Increasing multilingualism in schoolscapes
New scenery and language education policies

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In this qualitative research study, we examine changes made in 23 New York City schools that participated in a project for which participating schools were asked to regard bilingualism as a resource in instruction and develop a multilingual linguistic landscape. Findings document efforts made by schools to change their linguistic landscape in ways that recognize students’ many languages and cultures, significant corresponding ideological shifts by school leaders from monolingual to multilingual views of language and language learning, educators’ incorporation of students’ home languages in instruction, and new formal language education policies resulting from these efforts. We document the impact of all of these changes on students and their families and suggest that research on linguistic landscape conducted in schools should consider not only the physical landscape but also its connections to pedagogy, programming, and language policies.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, schoolscape, soundscape, bilingual education, New York, translanguaging, language policy, emergent bilingual

1. Introduction

Serving 1.1 million students, the New York City Department of Education is the largest and most linguistically and culturally diverse school system in the United States (and arguably the world); in recognition of its extreme linguistic and cultural diversity, New York City has been referred to as the “Multilingual Apple” (García & Fishman, 2002). Presently, about half of all school students come from a home where a language other than English is spoken, and 15% of students...
are emergent bilinguals.¹ Spanish is the predominant language spoken by 61% of emergent bilinguals, followed by Chinese (13%) and over 180 other documented languages (NYCDOE, 2018).²

Scholars of linguistic landscape (LL) have in recent years challenged and extended the boundaries of the field well beyond signage. For instance, Shohamy and Gorter’s (2008) definition includes “language in the environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces” (p.1). More recently, LL researchers have moved beyond what is seen in public spaces to also consider “smellscape” (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015), “semiotic landscapes” (Jaworski & Thorlow, 2010), “multimodalities” (Shohamy, 2015), as well as “linguistic soundscaping” (Scarvaglieri, Redder, Pappenhausen, & Brehmer, 2012). For the purposes of this paper, which focuses on the LL in schools or “schoolscapes” (Brown, 2012), we adopt here a broadened definition of LL that moves beyond discussion of the many physical representations of languages within school buildings to also consider the languages heard and spoken, including the use of students’ languages in classrooms – particularly in instruction.

In spite of rapid immigration growth rates and great student diversity, the LL of New York City schools has largely remained monolingual in English. This is often in marked contrast to the LL of the streets surrounding school buildings, where many community languages are visible, particularly in commercial signage (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael & Barni, 2010). In this qualitative research study, we examine changes made to the LL in 23 New York City schools as part of an effort to disrupt the hegemony of English. Specifically, these schools participated in a project aimed at increasing the knowledge base of educators and school administrators about emergent bilinguals, in which participating schools were asked to develop a multilingual LL and regard bilingualism as a resource in instruction.

In this article, we document the changes made to the LL of the schools, and show how these changes were interconnected with shifts in language ideologies. These physical changes were tied to pedagogical changes whereby students’ languages began to be incorporated in instruction. In several cases, doing so engendered significant programmatic and/or structural schoolwide changes for

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1. Emergent bilinguals are students who come from a home where a language other than English is spoken and receive language learning support in schools through bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) instruction. These students are officially designated “English language learners” (ELLs) in city schools. We prefer the term ‘emergent bilingual’ as per García (2009) which recognizes that the students are adding English to their linguistic repertoire and thereby becoming bi/multilinguals, not simply English monolinguals.

2. This number is seen to be a low estimate, as in fact Daniel Kaufman of the Endangered Language Alliance estimates there are over 800 languages currently spoken in New York City (The Economist, 2011).
emergent bilinguals. The final section reports the impact that changing LL and instructional practices had on students, their families, and the school community as a whole. Our findings show how changes to a school’s visual LL often served as a pathway from monolingual to multilingual language education policies. We suggest that research on LL conducted in schools should consider not only the physical landscape but also its connections to pedagogy, programming, and language policies.

