

# 8 The glotopolítica of English teaching to Latinx students in the US

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## Introduction

The teaching of English to Latinx<sup>1</sup> students has always been about assimilating a population that was conquered, colonized, and racialized through the imperialist designs of the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chapter, nourished by the theoretical perspective of glotopolítica,<sup>2</sup> which will be described below, analyses the assumptions behind English language teaching of Latinx students. To do so, it examines the ideologies behind the English language standards that define the teaching of English to Latinx students today. We focus on the way in which English has been disembodied from its history as an imperialist instrument of conquest and colonization and from its role in the neoliberal establishment of global capitalism in the present. English is treated as an autonomous neutral linguistic structure, without taking into account how it has been, and continues to be used, to maintain structures that keep the power in the hands of English monolingual elites.

The movement in the United States towards English language “standards” is here shown as a way to restore a social order in which students of colour were educationally segregated prior to the judicial decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954).<sup>3</sup> With social measures and judicial and legislative orders that required educational authorities to provide an equitable education to *all* students after the Civil Rights era, ways had to be found to sort students into categories of those who deserved a rich and challenging education, and those who were seen as not meeting the standards to do so. We use a lens from glotopolítica to show how the standards movement, and the testing and accountability measures that have accompanied it since the 1990s, are being used today to justify excluding Latinx students and other racialized minorities from educational opportunities, as they fail to meet “standards” that are presented as objective measures of linguistic and intellectual capacity.

## Glotopolítica

The study of what is known by the term “glotopolítica” emerges as a counter-narrative to the ways in which scholars from the northwestern hemisphere studied the relationship between language and society in the mid-twentieth

century. Worried about what were considered “the language problems” of newly independent Asian and African countries, scholars started to shape what became the field of language policy (Fishman, 1974; Rubin and Jernudd, 1971). Corpus planning, Status planning, and later Acquisition planning became the three pillars of language policy, as new nation states, and their language practices, were constructed in the image of former colonial powers, even when indigenous languages were chosen over colonial ones. This early language policy scholarship was later enriched by critical scholars such as Jim Tollefson (1991, 1995, 2002), who started questioning the assumptions about language and society being made. Later, Bernard Spolsky (2004) expanded the field of language policy by proposing that it had three components: language management, language practices, and language ideologies. Despite its renewed criticality, and its expansion beyond the study of top-down institutional language policies, the field remained mostly politically neutral.

In contrast, *glotopolítica*, the study of the politics of language, was centred and focused on destabilizing the ways in which language had been manipulated to exert control over populations. The field, which owes its early beginnings to Marcellesi and Guespin (1986) in France, and to its development in Latin America by Elvira Arnoux in Argentina (Arnoux, 2014; Del Valle, 2017), focuses on studying texts about language in relation to their sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts, as well as to uncovering the ideologies that have led to the language constructions manifested in the texts.

What is interesting about *glotopolítica* is that it is a field of study which emerged from the South and spread to the North through the Americas and in Spanish. This disrupts the hierarchical flow of ideas from the North, and thus, even in its inception, *glotopolítica* is not only critical but militant in its ideological distance from Anglo-American constructions about language and society. Theoretical *glotopolítica* ideas and work have spread to the United States in Spanish mainly through the work of José del Valle, a bilingual scholar of Galician ancestry, and his students at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York (see Del Valle, 2007, 2017). The locus of enunciation in *glotopolítica* studies, as Mignolo (2000) would say, is not in the English-speaking world. The enunciations are made by those living and working in worlds that have suffered the imperialist designs of the United States in Latin America, or that as a result of many of those policies have had to flee and work within what José Martí, the late nineteenth-century Cuban patriot, called “*las entrañas del monstruo*” [the inner bowels of the monster]. The language texts that are objects of study are deconstructed through a language (Spanish) and voices (those of Latin Americans and Latinx in the US) which have not had a legitimate place in language scholarship. It is this lens from *glotopolítica* that we take up in this chapter to tell the story of the construction of English standards and its implications for teaching to Latinx in the United States today. First, however, we review the historical and sociopolitical context of our study.

## Latinx in the United States and their education

The presence of Spanish speakers in the United States is not new, since Spanish was one of the founding settler languages of North America (Kloss, 1977). And Spanish-speaking people have been conquered and colonized by the imperialist designs of the United States since the nineteenth century. But despite language policies to restrict the use of Spanish, the resistance of the US Latinx population to total linguistic assimilation to English has been fierce.

