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Linguistic Hurdles Faced by English L2 Speakers Pursuing U.S. Higher Education: What the Research Tells Us and Pathways Forward

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Abstract

Decades of extant research has suggested English learners (ELs or English L2 students) and their support networks do not access United States (U.S.) higher education at the same level as their English-fluent (or English L1 peers). Similarly, decades of research have suggested U.S. higher education ought to adopt a polylingual approach to postsecondary access, yet little has changed since the work began in the early 1980s. This critical review synthesizes this work, includes recent work, and criticizes a stubborn U.S. higher education system for failing to embrace linguistic minorities and improve access to the U.S. higher education system for minoritized language populations. Implications for research, practice, and equity are addressed.

Keywords: English L2 students, English language learners, college access, university, higher education

Linguistic Hurdles Faced by English L1 Spanish Speakers Pursuing U.S. Higher Education: What the Research Tells Us and Pathways Forward

Of the most pressing issues facing the United States (U.S.) higher education system today, how minoritized students access higher education and whether they experience equity within higher education are two topics of great importance. For decades, higher education researchers have found students of color (Quaye & Harper, 2015; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, 2005), members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Rankin, 2006; Renn, 2010), immigrants and refugees (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; McBrien, 2005), students with disabilities (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Getzel & Thoma, 2008), and low-income students (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Ward, 2006) do not access higher education, nor are provided equitable opportunity in higher education, at the same level as their peers.

A related body of research has attempted to explain postsecondary access and equity gaps by examining a salient identity for every prospective postsecondary student in the United States: their linguistic identity, and more specifically, their first spoken language in the home. According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2018), over 230 million people living in the U.S. speak English in the home, rendering English the language majority of the United States by a wide margin. However, as of 2017, over 40 million people living in the U.S. spoke Spanish as their first language in the home, followed by Chinese speakers at over 3 million and five other languages with over 1 million speakers. The results of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2018) suggest, at any given time in the United States, over 50 million people are speaking a language other than English in the home, representing hundreds of thousands of prospective postsecondary students.

As a result, researchers have investigated the role of language in postsecondary access and equity in U.S. higher education. This research has suggested English learners (ELs or English L2 students) have not accessed U.S. higher education at the same level as their English-fluent (English L1) peers (Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Cook, Pérusse, & Rojas, 2012; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Flores & Drake, 2014; González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Harklau, 1998; Kanno, 2018; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Lee, 2012; Oropeza, Varghese, & Kanno, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2009; Sanchez, 2017).

This U.S. higher education access and equity gap has not been owed to dwindling enrollment of English L2 students in U.S. public schools, as the number of English L2 students in U.S. public schools has grown considerably over recent decades. In Fall 2015, 4.8 million or 9.5% of all K-12 public school

students were English L2 compared to 3.8 million or 8.1% in 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Despite this growing population, English L2 student access to U.S. higher education has remained elusive, as only 2.4% of the student population at 625 nationally-ranked colleges and universities per *U.S. News & World Report* participated in postsecondary EL/ESL/English L2 programming in 2016, even though English L2 students comprised nearly 10% of the K-12 public school population (Friedman, 2017). Furthermore, on average, less than 2% of all English L2 students in the U.S. have taken postsecondary entrance exams since 2000, such as the SAT or ACT (Sanchez, 2017), compared to over 60% U.S. high school graduates since 2000 (Adams, 2017).

In the largest study of English L2 student access to and achievement in U.S. higher education to date, Kanno and Cromley (2013) used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 to articulate differences in access and achievement between English L1 and English L2 students. The authors explained about 20% of English L2 students were high school dropouts, rendering it nearly impossible to pursue a postsecondary education, whereas only 6% of English L1 students dropped out of high school. Ultimately, Kanno and Cromley (2013) found 12.5% of English L2 students earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 33% of English L1 students who earned a bachelor's degree from the same NELS 1988 cohort.

Of English L2 students who do apply to and enroll in U.S. institutions of higher education, these students have not accessed U.S. federal financial aid at the same level as their English L1 peers (Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2001; De La Rosa, 2006; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Kohler & Lazarín, 2007; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Perna, 2006; Post, 1990; Santiago & Cunningham, 2005; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). In addition, undocumented students—many whom are English L2—are not eligible for federal financial aid per Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, posing further barriers to higher education for these students (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011; Drachman, 2006; Flores, 2010; Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, & Wilkerson, 2010; Olivérez, Chavez, Soriano, & Tierney, 2006; Perez, 2010).

Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have made various attempts to assuage the postsecondary access gap between English L1 and English L2 students in the U.S. These attempts have included educating high school counselors to the needs of English L2 students pursuing higher education (Cook et al., 2012; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Perez, 2010), modifying language policies to better serve English L2 students (Kanno & Varghese, 2010), providing the parents of English L2 students with postsecondary access materials and information (Auerbach, 2004; Doran & Taylor, 2020; González et al., 2003; Pérez Huber, 2009; Taylor, 2020), and facilitating equitable access for English L2 students to pursue advanced placement courses in high school to prepare these

students for college entrance exams and rigorous postsecondary curricula (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Despite these efforts, the U.S. higher education gap between English L1 and English L2 students has persisted (Kanno, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Sanchez, 2017).