2. Literature review: Linguistic landscape in schools

Schools are important public institutions where language policies and ideologies are implemented, navigated, and/or contested, though scholars of LL have yet to focus extensively on schools as key sites for their research (Brown, 2012). This has begun to change, as evident in the April 2018 special issue of Linguistics and Education on “visual and material dimensions of education and learning” (Laihonen & Szabó, 2018). We offer here a brief overview of LL research conducted in schools, which mainly includes studies of the visual LL in school buildings and those that consider LL for pedagogical purposes. The foundational paper by Landry and Bourhis (1997) surveyed 11th and 12th grade francophone Canadian high school students about the impact of LL, including the issue of support for French in schools. They found that LL has a strong symbolic function in promoting or limiting group identity and impacts students’ language use, and concluded that speakers of minoritized languages have a vested interest in promoting the use of their language within the LL to ensure language maintenance and ethno-linguistic vitality.

Brown (2012) conducted a qualitative study of the LL of schools in southeastern Estonia where speakers of Võro, a minoritized language, sought to reverse language shift. She identified factors impacting the use of Võro, including community, parental, or administrative support, the physical space within the school, and teacher autonomy in language choices. Brown (2012: 282) puts forth the terms ‘schoolscape,’ which she defines as “the school-based environment where place and text, both written (graphic) and oral, constitute, reproduce, and transform language ideologies.” Her inclusion of oral language as part of the schoolscape is significant, and relevant here as our paper extends beyond the visual LL to consider oral language practices in classrooms as well.

Gorter and Cenoz (2014) examine the LL in the rooms, hallways, and immediate surroundings of seven schools in the Basque Country where the most common curricular model uses Basque as a medium of instruction, includes Spanish Language Arts instruction, and adds English as a third or foreign language. The
authors found that where the conditions of language policy are favorable to the minoritized language, it will have a stronger presence in a school’s visual LL, and they suggest that language education policies can reverse language shift and support multilingualism. Garvin and Eisenhower (2016) examine the LL of schools in Korea and the U.S., and show how the LL is used in both contexts to cultivate a school culture and identity – offering current support for Landry and Bourhis’ (1997) conclusions. As Shohamy (2006, 2015) asserts, studies like those cited above show how LL is a mechanism of language policy that can perpetuate ideologies and the status of certain languages. Moreover, this body of LL research conducted in schools has mainly concerned itself with the privileging of certain languages over others, particularly as evident in visible language displays. As summarized by Pakarinen and Björklund (2018), “[t]he focus of the previous studies has often been the balance between the majority and minority language(s)” (p. 5).

As noted, several studies have examined the ways the LL can serve educational aims. Cenoz and Gorter (2008) consider the various ways in which the multimodality of the LL can be used in second language learning: namely, to provide pragmatic information, to aid comprehension in multilingual contexts, to increase vocabulary, and to aid in learning vocabulary. Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre, and Armand (2009) draw from the LL of the surrounding communities to document the literacy practices of Canadian school children and raise their language awareness. They show how the LL can be used in critical pedagogy addressing language awareness and representations of the students’ own language practices. Similarly, Clemente, Andrade, and Martins (2012) taught young students in Portuguese schools lessons that cultivated awareness of language and LL. Sayer (2010) provides an account of using the LL as a resource to teach English as a foreign language in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Malinowski (2015) likewise considers the ways in which the LL can be used in language learning. He offers a conceptual framework that combines LL theory with pedagogical practice in language education and outlines “spaces” in the LL, along with ways of using these in education. Dressler (2015) looked at the LL in a German-English school offering bilingual education in Western Canada, focusing on sign-making practices as a means for promoting bilingualism. She found that teachers typically create the signs that promote bilingualism, but also noted constraints from doing so. Leung and Wu (2012) draw from their study of Chinese languages in the LL of Philadelphia’s Chinatown neighborhood to argue that all Chineses should be present and used fluidly in heritage language classrooms to match the community’s actual language practices.

Research by Jakonen (2018), while also finding that schoolscape can further educational aims, offers a departure from other empirical research by taking a multimodal approach to examine how teachers and students interact with images,
texts, and other material artifacts in a bilingual classroom. As Jakonen (2018) concludes, “[T]he analysis has illustrated how attention to objects and movement within the classroom can serve the enactment of a multilingual pedagogy that treats all available languages as resources” (p. 29). Our research builds on this work and considers not only visual language displays but also oral language practices and “linguistic soundscaping” (Scarvaglieri, Redder, Pappenhagen, & Brehmer, 2012) in schools. As these authors explain:

[I]t is linguistic action that serves as a bridge between a physical space and its soundscape and the social space in which people live and interact … Consequently, one of the aims of linguistic soundscaping is to document how social spaces are created and developed over time through linguistic action.