Following the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), one half of the Mexican territory was ceded to the United States, a territory that encompasses what today is California, Arizona, Texas, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming (Menchaca, 1999). The Spanish language that people spoke was gradually eradicated from the territory, with schools becoming the primary instrument of this eradication. For example, California became a state in 1850, and in 1855 it was decreed that English only would be the language of instruction (Castellanos, 1983). The territory of New Mexico (which originally consisted of present-day New Mexico and Arizona) was added to the Union in 1850 and separated into two territories in 1863. In 1874 in the territory of New Mexico, 70 per cent of schools taught in Spanish only, and only 5 per cent of the schools were in English only, with the remainder being bilingual schools. Fifteen years later, only 30 per cent of the schools used Spanish as a language of instruction, whereas 42 per cent used English only. The reversal in language education policy and the imposition of English only in education was complete by the time New Mexico was admitted to statehood in 1912 (Del Valle, 2003; García, 2009b).

Following the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, Cuba and Puerto Rico were made US colonies, and Puerto Rico remains so today. In Puerto Rico, education was decreed to be in English only. By 1916 the policy was changed so that Spanish, the language of Puerto Ricans, was allowed in instruction only for the first four years. The resistance of Puerto Ricans to the policy led to the re-establishment of instruction in Spanish in 1948 (García *et al.*, 2001). Puerto Ricans, US citizens by virtue of the Jones Act (1917), started migrating to New York City in the early twentieth century and accelerated after the Second World War (Meléndez, 2017). In New York, the imposition of English in instruction for Puerto Ricans led to massive school failures.

Scholars have documented how the Mexican American community and the Puerto Rican community advocated for Spanish in their children's education throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Del Valle, 2003; San Miguel, 1987). But as immigration from Mexico and Puerto Rico increased, efforts to teach English were redoubled in order to annihilate what was considered the “problem” of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans – their Spanish language. Still, they resisted, and both communities drew inspiration from the Civil Rights and Black Power movements to demand a more equitable education for their youth that sustained their bilingualism and that advanced a broader agenda of political and economic self-determination (García and Sung,

2018). The passage of The Bilingual Education Act in 1968, which provided funding for schools to develop bilingual programmes, as well as the judicial decision of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) which declared that an equitable education required being able to comprehend instruction, did much to fuel bilingual education programmes in the United States. But the opposition was fierce, especially following the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Immigration from Latin American countries increased in the late twentieth century as US immigration laws were relaxed and the long-standing US policies in Latin America started destabilizing the region. As the twentieth century drew to a close, three states – California, Arizona, and Massachusetts – declared bilingual education to be illegal, and many other states dismantled their bilingual education programmes. Despite the fact that both California and Massachusetts reversed their ban in 2017, bilingual education in the United States continues to be seen mostly as a way of teaching English to the many Latinx students who are said not to be performing according to English standards. Bilingual education is also increasingly seen as an opportunity for English-speaking white students to learn a language other than English. In many ways, bilingualism is constructed as harmful for Latinx students, but as a commodity in a neoliberal global economy for Anglo white students (for more on this history see Flores and García, 2017; García and Sung, 2018). The Spanish language on the lips of the Latinx community brings up the images that President Donald Trump has promoted since he announced his candidacy – animals, criminals, Narco-traffickers, rapists, thugs. And the effect of this dehumanization of Latinx communities on educational policy can be felt today on the 58 million people who make up the US Latino community.

The Latinx population is not by any means foreign-born. In fact, two-thirds of the Latinx community was born in the United States. But more than half the Latinx population speak Spanish at home, despite the fact that they speak English very well (Seltzer and García, 2019). In 2011, over 95 per cent of Latinx surveyed in a Pew Research Center study believed that Spanish was most important for the next generation (Taylor *et al.*, 2012).

Although most Latinx are US-born and highly bilingual, US schools erase these characteristics, focusing instead only on those who are labelled by schools as “English language learners”. Educating Latinx students is all about teaching English and getting them to use English with norms that are said to be those of “native speakers” – white middle-class students. Latinx students’ language use can be placed along all points of the bilingual continua, but their bilingualism, and its complexity, is completely ignored.