Pertinent to language, researchers have examined the role of English fluency in English L2 students' inequitable access to and achievement in U.S. higher education. Multiple longitudinal studies have found English L2 students and their parents often do not have enough information or understanding about the postsecondary processes of applying for admission (Auerbach, 2004; Collatos et al., 2004; Pérez Huber, 2009; Tornatzky et al., 2002) and financial aid (Auerbach, 2004, Collatos et al., 2004; De La Rosa, 2006; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011), resulting in English L2 students ultimately forgoing a postsecondary education. Even among gifted English L2 students, Kanno's (2018) case study of two high-performing English L2 students found these students often cited a lack of specific postsecondary knowledge and confidence in their ability to speak English as reasons to avoid a four-year institution and enroll in community college. However—and only recently—has educational research addressed the intersection of language and technology as a topic of study pertinent to U.S. higher education access for English L2 students.

Since its inception in 1991, the Internet has become a widely-accessed and critical source of pre-postsecondary enrollment information for prospective undergraduate and graduate students in the United States (Burdett, 2013; Daun-Barnett & Das, 2013; Goff, Patino, & Jackson, 2004; Hartman, 1997; Huang & Bilal, 2017; Jones, 2008; Taylor, 2019; Venegas, 2006, 2007). Specific to linguistic hurdles faced by English L2 students on their path to postsecondary education, Taylor's (2018a, 2018b) studies analyzed the readability and translation of domestic and international admissions materials posted on institutional .edu websites. From a random sample of 325 four-year U.S. institutions, Taylor (2018a) first found only 4.9% of domestic undergraduate admissions materials had been translated into Spanish, with the average readability of the materials being written above the 13th-grade English comprehension level. Regarding admissions materials for English L2 international students, Taylor (2018b) also learned only 1% of a random sample of 335 four-year U.S. institutions provided a machine language translator on their institutional website, with 91% of institutions providing English-only content for prospective international undergraduates. Additionally, international undergraduate admissions materials were written near the 14th-grade English comprehension level.

Ultimately, educational researchers must continue to investigate why English L2 Spanish-speaking students do not access U.S. higher education at the same level as their English L1 peers. Therefore, this literature review will explain

how secondary schools, postsecondary schools, and non-educational entities have attempted to close English L2 postsecondary access gaps, and what work still needs to be done to ensure that English L2 Spanish-speaking students can enjoy the postsecondary educational benefits that their English L1 peers have enjoyed for generations.

Linguistic Hurdles to Access of U.S. Higher Education for English L2 Students

Astin (1982) was one of the first researchers to report English L2 student access gaps in U.S. higher education. Of his critical findings, Astin found that Chicanos (native Spanish speakers) and American Indians applied to and enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education at far lower rates than White, English L1, English-fluent peers. Astin explored language barriers to higher education access for English L2 students, reporting many Chicano and American Indian students required intensive bilingual secondary programming to prepare themselves for an English-focused U.S. higher education system, a finding later echoed by multiple researchers (Baker & Rossell, 1987; Milk, 1990; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984; Tienda & Neidert, 1984). Ultimately, Astin suggested secondary schools ought to provide more bilingual programming opportunities for English L2 students. Moreover, Astin urged the parents and support networks of English L2 students to take a greater role and responsibility during the postsecondary exploration process. Astin also asserted the postsecondary exploration process should be a communicative, shared journey between secondary schools, English L2 students, and parents of English L2 students in order for all educational stakeholders to learn more about the U.S. postsecondary system and share that knowledge of the system with families, friends, and support networks.

Another early analysis in the field of English L2 student access to U.S. higher education was Gándara's (1986) study of English L2 Spanish-speaking students in California secondary schools and these students' access to U.S. higher education. For Gándara, a defining characteristic of Hispanic students in California was their linguistic identity and the language spoken in the student's home. Of the early 1980s, Gándara (1986) wrote, "In California, one in four Hispanic school children speaks Spanish at home. Approximately 370,000 of these children are limited English speakers and require some language assistance in the classroom... Most struggle to learn reading, writing, and math in a language that they do not fully understand" (p. 263). To maintain a rich, cultural heritage of Spanish-speaking families but to also assuage postsecondary access gaps faced by English L2 Spanish-speaking students, Gándara asserted that English L2 Spanish-speaking students must close achievement gaps in English reading, writing, and math. Gándara (1986) reasoned:

Everyone agrees that Chicanos must master English in order to be successful, but the kind of English that promotes high scores on the SAT is not learned in ESL classes; it is learned in English- composition and literature class... Unless we wake up to this fact, most limited-English-speaking Chicanos will continue to fall behind their classmates and drop out of school in large numbers. (p. 266)

Gándara (1986) also urged “there must be a shared responsibility for getting minority students into higher education between secondary schools and institutions of higher education” and criticized “tiered systems of higher education” as being fragmented “into separate and isolated segments” which “serve certain bureaucratic ends, and makes accountability very difficult, but it does not meet the needs of students” (p. 267). These findings echoed of many Astin’s (1982) in his earlier study, reinforcing the importance of English L2 parental involvement during the English L2 students’ postsecondary exploration process, as well as the need for institutions of education—at both secondary and postsecondary levels—to communicate and share postsecondary information with interested educational stakeholders.