(Scarvaglieri et al., 2012: 63)

Specifically, our purpose is to document concerted efforts to make changes to schoolscapes and corresponding “linguistic action,” as embodied in the language practices of educators and students in participating schools, in order to understand the impact of those changes on the school community and on the education provided to emergent bilingual students. Findings highlight how a focus on the LL in schools offers an entry point for efforts to contest monolingual schooling and language hegemony by promoting bi/multilingual education.

3. Methods

A total of 27 schools across New York State participated in the City University of New York – New York State Initiative for Emergent Bilinguals (CUNY-NYSIEB) Project3 from 2012–2013, of which 23 schools were located in New York City.4 Our research centers on the work of these 23 New York City schools during the 1.5 years of their official involvement in CUNY-NYSIEB (January 2012 to June 2013) and for several years afterwards (from 2013 to 2016). The purpose of CUNY-NYSIEB is to increase the knowledge base of school leaders and staff about emergent bilinguals and the education of this student population, and the project provided intensive professional development and technical assistance to participating schools to achieve these aims. School leaders and staff attended a series of seminars offered at the CUNY Graduate Center and received regular visits for professional development and consultation from CUNY-NYSIEB team members.

3. The principal investigator (PI) of CUNY-NYSIEB is Ricardo Otheguy, and the Co-PIs are Ofelia Garcia and Kate Menken.

4. A total of 66 schools across the state participated in the project from 2012–2016.
Involvement in CUNY-NYSIEB was voluntary, and schools applied to participate. Participation required that the schools agree to engage in efforts to: (1) leverage students’ bilingualism as a resource in education and (2) reflect the students’ diverse languages and cultures in the school’s visual LL. Kate Menken served as Co-Principal Investigator of the project, Vanessa Pérez Rosario was an Associate Investigator, and Luis Alejandro Guzmán Valerio was a Research Assistant. We recognize that our respective roles in designing and implementing the project are a potential limitation of this research. However, the purpose of the present study is not to evaluate the project’s effectiveness in any way but rather to document the changes made in participating schools and the school staff’s perceptions of the impact of those changes.

Specifically, we employed qualitative research methods to answer the following research questions:

1. **What changes were made in (a) the physical LL of participating schools, and (b) instructional practices?**
2. **What are school leaders’ (including principals, administrators, and lead teachers) perceptions of the impact of those changes on students and their families?**
3. **In what ways, if any, were schoolscape changes correlated to changes in instruction and broader language education policies?**

The main data sources for this research study are interviews and photographs taken in the schools. Further information for triangulation purposes included school profiles and notes taken by CUNY-NYSIEB teams, as well as publicly available data about the schools, such as demographics, services to emergent bilinguals, and performance on state-mandated assessments. The interviews we analyzed were initial interviews with school leaders conducted in Spring 2012 at the start of their involvement in CUNY-NYSIEB, exit interviews conducted at the end of Fall 2012, and follow-up interviews conducted from 2013 to 2016 with school leaders who continued their involvement in the project by attending seminars and events. A total of 37 interviews were gathered and analyzed. Interviews were conducted one-on-one or in small groups (the largest group for a given interview was three school leaders at a time, and included the school principal, assistant principal, and/or teacher leader[s]).

Interviews were gathered, audio recorded, and later transcribed by each school’s CUNY-NYSIEB team (comprised of a faculty member in bilingual education and a research assistant who was also a doctoral student). The interviews asked a broad range of questions about school leaders’ experiences in CUNY-NYSIEB and perceptions of its impact, as can be seen in Appendix A. Photographs of the schools’ LL were taken by team members during their visits to the schools involved in the project, and each school was visited three to four
times per semester from Spring 2012 through Spring 2013. Photographs focused on classrooms, hallways, and the school entrance.

After completion of data collection, data from each school was analyzed thematically through descriptive coding, noting themes that arose repeatedly across interviews and were observable in photos (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). In our analysis, we paid particular attention to mentions of the LL and instructional practices. The codes in each interview were tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet to identify those arising most frequently (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Each school's data set was thematically analyzed by the authors, who compared their coding and analysis to one another to further increase the validity of our findings (Miles et al., 2013). The findings presented in this paper represent the themes that arose most frequently in the interviews.