Irvine and Gal (2000) have proposed that people construct ideological representations of linguistic differences through three semiotic processes – erasure, iconization, and fractal recursivity. Latinx students have been subjected to these semiotic processes, ensuring that they can then be required to meet externally imposed educational standards that treat them as if their bilingualism, and the minoritization and racialization to which they are subjected daily, does not exist. First, the bilingualism of Latinx is *erased* because the English-only ideology

makes it invisible. Second, the Spanish language, along with lack of English, serves to *iconize* being Latinx; that is, the link between Spanish and the racialization process to which Latinx are subjected is made inherent. This again ignores Latinx bilingualism and the fact that most Latinx students use Spanish *with* English, and that Latinx people are diverse. Third, through a process of *fractal recursivity*, the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level (Irvine and Gal, 2000, p. 38), Latinx students are held to “common” English “standards” that have nothing to do with the ways in which bilingual Latinx use/do language. Standardized tests are then constructed to measure these “standards”, proving once again that there is an “achievement gap” between students of colour, including Latinx, and their white counterparts. This then relegates Latinx students to “remedial” types of classes, where their bilingualism is ignored, their language practices stigmatized, and where the emphasis becomes the development of English only.

### An era of standards

In the United States, educational policy is the purview of each of the states, although the U.S. Department of Education provides oversight to distribute the funds that it regulates. In the year 2000, American students were included in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a worldwide survey conducted every three years by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to 15-year-olds in mathematics, science, and reading. The performance of US students as compared to the 27 countries that participated originally was judged to be just average. The US ranked eighteenth in maths, fifteenth in reading and fourteenth in science out of the 27 countries that participated. To remain a competitive superpower in the neoliberal global market of the twenty-first century, it was felt that something had to be done about education.

The National Governors Association, an organization of state governors, and the Council of Chief State School Officers made up of the educational chancellors in each state, started to discuss the development of a series of shared educational objectives that would be “common” across states to increase the “competitiveness” of US citizens. Dane Linn, Director of the Education Division for the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, summarized the charge for these objectives:

Governors recognize the irrefutable links between a quality education, a productive workforce, and a sound economy. Our competitiveness relies on an education system that can adequately prepare our youth for college and the workforce.

(Cited in National Governors Association, 2009)

In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed. The new policy rendered states accountable for their students’ academic performances, demanding

accountability systems that yielded what they deemed to be valid data on standardized tests and sophisticated reporting mechanisms to the federal government. But each state continued to measure student achievement according to its own objectives. In the meantime, the development of the “common” educational objectives was coming to fruition.

What became the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were launched with much fanfare in 2009. These were supposed to identify what students across different states were expected to know and do in English language, arts and literacy, in history/social studies, science and technical subjects, and in mathematics. During the same year, the Obama administration announced *Race to the Top*, a competitive grant that provided funding incentives for states to adopt common core standards. The future of the United States was said to be at stake. That year, the US ranked fourteenth in reading, seventeenth in science, and twenty-fifth in maths among the 65 countries included in the PISA evaluation (García and Flores, 2014).

By the following year, 41 of the 50 US states had adopted the CCSS standards. But in 2015, *No Child Left Behind* was substituted by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). The law provided states with more flexibility for some of NCLB’s more prescriptive requirements. By October 2017, ten states had either rewritten or replaced the CCSS, although for the most part states kept the standards proposed as the CCSS (García and Kleifgen, 2018).

The Language Arts standards of the CCSS included strands for listening/speaking, reading (informational texts, literary texts, and foundational reading understandings), and writing. In addition, a language strand focused on the linear build-up of grammatical structures and vocabulary (García and Flores, 2014). In many ways this was a compromise to those who believed that norms and conventions of English also had to be included, and, of course, tested. Students were supposed to use language, but only if it was rendered in what was considered “standard” English.

The Common Core Standards have neglected to pay any attention to bilingualism, and have had little to say about what students who are new to English are expected to know and do. The original document devoted only two and a half pages to emergent bilingual<sup>4</sup> students (those that states classify as “English language learners”) and acknowledged that “these students may require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge”.<sup>5</sup> But the neglect of these students shows how their lives and languaging have been “erased”.

The CCSS have produced a proliferation of standardized tests that have been used by state education departments to produce data. This data is increasingly being used to level students into different tracks and punish teachers and schools that do not produce results. Because the standards have not taken bilingual students into account, Latinx students and teachers and schools with large Latinx populations have been hit the hardest. Curricula and instructional material aligned to the standards (and the tests) have been produced, but these

do not take into account the bilingualism of Latinx students. There has also been a renewed emphasis on English language teaching, and on English Structured Immersion programmes. Bilingual education programmes have increasingly disappeared. But despite the greater emphasis on the teaching of English only according to new standards, Latinx students are just falling more and more behind.