Akin to Astin (1982) and Gándara (1986), Post (1990) also analyzed the postsecondary perceptions and decisions of English L2 Spanish-speaking students in California. Using an ordinary least squares logistic regression approach to understand postsecondary perceptions and planning, Post found notable differences between English L1 English fluent families and English L2 native Spanish-speaking families. Post (1990) learned English L1 students and their families were better informed about tuition costs at local community and four-year colleges and were more likely to have concrete plans for higher education than English L2 Spanish speakers and their Spanish-speaking families. These English L1 students and families started the postsecondary exploration process earlier in the English L1 student’s secondary education career, and English L1 parents better understood how their child could afford a postsecondary education by engaging with student loan and scholarship resources.

Given these findings, Post (1990) postulated that English L1, English-fluent students were more likely to have parents with postsecondary credentials, resulting in these students having more postsecondary knowledge than their English L2, Spanish-speaking peers. However, Post also pointed to language barriers as a potential reason for the differences between groups: “When there are variations in students’ perceptions because of differential access to information, then we can postulate that these variations will be closely related to ethnicity and language” (Post, 1990, p. 176). Since Astin’s (1982), Gándara’s (1986), and Post’s (1990) foundational work, higher education researchers have more closely investigated the role of bilingual education, parental knowledge of postsecondary information, and the phenomenon of chain migration into higher education as

contributing factors promoting English L2 student access to U.S. higher education.

Bilingual Education

The roots of bilingual education in the United States were planted largely due to shifting population demographics and not strictly a method of promoting higher learning for English-language learners (Nieto, 2009). Shortly after a wave of Cuban and Mexican immigration in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Title VII's Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968 was the U.S. Federal Government's first legislative acknowledgement of the need for bilingual education in U.S. public schools. Since the signing of the BEA by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the U.S. Federal Government has amended the BEA four times (1974, 1978, 1984, 1988), reauthorized the BEA once (1994), and officially renamed the BEA as Title III's English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (2001) upon the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001). In 2015, President Barack Obama reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and replaced NCLB (2001) with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which also included federal subsidies to support bilingual education programming in public elementary and secondary schools.

Despite the long and storied legislative history of bilingual education in the United States, higher education researchers have consistently criticized federal bilingual education policies for failing to address issues relevant to English L2 access to U.S. higher education. These issues include a lack of effective strategies for recruiting high-quality bilingual teachers to prepare English L2 students for a rigorous postsecondary curriculum (Katz, 2004; Téllez & Waxman, 2006), an inequitable emphasis on English-language standardized testing resulting in English L2 student dropout and uncompetitive postsecondary applications (Menken, 2010; Palmer & Rangel, 2010), a stigmatization of being bilingual and belonging to a bilingual home promoting low self-esteem among English L2 students (Garcia, 2005; Hinton, 2016; Katz, 2004), and a goal for English L2 students to attain English language proficiency instead of true bilingualism, stripping these students of their linguistic heritage and cultural diversity (Gándara & Baca, 2008; Hinton, 2016; Katz, 2004). Beyond problematic bilingual education policies, higher education researchers have investigated the role of parents and support networks—and what information these parties hold—when facilitating access to higher education for their English L2 student.

Parents, Families, and English L2 Access to Higher Education

A critical study in the field of English L2 student access to higher education is Ceja's (2001) examination of the college exploration process and institutional choice of first-generation-in-college Chicana students. Ceja found Spanish-speaking parents of these students often lacked information about the college choice process, including details about how to explore institutions, gather application materials, and apply for federal and institutional financial aid. Ceja reasoned Spanish-speaking parents of English L2 students encountered hurdles when accessing postsecondary-related content, as this content was made available primarily in English and offered primarily by English-speaking admissions counselors and representatives from U.S. institutions of higher education. In sum, Ceja asserted postsecondary institutions in the U.S. must embrace native Spanish speakers and provide more postsecondary access information in Spanish, making it easier for English L2 Spanish-speaking parents and their English L2 children/students of learn more about postsecondary requirements for admission and financial aid.

Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) built upon the work of Ceja (2001) and discovered similar phenomenon when exploring the postsecondary knowledge of English L2 parents guiding prospective postsecondary students. Tornatzky et al. (2002) asserted "language barriers were an extremely important factor impeding acquisition of college knowledge" (p. 1) of English L2 parents when assisting their child during the postsecondary exploration process. The authors defined English L2 parents' experiences with U.S. institutions of higher education as problematic, as institutions rarely provided bilingual admissions and financial aid materials and rarely staffed their admissions and financial aid staff with bilingual counselors. This finding ultimately led Tornatzky et al. (2002) to assert that English L2 parental "Interactions with the formal educational system [at both secondary and postsecondary levels] are more likely to be hampered by language difficulties" (p. 12), which in turn stifled English L2 students' ability to gather the necessary information to make informed postsecondary decisions.

Tornatzky et al. (2002) concluded by suggesting all U.S institutions of higher education partner with secondary school districts to "disseminate college knowledge to non-English speaking parents" (p. 23) and adopt specific linguistic interventions to increase English L2 parent access to postsecondary information. Encompassing the P-20 spectrum, these interventions included the need for secondary schools "to increase the number of counselors and teachers who are genuinely bilingual" and that "all hard-copy correspondence to parents from high schools should be routinely provided in both Spanish and English" (Tornatzky et al., 2002, p. 29). Specific to institutions of higher education, Tornatzky et al. (2002) suggested "College application materials and descriptive literature, whether hard copy or available on Web sites, should be routinely provided in both Spanish and English," and "All college knowledge informational events, college

nights, and open houses should be routinely staffed with bilingual Spanish speakers and translators” (p. 29).