4. Findings

In the sections that follow, we report on the different efforts made by CUNY-NYSIEB schools to change their LL in ways that recognize their students’ many languages and cultures. We then discuss the ideological shifts among school leaders that occurred together with their efforts to embrace multilingualism in their LL, and how these shifts galvanized further schoolwide changes. We present below findings on changes to instructional practices within classrooms in participating schools, by examining efforts to incorporate students’ home languages in instruction. We detail broader programmatic changes made in several of the schools, codifying their changes in thinking about bilingualism and emergent bilingual students in formal school language policies. The final findings section discusses the impact of the changes to the LL on members of the school community, including parents, community members, educators, and students. Each of these findings is detailed in the sections that follow.

4.1 Changes to the visual linguistic landscape in schools

When schools began working with CUNY-NYSIEB, typically the only languages other than English in their visual LL were those in the multilingual welcome poster that the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) mandates be displayed in all school entranceways in the wake of a campaign in the early 2000s by immigrant parents, community groups, and their representatives for better translation and interpretation services in city schools (Advocates for Children & New
York Immigration Coalition, 2007).\(^5\) A photograph of the required multilingual poster hanging in the entrance of one of the schools in our sample can be seen in Figure 1.

![Multilingual Welcome Poster](image)

**Figure 1.** Mandated NYCDOE multilingual welcome poster

In order to move beyond the poster and increase the multilingualism of their LL, participating schools typically needed to create materials from the “bottom-up” (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, & Trumper-Hecht, 2006; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006), meaning that staff members, teachers, parents, students, and other members of the school community created new multilingual displays. This section documents some of their efforts.

Almost all of the participating schools created their own multilingual welcome sign that displayed the languages present in their school community. One assistant principal, for example, noted how her school had a welcome sign in English with blank stars in the school entrance, so they changed the sign such that each star could say “welcome” in a different language present at the school. As she explained:

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\(^5\) Multilingual Welcome Posters are required under NYCDOE Chancellor’s Regulation A-663 (Advocates for Children & New York Immigration Coalition, 2007).
It was just a welcome board, “Welcome to [elementary school]”. After we came back from one of the CUNY-NYSIEB meetings, … we suggested that we should put “Welcome” not just in English, but in all the languages we have in the building.

(Ms. T, elementary school assistant principal, exit interview)

After making these changes, students and families from the community entering the school would see all of their languages represented for the first time in a home-made display.

One school decided to develop a welcome sign that would not only greet families in their languages but also provide important information. This school generated a list of “Frequently Asked Questions” that were often posed by parents, guardians, or community members, and translated these into the six languages other than English most widely spoken in their school community. When entering the school building, families could then simply indicate to school staff the question(s) they wanted answered. This display can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Multilingual welcome sign with frequently asked questions in seven languages

In another example of locally-made signs, an assistant principal remarked on how school staff, students, and families helped create multilingual word walls for their classrooms, where vocabulary words were translated into one or more of the students’ languages (Ms. V, elementary school assistant principal, exit interview). Figure 3 shows a photograph of a multilingual word wall that was created by a teacher at one of the schools in our sample, in which key vocabulary words were translated into the three languages other than English spoken in her classroom.

CUNY-NYSIEB schools were encouraged to increase the multilingualism of their visual LL in ways that responded to their own situated realities by recognizing
all of the languages of their students (García & Menken, 2015). One school created a labeling team “to put labels around the school, so that our school building is more accessible” (Ms. K, elementary school lead teacher, exit interview). Figure 4 offers an example of hallway labeling in English and Spanish, and Figure 5 shows hallway signage in English and four additional languages. Figure 6 shows labels in English and Spanish of objects inside a classroom.

Some schools created multilingual welcome packets in the languages of families enrolling in U.S. schools for the first time, or developed other informational resources for families and students who were new arrivals. In one school’s welcome
packet, they included “pictures of places around the school and a lot of different labels” for new students (Mr. S, elementary school assistant principal, exit interview). This packet was translated into Spanish and Chinese and included an audio-recorded welcome message from the principal, a map of the school that was
explained by a partner student during a building tour, and materials for the students to familiarize themselves with basic classroom vocabulary and routines. One elementary school in our sample prepared information about the school that included pictures of school supplies labeled in English and Polish, as shown in Figure 7.