Many states have tried to offer some respite to emergent bilinguals by producing ways in which teachers can help their bilingual students meet the standards, specifically for those they classify as “English language learners”. This is the case of New York State (NYS) which has always had a more progressive view of emergent bilinguals than many other states. In fact, NYS drew up and published guidelines for what emergent bilinguals were expected to know and do first in 2004, way before the common core was released. Although already pointing to the interest in “standards”, this pre-CCSS document provides schools and teachers with a lot more flexibility about how to teach and evaluate students’ performances than after the CCSS were released and adopted.

Once the CCSS were adopted, NYS educational authorities were clear that unless the expectations for meeting common standards were calibrated differently, emergent bilinguals would be left out. On the one hand, it had to be decided what emergent bilingual students who had different levels of English proficiency were realistically expected to do in order to meet a standard. Second, it was felt that teachers needed guidance to scaffold instruction for the different levels of English development. NYS initiated a “Bilingual Common Core Initiative”. The result of what was a good-faith attempt to provide more realistic targets for emergent bilinguals in English and guidance for their teachers was the 2014 document entitled “The New Language Arts Progressions”, accompanied by “Home Language Arts Progressions”.<sup>6</sup>

A glotopolítica lens on the post-CCSS document reveals that despite efforts to make the standards flexible enough to accommodate emergent bilinguals, this was not sufficient to disrupt what was at the foundation of the CCSS – the fact that some students were going to meet standards and Latinx bilingual students were not. As segregation of students into ability and racial tracking became socially incompatible in the US, a new “standards” instrument would sort out students into differential instructional tracks that were said to meet their instructional needs. In effect, educational policies and documents released post-CCSS remained dedicated to the linguistic and cultural assimilation of language minoritized students, while creating what were seen as objective measures of their academic failure. These efforts, however, were now hidden, and English, even as a “second language”, is not named.

It is the purpose of our glotopolítica analysis to uncover the semiotic processes that have been used following the creation of the CCSS to perpetuate the continued failure of Latinx bilingual students – erasure, iconization, and fractal

recursivity (Irvine and Gal, 2000). Through a glotopolítica analysis, we ask ourselves three questions related to these three semiotic processes:

- What has been progressively *erased*?
- How have emergent bilinguals been progressively *iconized*, and what does this achieve?
- How are the ideologies of language in the standards for students who speak English only *reproduced* for emergent bilinguals post-CCSS?

A glotopolítica analysis of the pre- and post-CCSS documents reveals the shifting ideologies that reflect the greater commodification of language and bilingualism in a neoliberal global economy.

### **The glotopolítica of standards for emergent bilinguals**

Our glotopolítica lens of analysis revealed three ways in which the semiotic processes that shift the representation of Latinx students as failures have been carried out post-CCSS: (1) an increased level of structural complexity, erasing their complex bilingualism; (2) commonizing language and culture, hiding its assimilationist stance; and (3) omission of enjoyment and engagement concealing the sociopolitical dominance intent of English and English education. Needless to say, the standards do not mention Latinx students in particular, but given their greater number in comparison with other ethnolinguistic groups, and their historical importance, the standards say a lot about how Latinx emergent bilinguals are viewed and the efforts to teach them English.

#### *Increased structural complexity, erasing Latinx complex bilingualism*

The pre-CCSS document published by the New York State Education Department established five “benchmarks”<sup>7</sup> for “English language learners” for elementary grades 2 to 4. They were:

Students will listen, speak, read, and write in English for:

- 1 information and understanding
- 2 literary response, enjoyment and expression
- 3 critical analysis and evaluation
- 4 classroom and social interaction

and students will demonstrate:

- 5 cross-cultural knowledge and understanding.

Each of these benchmarks then had performance indicators which were accompanied by sample classroom tasks divided by three English proficiency levels: Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced. It is to be noted that the pre-CCSS

standards were not specified by grades, but encompassed grades in clusters; for example, for the elementary grades it was second to fourth grade. Although these benchmarks were meant to be the standards that “English language learners” were expected to meet, they were drawn up by educators who had much experience of what these particular students could do. Thus, the benchmarks were developed from the experience of emergent bilingual students, and of Latinx students.