Similarly, Tierney (2002) echoed many of these findings, asserting that secondary schools should staff bilingual counselors because “If there are no bilingual speakers on staff, then it is impossible for parents to become involved until they are proficient in English,” (p. 594). Moreover, Tierney (2002) argued that bilingual staffing and a translation of postsecondary materials would demonstrate an acknowledgement and value of non-English languages. Tierney reasoned that secondary school efforts to value non-English languages would lead to English L2 students and their families feeling valued and supported by the school, promoting more interaction between the school and the families it serves. Exemplary secondary schools should, for Tierney (2002), “...develop strategies that call on local languages and definitions of self and identity to enable parent/family interactions to occur with teachers, counselors, and administrators” (p. 600). However, Tierney (2002) argued secondary schools rarely practice these strategies, as, “Indeed, more often than not, parents and families are not included in college preparation programs in any manner” due to the school’s failing to value students’ and their families’ linguistic identity (p. 600). Tierney (2002) concluded by asserting that postsecondary preparation programs must be appropriately funded so secondary schools can hire a sufficient number of bilingual staff members and build connections with postsecondary institutions to promote postsecondary exploration and enrollment.

Building upon Ceja (2001), Tornatzky et al. (2002), and Tierney (2002), Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, and Perna’s (2008) case study of fifteen high schools from five states learned:

At schools with a high percentage of immigrant students and parents whose primary language is not English, schools make additional efforts to provide information in Spanish. A counselor at the California low-resource school stated that ‘everything that goes out is translated. So everything is in English and Spanish.’ (p. 574)

Despite some schools answering Tornatzky et al.’s (2002) call for the translation of pre-college materials in Rowan-Kenyon et al.’s (2008) study, other studies have found that translated postsecondary content is not often available for English L2 students and their support networks. Torrez (2004) surveyed 92 Latino parents of prospective college students in Southern California and learned many of these parents were native Spanish-speakers without English proficiency. These parents often “expressed an interest in obtaining information about college preparation in Spanish (instead of English), and in a short format that they could easily understand” (Torrez, 2004, p. 58). However, many Spanish-speaking parents felt secondary schools were not providing enough translated

postsecondary content or that the English version of the content was not easy to understand (Torrez, 2004).

Even though Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) and Torrez (2004) both analyzed California secondary schools in their studies, Torrez (2004) found Spanish-speaking parents were often not provided with translated postsecondary content, whereas Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) later learned Spanish-speaking parents were provided with translated postsecondary access content. However, unlike Torrez (2004), Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) examined the differences between low-income and high-income secondary schools, working to explain why translated postsecondary content may be available at some secondary schools but not others.

Ultimately, Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) found low-income Spanish-speaking parents and their children were often not provided with the necessary linguistic scaffolds at their low-income schools, resulting in a socioeconomic and linguistic stratification of information between high- and low-income schools serving English L2 populations. Beyond access to translated postsecondary materials, Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) asserted that the availability and quality of bilingual education varied between low- and high-income secondary schools, with high-income secondary schools providing higher quality bilingual education programming and better qualified Spanish speaking teachers than low-income secondary schools. For Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008), providing bilingual postsecondary access materials did not sufficiently enable English L2 students and their support networks to explore postsecondary options during high school. Here, Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) suggested high-quality bilingual programming, partnerships between secondary and postsecondary schools, and translated postsecondary materials should be available to all English L2 students regardless of the income level of their families or school districts.

Grodsky and Jones (2007) also explored the intersectionality of income and language as it related to English L2 parent access to and knowledge of postsecondary information. Similar to earlier studies (Ceja, 2001; Tornatzky et al., 2002; Tierney, 2002), Grodsky and Jones (2007) found lower-income Spanish-speaking parents may be further marginalized by the U.S. education system, given a lack of postsecondary support provided to low-income secondary schools and their Spanish-speaking educational stakeholders. Grodsky and Jones (2007) used 1999 National Household Education Survey (NHES) data and found Spanish-speaking parents were 92% less likely to accurately estimate tuition than English-speaking White parents, illustrating the linguistic and racial stratification of postsecondary information experienced by English L2 and English L1 families. These findings echoed earlier work by Ceja (2001) and Tornatzky et al. (2002), arguing English L2 parents do not possess the same level of postsecondary information as English L1 parents.

Secondary, Postsecondary, and Community Partnerships

To improve the volume and quantity of postsecondary information available to Spanish-speaking students and their support networks, Fann, McCafferty Jarsky, and McDonough (2009) conducted a series of four Spanish-language workshops for Spanish-speaking parents of prospective postsecondary students. The researchers acknowledged prior work and translated postsecondary information into Spanish in an effort to simplify the postsecondary application and financial aid processes. Fann et al. (2009) explained:

...a significant portion of the Spanish-language workshops was devoted to overcoming language barriers faced by nonnative [sic] English speakers as they navigate the universe of college-related information. Whenever possible during the workshops, parents were provided with resources in Spanish (with exceptions occurring only in the case of third-party documents that had not yet been translated) so that their fears of not being able to manage the college preparation and application process were allayed. For instance, during the discussion of financial aid, they were shown the FAFSA (free application for federal student aid) materials in Spanish and given an orientation to the Spanish Web site on the subject. (p. 383)