![Figure 7. Sample welcome packet with school supplies image labeled in English and Polish](image)

Many participants made efforts to change their schoolscape by gathering home language resources, such as books in students’ home languages, which were added to classroom and school libraries. One school principal reported that multilingual books were acquired for the school library, and their rationale for doing so, in the following interview excerpt:

> When they go to the library, we want them to feel part of it, by having the languages available for them. (Ms. T, elementary school principal, initial interview)
Like schoolwide libraries, libraries within classrooms likewise began offering books in languages other than English. For instance, Figure 8 shows a classroom library in Spanish and English, and Figure 9 shows a classroom library in five languages (English, Polish, Arabic, Ukrainian, and Spanish). The languages of the books available in these libraries were determined by the student population in each school and classroom.

Figure 8. Spanish/English classroom library

Figure 9. Multilingual library with books in five languages
Below, we describe how multilingual materials such as these were used in teaching and learning in CUNY-NYSIEB classrooms.

4.2 Ideological shifts among school leaders

Along with the changes made to the schoolscapes in our sample, many school leaders reported making significant ideological shifts from monoglossic to heteroglossic views of language and language learning (García, 2009). For teachers and administrators in city schools where instruction is typically conducted only in English, in English as a second language (ESL) or general education programs, this meant moving from monolingual approaches to multilingual ones that recognize and build on students’ bi/multilingualism. These shifts are demonstrated in efforts to implement translanguaging pedagogy, using the entire complex and dynamic linguistic repertoire of bilingual children flexibly and strategically in instruction (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2016), and in the ways students’ home languages came to be valued.

As leaders of schools with English-only programs developed a deeper understanding of bilingualism and the multilingual world the children inhabit, it not only galvanized changes to the school’s LL visually, but promoted shifts in the ways school leaders thought about the education of emergent bilinguals in their schools.

I don’t have an ESL background at all, so I would think, my thoughts were that the ESL teachers went in 4 times a week, 8 times a week, whatever it was, and taught the children English, almost like being a one-way street. Now I think of it that there’s so much more to it, and that the use of the home language should be encouraged and used as much as we can to help them gain English. But also, just because they don’t know English doesn’t mean they can’t think and can’t express themselves. (Ms. B, elementary school principal, exit interview)

The passage above reflects important changes not only in how this principal thought about English language instruction, but also in how she viewed the students. Greater value was placed on the children's bilingualism, their cultures, and what they have to contribute.

While several school leaders noted that it was most difficult to change mindsets in general education classrooms, where teachers are not licensed as specialists in the education of emergent bilinguals, other schools noted shifts occurring amongst these teachers too. The following is an example about an English language arts teacher (note that ‘ELL’ refers to English language learner, a term used synonymously with our preferred term ‘emergent bilingual’):
[T]o have a teacher pull me aside and say, “I had never considered having students that were former ELLs potentially read a novel in their home language if they were more comfortable with that option.” … I think seeing that it’s getting teachers to really rethink practices around language is refreshing.

(Ms. S, high school lead teacher, exit interview)

In this passage, a lead teacher at a high school describes how changing the schoolscape by purchasing materials for a classroom library with books in students’ languages in combination with professional development on bilingualism and translinguaging to learn how to incorporate those materials in instruction promoted a shift in thinking for an English language arts teacher. This teacher now realized for the first time that home language resources could be useful in instruction for emergent bilinguals in the general education classroom.

The introduction of translinguaging pedagogy in CUNY-NYSIEB offered educators permission to use languages flexibly and fluidly in the classroom and provided specific ways to do so.

I’ve always had the belief that the native language is very key to a student’s learning. And in most of the places that I’ve worked, that was not valued. My participation with CUNY-NYSIEB has not only given validity to my thought, but it’s also taught me different ways … to push forward the thinking of using both languages.

(Ms. B, elementary school principal, exit interview)

As seen in the passage above, this principal valued the use of the home language prior to her involvement in the project, but was not sure how to bring students’ languages into the schoolscape visually or in instruction. Shifting to a heteroglossic language ideology in the ways documented in this section led school leaders to reconsider their school’s program structures and classroom practices. The next section examines how such ideological shifts took root within classrooms.