In contrast, post-CCSS, the standards adopted by New York State for the students labelled English language learners had to reflect those of the externally imposed CCSS. Despite the best efforts of the committee of bilingual educators who worked on the document, the students (and their teachers) had to bend and stretch to meet a structure of standards that was imposed from outside by educators who had no experience with Latinx bilingual students.

The post-CCSS standards for emergent bilinguals reflect the structural complexity of the Common Core. First of all, they are grade specific. Second, whereas pre-CCSS, reading, writing, listening, and speaking benchmarks were not differentiated, now they are. Third, each of the four strands now has between 6 and 10 standards, as identified below, resulting in 36 standards (rather than just 5):

- 1 Reading for Information, 10 standards
- 2 Reading for Literature, 10 standards
- 3 Speaking and Listening, 6 standards
- 4 Writing, 10 standards

And although pre-CCSS three English proficiency levels were identified, now there are five: Entering (Beginner), Emerging (Low Intermediate), Transitioning (High Intermediate), Expanding (Advanced), and Commanding (Proficient).

The increased structural complexity of the post-CCSS makes it unlikely that teachers will be able to address all these differences. Latinx students are extremely diverse and so are their language practices; and, as we have said, in every classroom we find Latinx students along all points of the bilingual continuum. Furthermore, depending on the specific tasks, students can use language differently.

The post-CCSS standards omit the network of social relationships necessary for language development. Learning occurs in collaboration with others, as students engage in tasks where everyone brings in different experiences, content and language; thus, it is not always possible or desirable for teachers to design tasks and activities that focus on a specific level of English language development or expect students to meet standards narrowly defined by proficiency level.

Clearly, the ways in which language proficiency is treated post-CCSS may make it possible to have greater calibration of levels of English proficiency for individual students. But this serves test makers and data gatherers for accountability systems best, and not the students themselves or their language development, which relies, in great measure, on their collaborative engagement as

speakers and listeners. In order to measure language development, the tasks that emergent bilinguals are expected to do post-CCSS have become so narrowly defined that it does not give Latinx emergent bilingual students the opportunity to take linguistic risks, perhaps the greatest catalyst for language development.

The CCSS were constructed with a completely monolingual mindset, with English only in mind. In this regard, the NYS document is an important advance, for the students' "home language" is acknowledged and used. And yet, the use of the child's home language is only recommended for students at the Entering and Emerging levels. In the Transitioning stage, the expectation is that these students, who have been labelled "English language learners" through the use of an assessment, would use the home language only occasionally. By the time the students are deemed to be at the Expanding and Commanding stages, only English is to be used. Acknowledging the value of students' home language in performing tasks in English is important. But it does not acknowledge bilingual students' translanguaging, the fact that bilingual students' entire unitary language repertoire is always available, and can be leveraged to learn and deeply perform any language task all the time (García *et al.*, 2017). The newer understandings about bilingualism as dynamic (García, 2009a) and of translanguaging as the unitary language repertoire of bilinguals (García and Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2017; Otheguy *et al.*, 2015, 2018) is simply absent.

The home language is permitted as an "appropriate support" only at the beginning levels, when the tasks to be completed are relatively easy and could probably be completed in English only. For example, whereas a reading-centred activity for Entering level reads: "Organize *pretaught words and phrases* on a chart [...] *in the new and/or home language*", at the Commanding level it reads: "Organize *information on a self-created* chart, *independently*, to identify details and draw inferences [...] *in the new language*". The home language of Latinx students, Spanish, is only treated as a basic scaffold for very beginning students. As emergent bilingual students move along the bilingual continuum, Spanish is no longer accepted as a legitimate language to meet the standard. Spanish is only accepted as a "scaffold" at the beginning levels, and part of the "progression" is precisely to perform in English only, as a monolingual being.

We know that unless bilingual students are encouraged to leverage their entire language repertoire, they will not be able to meet standards of language proficiency even if they are in English only. That is, leveraging what bilingual students know how to say, read, and write using their entire language repertoire would result in greater gains in using *language*, and thus would result in more confidence appropriating new features of any named language, English or Spanish included, as part of their repertoire. But to do so, teachers must learn to leverage bilingual students' translanguaging not simply as a scaffold but as a transformative political act that disrupts the language hierarchies and the power differential between the English of those considered "native speakers" and bilingual Latinx students.