Here, Fann et al. (2009) elaborated upon extant research (Ceja, 2001; Tornatzky et al., 2008; Tierney, 2002), suggesting postsecondary information could be translated for a Spanish-speaking audience and connected with Spanish-language websites which Spanish-speaking parents could visit after the workshop was over. However, regarding translated postsecondary content, the researchers found exceptions occurred “in the case of third-party documents that had not yet been translated,” such as student loan information and postsecondary materials provided by non-profit organizations and public libraries (Fann et al., 2009, p. 383). As a result, Fann et al. (2009) urged that cooperation throughout the P-20 spectrum must extend beyond educational institutions to involve these “third-party” (p. 383) stakeholders, such as credit unions, public libraries, and community groups, to ensure wide translation of college-related information from English to Spanish. By extending partnerships beyond educational institutions, Fann et al. (2009) reasoned that low-income, Spanish-speaking families would have far greater access to postsecondary materials, given these families’ close ties to community groups, neighborhood organizations, and non-educational entities.

Studies by Núñez and Oliva (2009) and McClafferty, McDonough, and Núñez (2009) echoed the findings of Fann et al. (2009), suggesting colleges and universities ought to partner with K-12 schools and third-party stakeholders, as college and universities may be financially capable of such partnerships and could establish information networks between community organizations and educational

institutions. Núñez and Oliva (2009) argued that postsecondary institutions who are effective in promoting English L2 student access to U.S. higher education collaborate with multiple stakeholders at the local, state, and federal level to facilitate high-quality P-20 information networks which could “help inform stakeholders about student characteristics and the progress of these initiatives” (p. 331). McClafferty et al. (2009) also reasoned that such multifaceted collaborations between postsecondary institutions and other entities facilitates a multidirectional knowledge system. This knowledge system allows postsecondary institutions to constantly learn from and improve their postsecondary access programming through critical reflection, research connected to practice, and embracing diverse perspectives of external stakeholders, such as English L2 students and families.

However, given the early calls for translation of postsecondary information by Ceja (2001), Tierney (2002), Tornatzky et al. (2002), and Torrez (2004), the work of Núñez and Oliva (2009) and McClafferty et al. (2009) asserted that postsecondary and secondary institutions still did not collaborate effectively. Both Núñez and Oliva (2009) and McClafferty et al. (2009) reasoned that postsecondary information was not widely shared with Spanish-speaking students and their support networks because of antiquated, entrenched methods of communication, leading to isolation of secondary schools from postsecondary schools.

Given the ineffectiveness of secondary and postsecondary school collaboration, along with dearth of Spanish translations of postsecondary information available to Spanish-speaking parents and students, many English L2 students have needed to dedicate an extraordinary amount of effort to overcome linguistic barriers and enroll in postsecondary institutions. Researchers have investigated these English L2 students and their extraordinary efforts to access the U.S. higher education, positing that these English L2 students often perform the role of language broker, translating their postsecondary experiences for their Spanish-speaking families and friends (Pérez Huber, 2009; Weisskirch et al., 2011).

Language Brokering as a Last (Linguistic) Resort

Pérez Huber’s (2009) phenomenological study of ten undocumented Latina students used Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth to articulate how these students navigated a racist, predominantly-White institution of higher education in California. Pérez Huber (2009) found that multiple Latina students served as the translator of higher education knowledge for their family members and friends, as the dominant language of their institution of higher education was English.

Of one of the students in the study, Pérez Huber (2009) wrote: Natalia explained that one of her major responsibilities in her household was to translate for her family members, and in fact she continues to have this responsibility as a college student... Natalia has no doubt acquired a wide array of skills and abilities as a trilingual ‘language broker’ in her household. (pp. 716-717)

The student continued by explaining that her family members, as non-dominant language speakers, were “mistreated because they do not speak dominant languages,” forcing the student to strengthen her abilities to translate higher education-related material for her family members once she became a college student (p. 717). Here, a trilingual student able to speak English, Spanish, and Zapoteca was able to transcend the language boundaries enforced by educational institutions and perform Pérez Huber’s role of “language broker” (p. 716) to maintain ties with her family and work to liberate them from the constraints of the dominant, English-speaking language group. However, Pérez Huber (2009) lamented the position of these language minority students, none of whom had a parent with a postsecondary credential, and thus, experiential knowledge of the postsecondary education system in the United States.

Akin to the work of Pérez Huber (2009), Weisskirch et al.’s (2011) survey of 1,222 university students from 14 different institutions articulated how English L2 students often performed the role of language broker for their English L2 parents. Due to sparse amounts of translated college-related content and few partnerships between institutions and K-12 schools, the researchers asserted, “individuals—especially frequent language brokers—appear to be grappling with pressures to be part of both their heritage cultural world and the dominant [English] American context” (p. 48). During their work, the researchers made it clear that English L2 students forced to perform the role of language broker between the English L2 students’ college life and family life often develop acculturative stress, as “College students who language broker must juggle their academic and social obligations with language brokering for parents” (Weisskirch et al., 2011, p. 49). However, this sense of acculturative stress was counterbalanced by a sense of linguistic pride and cultural heritage, as the authors ultimately asserted, “Language brokering may not add to stressors around acculturation and may instead instill critical ways of thinking that support successful living in multicultural societies” (Weisskirch et al., 2011, p. 49).