4.3 Changes to instructional practices: Towards multilingual schoolscapes and soundscapes

Shifts in language ideologies by school leaders occasioned changes to language practices in classrooms, inclusive of both visual schoolscape (in the form of classroom language displays and materials, amongst other artifacts) and soundscape (including oral language with attention to the occurrence of different languages as per Scarvaglieri at al., 2012). All participating schools increased their recognition of home language practices, which were leveraged in instruction and developed. Thus students’ home languages were used orally in teaching and learning, and they were visible in student work, libraries, instructional materials, word walls and other displays in classrooms of participating schools.
For instance, students read materials for research projects in multiple languages and were given opportunities to discuss, reflect, negotiate, and debrief content and questions in English and their home language with partners, in small groups, and in whole-class activities. Teachers and administrators noted how these efforts had a positive effect on student participation and learning in general:

When you go in the classrooms, you’ll see artifacts, and artifacts are even done in Hindi and Bengali. They even have those in Bengali. They understand that it’s okay for children to talk in their own language and converse in their own language in order to learn the English language … So you see that, where children are actually writing in their own language because they cannot, when they get stuck writing [in English] … they’ll write it in their own language.

(Ms. T, middle school principal, exit interview)

In this passage, a principal reflects on interactions with a multilingual LL, and describes how bringing students’ home languages into school offered a way for students to participate who would otherwise have been silenced. This point is reinforced in the following interview quote:

I noticed that the students were more willing to participate, even though there were not only, the target language was English, but they were willing to discuss and talk in Spanish and then help each other translate … They were not intimidated.

(Ms. X, elementary school teacher, follow-up interview)

As seen in this excerpt, Ms. T reflects on the effects of her purposeful use of students’ home language in the classroom through the reading of books and discussion of academic materials in Spanish, which in turn emboldened students to take risks in English.

The interview excerpt that follows develops this idea further:

Kids who are fluent in languages other than English are participating just as much, whereas in the old days they might not have. So, that raises participation in conversation, because they’re able to converse in whatever language they’re more comfortable with.

(Ms. B, elementary school principal, follow-up interview)

In this ESL classroom, allowing for a more multilingual soundscape permitted emergent bilingual students to use their home language for sense making and to develop their ideas before sharing out in English, which Ms. B notes has increased students’ classroom participation.

While teachers varied in the extent to which they took up the project’s invitation to make their schools more multilingual, the teacher quoted in the
following passage radically changed the visual LL of his classroom, and describes here the impact of doing so (note PD refers to professional development):

After having a few PD sessions I really just got obsessed with making sure anything I had in the room was written in the languages that kids would understand, whether it's Polish, Arabic, Spanish, Ukrainian … and then some students would correct me. And then after awhile a couple of kids actually gave me a blank notebook and said, “If you ever to have a word you want written in Polish or Arabic, write in this book and I’ll translate it for you.” So that got them more involved in the process as well … They can help me out that way and then they feel part of the classroom, it's more of a student-run classroom.

(Mr. A, elementary school teacher, follow-up interview)

Mr. A often relied on electronic translation of his classroom materials. As such, occasionally he made errors, which students would correct. Mr. A explains how engaging with his classroom's LL collectively with his students meant that the students were able to assume more power in the classroom. Figure 10 shows a picture of Mr. A's multilingual schoolscape.

Figure 10. Example of Mr. A's multilingual schoolscape

The blossoming of a multilingual LL in participating schools generated a shift in school culture that nurtured a sense of belonging in emergent bilinguals. As these shifts occurred, the classroom became a safe space where children were comfortable practicing their new language.

During the first year, we were really able to change the culture of the school where basically our emergent bilingual population really felt more empowered and more
confident in their classrooms because they saw teachers making attempts to use translanguaging and to incorporate them into the classroom rather than let them just sit and not understand what’s going on.

(Ms. C, middle school principal, follow-up interview)

Here we see that the positive effects of building a multilingual schoolscape go beyond student learning. School staff increased awareness and the value they placed on students’ backgrounds. For students, doing so increased their classroom participation and involvement in school.