In summary, the reliance on the CCSS adds structural complexity while erasing the terms of the complexity. On the one hand, there seems to be more complexity superficially. On the other hand, however, this greater structural complexity is precisely the instrument through which the complexity of language practices of emergent bilinguals is erased. Each language is separated, erasing the dynamic bilingualism and translanguaging of bilingual students. Each language mode – listening and speaking, reading, writing – is separated, erasing the role of the listening subject in speaking, and of reading in writing, etc. Finally, each individual student is separated into narrow proficiency levels, erasing the more dynamic bilingual development that is afforded in classrooms. But these are not the only erasures that have taken place post-CCSS.

### *Communizing language and culture, hiding assimilation*

Pre-CCSS, the document proposing benchmarks for emergent bilingual students explicitly mentioned the importance of learning “American English and American culture”. The linguistic and cultural assimilation purpose of education was not hidden. It was visible for all to see. And yet, pre-CCSS there was also attention to developing “cross-cultural knowledge and understanding”. Not only is American culture emphasized but other languages and cultures were also legitimized, including those of the students. For example, the benchmarks and the activities proposed emphasize the reading and discussion of “myths, folktales, and literature from the United States and *international* regions and cultures, *including the students’ own*”, and the “appreciation of some commonalities and distinctions *cross cultures and groups (differentiated by gender, ability, generations, etc.) including the students’ own*” (NYS, 2004, p. 51, emphasis added). The sample tasks contained in the pre-CCSS document also made use of students’ home cultural practices. For example, Task 4 for Standard 1 for Advanced students reads: “Students bring in other recipes (e.g. *foods from their native countries*)” (p. 36); and Task 1 for Standard 5 for Advanced students reads: “Students select one American holiday and a *corresponding holiday from their country*” (p. 51, emphasis added). Although these standards construct language and culture (both “American” and those of students) as monolithic wholes, cultural differences are acknowledged. Differences that go beyond English proficiency, such as gender, generation in the United States, ability, social class, former education, are also considered. Whereas language and culture are constructed as autonomous realities in the pre-CCSS document, students are treated as not only individuals who perform their language and cultural identities but as also performing their gendered, classed and immigration-generation identities that render them different, even if they fall within the same “American English” proficiency level. The complexity of the students’ identities is never reduced to just an English language proficiency level.

Post-CCSS, all students are expected to meet the same standard, and thus, learners’ differences are not considered, except for the one that has to do with English language proficiency. Cultural knowledge or even literary knowledge of

other bodies of literature is only briefly mentioned. The post-CCSS document never refers to “American English” or to the students’ language and culture, except in standard 11 for reading and literature, which, following the CCSS, states: “interpret texts from a variety of genres and a wide spectrum of American and *world cultures*” (emphasis added). The cultures, other than the American, are presented as belonging to “the world”, not to the “students’ own” as in the pre-CCSS document.

The English language in instruction of emergent bilinguals has been neutralized, separating it from its historical role in conquering, colonizing, and controlling a Latinx population. No longer is it about “American English” but about “standard English grammar”, a much more neutral and apolitical construction. The standards in the CCSS are said to be about commanding the conventions of “standard English” in grammar and usage when speaking, and of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. The Language Strand standards also refer to the knowledge of language use and conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening; and the use of vocabulary, including “appropriate general academic and domain-specific words”.<sup>8</sup> English is now figured as “appropriate” and part of “general academic” language, a language that has standards and conventions that must be followed, not because of the control that it exerts over this population but because of its “appropriateness” (for a critique on appropriateness, see Flores and Rosa, 2015).

Emergent bilinguals are seen as undifferentiated students who progress from one English proficiency level to another, without consideration as to who they are as people with histories, without differentiating between their socio-educational experiences in the US or in their countries of origin, or of the ways in which they use language, independent of their English language proficiency. Through the process of interpellation (Althusser, 1971), the ideology post-CCSS constructs students as subjects defined only by their measurable position in an objective and extensive sequence, whose failure or success is exclusively built upon advancement in the levels’ succession. Language teaching is constructed as a mere techno-linguistic skill that does not engage with who the students are and does not acknowledge their home language and cultural practices. The linguistic and cultural assimilation purpose is hidden, but it is present. By erasing it explicitly and not mentioning it, it makes it easier to acquiesce to it, accepting the iconization of Spanish as a mark of Latinx students racialized as non-white and as poor students with low achievement. It also makes it possible to accept the fractal recursivity that makes the standards common to all, even though there are few commonalities among the many different groups in the United States.

