

Table 3.1. Types of English Language Learners

Types of ELLS	Distinctions
Simultaneous bilinguals	<p>Were born in the United States but have grown up in households where a language other than English is spoken.</p> <p>Live in communities of speakers who primarily communicate in their L1 or go back and forth between languages.</p> <p>Have grown up being exposed to two languages simultaneously.</p> <p>May have not developed academic literacy in either L1 or L2.</p> <p>Often engage in extensive code-switching, thus making use of both linguistic systems to communicate.</p> <p>Have acquired oral proficiency in a language other than English first but may not have learned to read or write in that language.</p>
Long-term ELLs	<p>Have already spent more than 5 years in an English-speaking school.</p> <p>Have literacy skills that are below grade level.</p> <p>Have had some English as a Second Language classes or bilingual support.</p> <p>Require substantial and ongoing language and literacy support.</p>

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Table 3.1. *(continued)*

Types of ELLS	Distinctions
Newcomers with adequate formal schooling ^a	<p>Have been in the country for fewer than 5 years.</p> <p>Have had an adequate degree of schooling in their native country.</p> <p>Perform in reading and writing at grade level.</p> <p>Find it relatively easy to catch up with their native-English-speaking peers.</p> <p>Have difficulty with standardized tests.</p> <p>Have parents who are educated speakers of their L1.</p> <p>Developed a strong foundation in their L1.</p> <p>Demonstrate the potential to make fast progress in English.</p> <p>Have found it easy to acquire a second or third language.</p>
Newcomers with limited formal schooling	<p>Have recently arrived in an English-speaking school (fewer than 5 years).</p> <p>Have experienced interrupted schooling.</p> <p>Have limited native-language and literacy skills.</p> <p>Perform poorly on achievement tasks.</p> <p>May not have had previous schooling.</p> <p>May experience feelings of loss of emotional and social networks.</p> <p>Have parents who have low literacy levels.</p> <p>Could have difficulty learning English.</p>

Note. L1 = native or first language; L2 = second or additional language; ELL = English language learner.

^aSee Freeman & Freeman, 2002.

Currently the climate in many U.S. schools is such that language differences are problems that schools must “fix” and that they are the cause of much of the underachievement (Escamilla, 2000). False assumptions about bilingualism and language differences influence the instructional and assessment decisions we make for our ELLs. In a recent study of school-based RTI teams (Eppolito, 2011), we observed many conversations around decision making for ELLs, including intervention support and possible special education referrals.

Many observations were conducted in elementary schools offering bilingual programs. The school teams had specialists with expertise in second language acquisition and extensive knowledge about the students' backgrounds, families, and previous educational experiences. Therefore it was surprising for us to hear so many negative comments about language (see Table 3.2). So many educators alluded to students' lack of English proficiency as the reason for continued academic failure. We noticed that it was not central to just one team member, but multiple members of the team used this type of deficit language. What is problematic about these statements? Consider the attitude toward emerging bilingualism that they reflect; how might such attitudes affect decisions about students' needs? Failing to address and confront this deficit paradigm of bilingualism places ELLs at a continuing disadvantage, misdirects our efforts, and takes away the opportunity for our students to become bilingual and biliterate.

Table 3.2. Statements Reflecting a Deficit View of Bilingualism

Educator	Comment
Third-grade teacher	She really has a language problem, don't you think? A second language problem? I see her trying but a lot of it is her language; she can't say some of the words we are reading because of the language problem.
ESL teacher	His mom only speaks Spanish. His dad speaks English very well. He's probably conversing most of the time in Spanish because I bet dad lapses into Spanish at home because it's the common language.
Second-grade teacher	It's a language issue because Mom doesn't speak any English at all...I see her lapsing, she'll be talking and then all of the sudden she is talking in Spanish.
First-grade teacher	She's second language. She went back and forth, Spanish-English, so language is a problem. Mom supports her but she speaks all Spanish.
Principal	That kid is lower than a lot of your other kids that are heavily impacted with language.

Note. Adapted with permission from A. Eppolito, *The Response to Intervention Decision-Making Process for English Language Learners: Three Elementary School Case Studies* (Doctoral Dissertation, 2011).