5. Language education policy shifts

In addition to infusing students’ home languages in instruction in the ways outlined above, particularly in schools offering English-only instruction, several schools made significant changes to their language education programming and policies for emergent bilinguals. Our attention to this finding is grounded in Shohamy’s (2015) investigations of the link between LL and language policy (LP); as she writes, “LL is a powerful mechanism for creating de facto LP and also to protest, object, and negotiate it” (p. 156). In our research, the invitation to make the schoolscape multilingual rather than monolingual disrupted de facto English-only LP prevalent in U.S. schools. This, in turn, resulted in more formalized changes to the language policies of participating schools.

For example, some schools began to offer a formal class during the school day taught through the medium of the students’ home language in a course entitled “native language arts” or NLA (note that ELA in this quotation refers to English language arts):

We have native language arts now, which we didn’t have before. Our kids used to get only ESL for ELA, but now depending on their level, they all get ESL, and then they either get NLA or the Great Books program in English.

(Ms. C, middle school assistant principal, exit interview)

This is reiterated in another middle school where, as the principal describes, the school “made a drastic move to make sure our newcomers are getting native language arts … a massive change that just took effect today” (Ms. O, middle school principal, exit interview). Instruction in these courses is in the students’ home language and the curriculum typically mirrors that of English language arts courses.

In New York, policy dictates that schools may elect to provide transitional bilingual education and/or dual language bilingual education in lieu of ESL instruction, which is typically in English only. Both forms of bilingual education
provide home language instruction for emergent bilinguals, albeit to varying degrees. Transitional bilingual education offers home language instruction for a shorter period of time with the aim of quickly moving students into English-only instruction. By contrast, dual language bilingual education programs are developmental, and typically provide at least 50% of instruction in the home language for an indefinite period of time, with the linguistic goals of bilingualism and biliteracy. While the schools in our sample offering ESL instruction all brought students’ home languages into instruction through translanguaging strategies in the ways described in the previous section, some schools increased home language instruction by converting their transitional bilingual education programs to dual language bilingual education programs.

I know [Ms. B (principal)] was able to do away with one of our first grade transitional bilingual … So that has been one of, one of the changes, …trying to do it as a whole.

(Ms. A, elementary school bilingual education coordinator, exit interview)

In this passage, Ms. A describes how the school’s leaders made the decision to replace their transitional bilingual program with a dual language bilingual program, which offers more home language instruction. This is a significant language policy shift in favor of multilingualism.

Other schools made an even more extreme move from monolingual to bilingual instruction by replacing ESL programs with some form of bilingual education.

So we decided we needed to create a new class so they opened a newcomer class … [Students] are in a transitional bilingual education program now … We had never had bilingual support like that before – they were just in the monolingual classes.

(Ms. C, middle school principal, follow-up interview)

In this quotation, Ms. C describes her school’s decision to implement a bilingual education program two years after their participation in CUNY-NYSIEB.

Another middle school replaced their ESL program with dual language bilingual education during their involvement in the project.

That is the most dramatic change we have made, opening up that particular program. But I think more subtle is the idea that we are explicitly encouraging teachers to now use native language instructionally, whereas some of the models from the past prohibited it. You weren’t supposed to hear a foreign language, even if that was the language your students knew best … It seemed it was the only logical place to go as opposed to doing another transitional bilingual class where we would do Spanish and reduce it, reduce it, reduce it. Why do you want to do that when the research shows that it is not what you should do?

(Mr. K, middle school principal, exit interview)
The preceding quotation explains this school’s decision to begin offering dual language bilingual instruction, replacing the English-only program that was in place beforehand. Here Mr. K references research arguing that dual language bilingual education achieves better educational outcomes than other approaches for emergent bilinguals (e.g., Steele et al., 2017; Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

6. Reported impact: “Even simple things would have a big impact”

While changing school language policies will have a lasting impact on students, families, and entire communities for years to come, we also found that changing a school's visual LL had an immediate impact on these groups. Even changes to a school's LL that were easy for schools to do (e.g., multilingual signage) were found to be significant for students and their families.

The following is an example of this, when a student's father came into one of the schools in our sample and noticed the school had added hallway signage in his home language (note that Ms. V is the assistant principal and Ms. B is the principal of the school).