*Omitting enjoyment and engagement, hiding the sociopolitical dominance of English*

Part of this emphasis on the technicalities of language teaching post-CCSS and the lack of engagement with students’ lived realities, beyond that of their

experience with the English language, results in the exclusion of enjoyment and pleasure in learning. Pre-CCSS, listening, speaking, reading, and writing were not solely academic tasks. Besides benchmarks to gauge the students' ability to obtain information, expand understanding, conduct critical analyses, and respond to literature, students were expected to speak, read, and write for "simple enjoyment", and for "personal and social expression". Pre-CCSS, the benchmarks not simply oriented students towards academic tasks but towards life in general and social life in particular.

In the post-CCSS context, enjoyment and emotions have been taken out of instruction and expectations. And the use of a "standard academic language" is restricted to tasks one performs in schools, not those performed at home or in the students' community context. Little attention is paid to the social context of learning.

This difference is most striking in considering the sample tasks proposed for teachers to carry out with students. Pre-CCSS, for students said to be at the Beginning level, some of the tasks suggested were: take a neighbourhood walk, create an illustrated book, pantomime the action, act out stories verbally and nonverbally, use and create maps, go on a treasure hunt, find and cut out pictures, draw pictures, examine pictures, illustrate a book or write captions, watch children's theatre, present a favourite toy, play a game. And although the sample tasks for students deemed to have an advanced level of proficiency were more complex, they also included: drawing and writing stories, creating brochures, having a dialogue journal, having reading buddies, writing a play, videotaping a rehearsal, creating a fable or legend, writing a review of a Disney film, publicizing a class event, bringing in objects of personal significance, writing a letter to a favourite author, reading news and magazine articles.

In contrast to these tasks oriented towards using language authentically and conjoined with multimodal support (images, gestures/acts), the tasks proposed post-CCSS seem to be focused solely on what is perceived to be "academic language". For example, for fourth-grade students at the beginner level, the task is rendered as: "organize pretaught words and phrases." What varies is the many forms and graphic organizers that this organization can take – a main-idea-and-details graphic organizer, a fishbone graphic organizer, a spider map graphic organizer, in-my-own graphic organizer, a main-point/supporting-evidence graphic organizer, a T-chart, a Text says/My inference T-chart, a discussion-reflection guide, a cloze paragraph, a main-idea-and-details web, a semantic web, a writing organizer web, a word map, a story map, a fishbone map, a story/drama, a flow chart to sequence events, etc. Gone seems to be the joy of doing language in other than these narrow academic tasks, and within these constrained structures. This, of course, refers to the explicit intent in the CCSS that what is important is to measure progress towards meeting the standards. These tasks can provide a single measure much more easily than the tasks that had been recommended pre-CCSS. The question for us is whether these are the appropriate affordances and opportunities to give emergent bilinguals to use language, or if they would be better served by engaging them in using

language creatively and critically, despite the fact that this is often an “immeasurable” experience.

The progression of tasks from one level to another post-CCSS is rendered as follows:

- Entering*: Organize pretaught words and phrases
- Emerging*: Organize preidentified words and phrases
- Transitioning*: Organize phrases and sentences
- Expanding*: Organize sentences
- Commanding*: Organize information

What progresses is the length of the text that has to be organized – from words and phrases, to phrases and sentences, to information. There is no mention of giving students practice in using language for authentic tasks outside of school. The emphasis is on scaffolding the complexity of the English language for emergent bilinguals. And yet, in focusing on scaffolding, students are not given opportunities to use new linguistic features creatively or critically.

Pre-CCSS, the performance indicators to meet the benchmarks included collaboration with other peers, a self-reflection task for individual students, as well as different learning strategies at all times. Post-CCSS, teachers were guided to perform different tasks depending on students’ different levels of proficiency. For example, at the Entering level, it is suggested that the tasks be performed in partnership and/or teacher-led small groups; that is, the teachers are guided to exert more control at this level. At the Emerging level, partnerships and/or small groups are recommended. Finally, from the Transitioning level on, partnership, small group, and/or whole-class instruction are encouraged. Post-CCSS there is a more technocratic view not only of language development but also of how to teach emergent bilinguals.