Linguistic Discrimination Persists

Further research focused on the role of Spanish-speaking parents in the postsecondary exploration process has found these parents often experience linguistic discrimination stemming from monolingual, English-only

postsecondary information. In a study of 22 Spanish-speaking parents of English L2 students pursuing higher education in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, Martinez, Cortez, and Saenz (2013) asserted that institutions of higher education did not provide equitable college-related information to Spanish-speaking parents. The researchers suggested, "College-related bulletins and invitations to college-focused meetings that were sent home also 'all came in English,' and so Spanish-speaking parents were often left depending on their children to translate vital information" (Martinez et al., 2013, p. 116). This monolingual communication between institutions of higher education, K-12 schools, and Spanish-speaking parents produced a feeling among Spanish-speaking parents of linguistic discrimination, as the local school districts in the Rio Grande Valley served an 80% or higher Hispanic and Spanish-speaking population. However, the majority of college-related information was English-only and many of the college counselors working in secondary schools communicated college-related information in English (Martinez et al., 2013). These findings echoed Tierney's (2002) earlier call for secondary and postsecondary schools to value the languages spoken by non-English speakers to promote interaction between schools and English L2 families, thus mitigating feelings of linguistic discrimination experienced by non-English speakers (Martinez et al., 2013).

Gonzalez, Villalba, and Borders (2015) echoed much of what Martinez et al. (2013) asserted in their study of 15 Spanish-speaking immigrant parents of English L2 students pursuing higher education in the United States. Beyond translated college-related materials, Gonzalez et al. (2015) suggested few secondary schools employed bilingual, Spanish-speaking college counselors. The researchers explained, "One parent commented, 'They [secondary schools] should have Spanish counselors and offer assistance to parents when they go to school, because, for example, when I go to the meetings, I see some parents completely lost'" (p. 128). Gonzalez et al. (2015) also urged, "Specific concerns mentioned were barriers in access to technology and the lack of bilingual outreach by school professionals to provide information directly to parents" (p. 128). This finding, specifically mentioning barriers in access to technology, speaks to earlier research suggesting institutions of higher education ought to partner with K-12 schools to facilitate access to translated college-related information and polylingual websites (Fann et al., 2009; Gilligan, 2012; Tierney, 2002; Tornatzky et al., 2002), yet these communication structures have continued to be absent during the English L2 students' and their family's postsecondary exploration process.

Technology as a Problematic Solution

Some researchers have hypothesized that the communication structures between postsecondary institutions, secondary schools, and English L2 students

could be improved through low-cost, emerging Internet technologies (Fann et al., 2009; Gilligan, 2012; Tierney, 2002; Tornatzky et al., 2002). Tornatzky et al. (2002) hypothesized English L2 parents would be better able to access postsecondary information in the years after their study. The authors asserted, “Many of the access issues that are exacerbated by SES and language barriers dissolve through interactive media. As college Web sites get more and more language-friendly to Latino applicants, and as high-speed Internet access continues its penetration into Latino communities, many of the college knowledge problems described here will decrease,” (p. 27).

Exploring Tornatzky et al.’s (2002) earlier assumption, nearly twenty years later, Taylor (2018a) analyzed the Spanish translation and readability of undergraduate admissions materials on the institutional .edu websites of a random sample of 325 bachelor-degree granting institutions in the United States. Taylor found only 4.9% of undergraduate admissions instructions had been translated into Spanish, only 4% of institutional websites employed machine translation applications to provide polylingual content, and the average English-language readability of the materials was above the 13th-grade English language reading comprehension level. Taylor’s (2018) study, therefore, updated Tornatzky et al. (2002) work by again asserting that postsecondary information should be made available in English and Spanish on institutional websites to the benefit of English L2 students and their English L2 parents and families.

On a national level, private industries have implemented a select few initiatives specifically for English L2, Spanish-speaking individuals pursuing higher education, primarily in the financial aid sector. Private industries have launched these initiatives given longitudinal research suggesting English L2 students who apply for financial aid are more likely to enroll and persist in institutions of higher education (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Ryan & Ream, 2016), even though many English L2, Spanish-speaking students and their Spanish-speaking families experience greater levels of poverty than English L1 students and their families (De La Rosa, 2006; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Drachman, 2006; Gilligan, 2012; Ryan & Ream, 2016; Warnock, 2016).

At the 2006 National Association for Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) Conference, Sallie Mae and USA Funds—two federal student loan guarantors at that time—unveiled a financial aid literacy and distribution program entitled, “2Futuro” (iA Institute, 2006, para. 1). Sallie Mae and USA Funds billed 2Futuro as “the only fully bilingual college-financing and outreach program that enables Hispanic parents and students to apply for college loans in Spanish, and also offers dedicated Spanish-language customer service support to students, parents, and financial-aid administrators” (para. 2) with the program also helping “schools reach out to Hispanics by offering access to

scholarships, grants and valuable financial-aid information through the Spanish-first, fully bilingual Web site” (para. 2).

Upon its pilot launch in the summer of 2006, Allen (2007) reported on 2Futuro after a Washington D.C.-based lobbying group *US English* criticized the program as marginalizing the importance of English and preferring Spanish-speaking individuals over students and families of color from other races and ethnicities. Rob Toonkel, a spokesperson for US English, claimed, “It is unfair, this mindless multilingualism many government programs are embracing wherever they see a problem. Hispanics have one of the lowest rates of high school graduates. There are issues with college but giving them things in other languages is not the best way to get at the problem” (Allen, 2007, p. 40).

