could learn about Ron Unz, who he was and how he got involved in the English for the Children movement that led to banning bilingual education in California (See Moñtano, Ulanoff, Quintanar-Sarellana, & Aoki, 2005; Ryan, 2001). Another topic of interest here is Arizona's Structured English Immersion program that was a disaster for emergent bilingual children (See Arias & Faltis, 2012; Lillie, 2016; Lillie, Markos, Arias, and Wiley, 2012). Have your students learn about Arizona's language policy and how and why it harmed emergent bilingual Mexican descent children and youth.

Students should also learn about the hegemonies of language as these have played out in dual language schools and programs, starting with Valdés (1997) who cautioned against English hegemonies alive and well in dual language programs for Spanish and English. Another important work to have students learn from is Kelly (2018), who discusses interest convergence and hegemony in many of today's dual language programs.

Invite students to consider what is happening in the painting below, and how it relates to eugenolinguistics and the hegemonies of language in the U.S. given what has happened since the colonization of the U.S. to indigenous groups, enslaved Africans, and in more recent times to Mexican immigrants and Latino children and youth in general.



Artist: Christian Faltis, oil on canvas, 24X30. **Eugenolinguistic Erasure**, 2021

## Conclusion

Have multiple discussions about translanguaging and encourage multilingual students in your courses to translanguange and to write translingually. Really think hard about the ways you treat language in your syllabus. Are points taken away for “incorrect spelling”? Do you explicitly state that all written assignments must be in Standard Edited English? Is it implied that students must use “academic English,” whatever that means?

Lastly, problematize the idea of Academic Language or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) Jim Cummins developed 1979 (Cummins, 1979; Cummins, 2008), which he distinguished from basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), sometimes referred to as playground language. Watch a video on BICS and CALP by Colorín Colorado and discuss how it portrays these concepts without critically considering the implications for promoting a deficit view of emergent bilingual children. Many have argued that CALP is a racist concept because it implies that academic language (Standard Edited English) is cognitively superior to conversational communitive language (See MacSwan, 2020; Seltzer, 2019). Read George C. Bunch & Daisy Martin (2021): From “academic language” to the “language of ideas”: a disciplinary perspective on using language in K-12 settings. There is no place for promoting academic language in schools because the reality is that there are multiple varieties of language that all students bring, and all teachers use and can use in a classroom. If we are truly in favor of equity, there is no way that teacher educators should be promoting hegemonic academic language or academic English as the only language variety that is acceptable in school settings. Academic language is one more way that hegemons promote and expect monolingualism, and particularly a type of monolingual language use, Standard Edited English, that sustains their power, and harms all children, but especially children of color, bilingual children, and immigrant children.

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