### **The glotopolítica of the standards: Conclusion**

A glotopolítica analysis of documents attempts to reverse the Western logic of texts, opening up cracks in the arguments that allow us to make visible epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2014). With our glotopolítica lens we have uncovered that the epistemology of the CCSS does not question the separation of students, of performance indicators, of languages, and of tasks so as to honour the complexity of the bilingual continua in which Latinx students are placed and the sociohistorical conditions which they have endured. It also does not provide for the use of Spanish as anything but a transitional scaffold, robbing it of its dynamic relationship with English in the US, and of the transformative sociopolitical potential of the translanguaging of the Latinx population.

The notion of “American English” and “American culture” has been erased post-CCSS. In fact, English is not even mentioned, and instead there is reference only to the “new language”. For most Latinx students who are classified as

“English language learners” English is not new, for many have been born in the United States. By not naming English or American culture, educators are made to think that this is not about the imposition of English with an assimilation goal, but about truly helping students succeed in meeting academic standards. The power and the status of English as an imperial and global powerful language is diminished, hidden, erased. In this way, the sorting of students into categories – those who have met the standards and those who have not – is not questioned as unfair to Latinx bilingual students, leaving the accomplishment of meeting the standards in the bodies and tongues of white middle-class monolingual students. The *erasure* of English as the culprit in the educational failure of bilingual students is complete.

Pre-CCSS bilingual students were seen as holders of another language and culture, and as speakers of a “second” language. Post-CCSS, bilingual students are *iconized* as “foreign”, since the language is now not even “second” but “new”. But as we said before, most Latinx students, and most students classified as “English language learners”, are born in the US and are citizens, and many are simultaneous bilinguals.

Finally, the CCSS engages in the semiotic process of *fractal recursivity*. The same logic of language, standards, and education is applied to minoritized emergent bilingual students as to white privileged monolingual students. Yes, teachers are asked to scaffold instruction, and the linguistic demands of texts are addressed, but the process that bilingual students go through, their translanguaging, is not acknowledged. Their lived experiences and their racialization are not given any weight. The structural inequalities of the institutions they attend are dismissed. The expectations of monolingual performances are unchanged at the end, performances in which bilingual students will be expected to use English in exactly the same ways as a monolingual, a position that is impossible for a minoritized bilingual person to hold.

Latinx students have not been well served by the CCSS. For states to be able to provide bilingual minoritized students with the learning opportunities to succeed, it would behoove them not only to rewrite the standards, as NYS did in 2017 in what is now called the Next Generation Learning Standards. It would be important for state education officers to examine their ideologies about language, bilingualism, and learning in ways that centre the experiences and ways of using language of bilingual students, and especially of the many Latinx students in US classrooms today.

The CCSS illustrate the tension between the global economy’s demands for a unified education system and the increased diversity of the US student body because of this same globalization (García and Flores, 2014). A standards epistemology applied to an increasingly diverse student population continues to have harmful consequences and perpetuate inequality.

Institutional structures that oppress cannot be easily changed or “renovated”. Monolingual education structures and monolingual-based standards and assessments have been instruments of oppression of the Latinx population for a very long time. Changing some of the content and the ways in which Latinx students

operate within monolingual educational structures just will not do. Bilingual Latinx students have to be provided with *new flexible bilingual structures* that support not only their epistemologies, understandings, and ways of using language, their translanguaging, but also their opportunities to question their histories of oppression. This would be the only way to get Latinx students to meet not only education standards but also social success as equal US bilingual peoples.

## Notes

- 1 Latinx is the gender-neutral term used for US populations with cultural links to Latin America.
- 2 We use here the term in Spanish to emphasize the Latin American roots of this work which has been developed in Spanish.
- 3 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was a landmark 1954 Supreme Court case in which the Supreme Court declared that school segregation which separated black and white students in public schools was unconstitutional.
- 4 In this document, we frequently use the term “emergent bilingual” to refer to those students who educational authorities call “English language learners”. For more on the use of this term, see García and Kleifgen, 2018.
- 5 [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) (accessed 15 December 2018).
- 6 [www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-bilingual-common-core-initiative](http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-bilingual-common-core-initiative) (accessed 15 December 2018).
- 7 Even though the 2004 document called these “standards”, we use here the word “benchmarks” to differentiate these from the more structured standards that followed the CCSS.
- 8 [www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/4/6/](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/4/6/) (accessed 15 December 2018).

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