Upon further exploration, Allen (2007) learned many lobbyists felt translating English financial aid-related content into Spanish was not a viable solution the access issue facing English L2 Spanish-speaking students, even though extant research suggested translating postsecondary information from English to Spanish for these students and their support networks (Tierney, 2002; Tornatzky et al., 2002). Ultimately, the 2Futuro program was discontinued shortly after its launch, due in part to the perceived discrimination cited by lobby groups such as *US English* (Paulsen, 2013). Since, no federal financial aid programs have published bilingual financial aid materials or have worked to provide bilingual financial aid counseling, even though Spanish-speaking parents have asserted they often feel uncomfortable understanding financial aid-related information due to language barriers (Fann et al., 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2015; Gilligan, 2012; Greenfield, 2015).

Despite the shortcomings of bilingual education, ineffective bilingual education policies, and linguistic barriers to higher education imposed by K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, many English L2 students have transcended these boundaries and have experienced postsecondary success. An important phenomenon assisting in these English L2 students’ postsecondary success in the United States is the concept of chain migration, tangentially related to the concept of language brokering (Pérez Huber, 2009; Weisskirch et al., 2011). Pérez (2007), and then Pérez and McDonough (2008), first introduced the concept of chain migration of English L2 students into U.S. higher education.

Chain Migration to Infiltrate the System

Loosely defined, chain migration can be thought of a movement of a population into a different space dominated by a group that does not share a primary identity (race, ethnicity, language, religion, etc.) of the incoming, migratory group. Before Pérez’s (2007) work, researchers in other branches of social science have long examined the concept of chain migration as it relates to

the racial and ethnic mobility of populations into physical and social spaces typically dominated by a different racial or ethnic group.. A few of these studies include Banerjee's (1983) analysis of social networks in India and how these social network assist migrants during their immigration process into a rigid Indian caste system. Other studies have addressed the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and language as they relate to the chain migration of immigrants into foreign countries or new social groups (Fawcett, 1989; MacDonald & MacDonald, 1964; Shah & Menon, 1999).

Pérez's (2007) doctoral dissertation integrated the concept of chain migration into a U.S. higher education context, examining how Chicanas/os navigated their pathway to community colleges and universities. Drawing upon MacDonald and MacDonald's (1964) notion of chain migration, Pérez explained that many Chicana/o students relied on social networks and the availability of social capital to assist in their pursuit of higher education. Of this social capital, Pérez reasoned prospective students often engaged with peers and support networks with experience in the U.S. higher education system. For Pérez, these experienced peers and support networks provided Chicana/o students the information and strategies necessary to overcome financial, social, linguistic, or other boundaries to apply to and enroll in a postsecondary institution. In terms of linguistic hurdles specifically, Pérez (2007) explained how peers used language to encourage Chicana/o students to pursue postsecondary education:

College norms, or here the expectation that Chicana/o students would attend college by their peers, was made implicit through the use of language and names placed on students by other peers. In terms of language, it was "understood" and "given" that Chicana/o students would go to college. Regarding labels, students were called "school boys" and "smart girls," thus the implied message that Chicana/o students would succeed academically. (Pérez, 2007, p. 153)

Beyond translation of postsecondary materials or educating English L2 parents of postsecondary processes and information, Pérez (2007) argued the college norms and language practiced by secondary school peers could influence whether Chicanas/os pursued postsecondary education. Similarly, Pérez learned "...school staff used implicit language that gave Chicana/o university students the sense that college was a natural progression after high school" (Pérez, 2007, p. 155). One of Pérez's interviewees explained, "'I can't remember a specific time when they said, 'Oh, you have to go to college,' but they always say, 'Oh well, when you get to college,'" (p. 93), speaking to the importance of school staff discussing postsecondary education. Perhaps most importantly, the school staff members and school peers facilitated the chain migration of Chicanas/os into U.S. higher education by regularly speaking about college, implying that Chicanas/os ought to attend college, and asserting that if a Chicana/o had a sibling who

attended college, that the school expected the younger sibling to attend college because their older sibling did.

However, Pérez (2007) also found university-bound peers to be stronger facilitators of Chicana/o chain migration into U.S. higher education, as university-bound peers discussed and shared postsecondary plans more frequently than peers planning on attending community colleges or not attending college at all. Here, Pérez (2007) articulated the importance of a college-going culture in the secondary school regardless of student aspirations, as many Chicanas/os in Pérez's study pursued higher education, even though their English L2 parents and English L2 siblings may not have held the necessary postsecondary information to support their student.

Pérez and McDonough (2008) elaborated on Pérez's (2007) work, finding chain migration was an effective strategy to mitigate language barriers to U.S. higher education. Specifically, Pérez and McDonough (2008) explained that family members and friends who already had experience in the U.S. higher education system provided tremendous support to English L2 students pursuing higher education. When discussing their overall findings, Pérez and McDonough (2008) reasoned:

When Latina/o students were prompted to speak about their college planning process, students surprisingly revealed that they spoke with their parents. However, it was not that parents shared information with their children about what to expect in college, but rather that students informed parents about college and sought out college information from other individuals. (p. 259)

Pérez and McDonough (2008) connected this finding to earlier, foundational research suggesting English L2 parents of Spanish-speaking or bilingual Spanish-English students often rely on their parents' as critical resources in the postsecondary exploration process, even if their parents have little or no experience or knowledge of the U.S. higher education system (Astin, 1982; Ceja, 2001; Gándara, 1986; Post, 1990; Tierney, 2002; Tornatzky et al., 2002).

Ultimately, since the foundational work of Astin (1982), Gándara (1986), Post (1990), Ceja (2001), and others, English L2 Spanish-speaking students still do not access U.S. higher education at the same level as their English L1 peers (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). From here, researchers and practitioners must embrace already-established best practices and emerging technologies to improve English L2 student access to U.S. higher education.

Conclusion: The Pathways Forward

In all, a rich history of educational research has documented how English L2 Spanish-speaking students and their English L2 parents and support networks

have attempted to access U.S. higher education through bilingual secondary education programs, Spanish-language postsecondary materials and information shared in workshops and online settings, and the phenomena of language brokering and chain migration in U.S. higher education. However, a longitudinal body of research has demonstrated that, despite these efforts, many English L2 Spanish speakers have not accessed U.S. higher education at the same level as their English L1, English-fluent peers (Collatos et al., 2004; Cook et al., 2012; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Flores & Drake, 2014; González et al., 2003; Harklau, 1998; Kanno, 2018; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Lee, 2012; Oropeza et al., 2010; Pérez Huber, 2009; Sanchez, 2017).

As result, researchers and practitioners must continue to explore how bilingual education, translated postsecondary materials, language brokering, and chain migration can be supported to facilitate access to U.S higher education for English L2 students. However, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers must take critical steps to ensure English L2 students and their families do not continue to experience linguistic discrimination and marginalization from the U.S. higher education system.

First, every effort must be made by both secondary and postsecondary institutions to connect with non-native English speakers to mass translate higher education content. Recently, the University of Virginia's (UVA) Office of Student Financial Services collaborated with UVA student organizations to network with English L2 students, specifically those fluent in non-English languages. As a result, the office was able to collaboratively translate financial aid-related documents into Spanish and different languages for both English L2 prospective and current students and families to learn more about the financial aid process (Doran & Taylor, 2020). This type of internal, institutional collaboration should be applauded, but this effort should be extended between secondary and postsecondary institutions to increase English L2 student access to postsecondary materials necessary for admission, procurement of financial aid, and eventual student success.

Second, secondary and postsecondary schools must be held accountable for their collaboration or lack of collaboration: All schools should work to serve all students, not just students who speak the dominant language or live in a certain, affluent school district. Astin's (1982) early work highlighted a disconnect between secondary and postsecondary schools when it comes to streamlining and translating postsecondary access communication. Years later, Post (1990) made the same findings, as have Taylor (2020). Now, nearly forty years of empirical research has argued that secondary and postsecondary institutions need to better collaborate to streamline and translate postsecondary

access content: The time is now, and these partnerships must be formed and held accountable by local education agencies, non-profits, and state governing bodies.

Third, secondary and postsecondary schools should recruit and hire a staff that is reflective of their community along racial, ethnic, and linguistic lines. Spanish-speaking communities should be served by Spanish-speaking individuals working in secondary and postsecondary schools, promoting educational opportunities for Spanish-speaking students and their families. Doran and Taylor's (2020) work indicated that there is a wealth of cultural capital—in the form of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005)—on college campuses already. Institutions need not search far and wide for English L2 speakers who understand the U.S. higher education system. Doran and Taylor (2020) spoke about engaging with student organizations with a diverse linguistic membership to expand access to the English L2 generations emerging from the higher education pipeline. The same efforts should be made at the faculty and staff level to recruit linguistically diverse people to communicate with prospective English L2 students and families in their native languages.

Finally, secondary and postsecondary schools must embrace emerging technologies, especially over the Internet, to expand and improve bilingual, translated postsecondary materials. Perhaps the modern postsecondary website is too large for native speakers to translate thousands of pages of English content into different languages for prospective English L2 students and families. Yet, if institutions could recruit linguistically diverse faculty and staff, collaborate with linguistically diverse students, and then leverage the power of technology to inform the human work, institutional websites would resemble a much more linguistically diverse student body. Until then, institutions of higher education who choose to engage with machines—instead of native speakers—to translate content are sending the message that the machines are more important collaborators than human beings. This is not the message that U.S. higher education should be delivering, especially seeing how linguistically diverse U.S. higher education already is in many regards.

For the linguistic hurdles uncovered by educational researchers (Astin, 1982; Ceja, 2001; Gándara, 1986; Tierney, 2002; Tornatzky et al., 2002) to continue to be problematic nearly forty years later is an embarrassment for both secondary and postsecondary institutions in the United States. Moreover, these persistent linguistic hurdles are indicative of a U.S. higher education system resistant to change and willing to maintain the English-centric status quo, even if it means English L2 students and their families are left behind. For U.S. higher education to serve a linguistically-diverse, polylingual society, secondary and postsecondary schools must embrace non-English languages and their speakers and be held accountable for failing to support English L2 students and their families. If these institutions are not held accountable, the English-centric status

quo will continue to pervade U.S. higher education, reproducing an inequitable, unjust, monolingual system.

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