Ms. V: On the front door it says ‘general office’ and then it says ‘office’ in Polish and Spanish. And a Polish family came in, and the husband, the father came in and said, “Oh my goodness what a nice surprise to see my language on the door!” And he made a big deal about it, and he was very impressed, and so I felt good about that, you know. We did that!

Ms. B: Like putting up the signs, putting up the flags … just including different languages in the announcements in the morning. I think just, I don't know, put a different value on it, and made it more valuable to us, and even parents noticed…

Ms. V: So even simple things would have a big impact.

(Ms. B and Ms. V, elementary school principal and assistant principal, exit interview)

In the preceding passage, the school principal and assistant principal mention a number of their efforts to recognize the languages of their students in the schoolscape, such as multilingual signage, hanging flags of students’ countries of origin, and making morning announcements including the Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. flag in different languages. In the preceding excerpt, a student’s parent who is bilingual in English and Polish was greatly impacted by the visibility of his language in signage in the school hallway, even though the translation was not necessary for him for comprehension purposes. In this case, the visible presence of a language other than English was symbolic, yet still clearly important to the parent.
There are also other examples of multilingual LL enabling participation by families and students who do not speak English, particularly in the schools in our sample where all instruction is in English only. For instance, one school provided a parent center and a parent coordinator in an effort to improve the relationship between schools and families, but they found that parents who did not speak English would stay away. Once they began to translate the materials sent home and bring in volunteer translators (such as school staff who speak languages other than English and parents who are bilingual), they found that parental involvement increased (Ms. S, elementary school assistant principal, exit interview).

One school leader noted that seeing signs in multiple languages helped students make connections between languages. As she said, “they see their languages up and posted, they know and they can make that connection, ‘Oh! This means that, ok’” (Mr. S, elementary school principal, exit interview). It also offers affordances in literacy, as a student described as being on a beginning reading level in English surprised school staff by demonstrating advanced literacy skills when given the chance to read in his home language (Ms. B, elementary school principal, exit interview).

Making students’ languages visible in the schoolscape was also found to be significant as a means to recognize and support student identity. The following is an example of student responses to receiving classroom materials in their home languages and being asked to speak their language in school for the first time:

Ms. V: There was one girl, it was Delila, and she knew a word in Spanish, and I said, “Oh, wow, oh, Delila, you know Spanish?” She said, “Yeah.” I said, “How do you know Spanish?” “Oh, I know it from home.” I said, “That is so special that you know another language.” And she just kind of sat there. She was like, wow … It was really special to see like that look on her face…

Ms. B: Students are not shying away from saying this is my language, this is my culture because it’s being valued in the building.

(Ms. B, elementary school principal, and Ms. V, elementary school teacher, exit interview transcript)

Bringing students’ languages into the classroom through the schoolscape was significant for recognizing students and their language practices. Moreover, this section has detailed how the visual and oral presence of students’ languages in schools had a positive effect on the students and their families in our sample, and was found to be extremely significant to them, either when these efforts were functional (as in the case for non-English speaking students and family members) or symbolic.
7. Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we detail ways that schools participating in the CUNY-NYSIEB project transformed their LL, and how doing so was in many schools tied to the adoption of a heteroglossic view of bilingualism in education, marking a significant ideological shift. We present the changes that school leaders describe having made to the LLs of their school buildings, with images showing examples of the changes made, and to how educators in those schools think about their bilingual students and the languages they speak. We documented many of the ways educators in our sample incorporated their students’ home languages visually and orally in their schools, and how some schools went further, codifying these ideological and pedagogical changes in new programmatic structures and language education policies that are multilingual rather than monolingual.

We found in our study that transforming the physical LL by making students’ languages visible served as a stepping stone for many schools to make further changes. This finding is captured well in an interview with a principal who refers to changing their language displays, for instance by creating and hanging a multilingual welcome sign, as the “early win” and “easy win”:

I think we also went for the early win … Some of the early easy wins were the visuals, so we prioritized that. The next big thing we prioritized were the instructional shifts, so now we’re focusing on language objectives, and resources and materials. (Ms. C, middle school assistant principal, exit interview)

As this principal explained in her interview, the school began by focusing on the school’s signage and displays as their starting point, which then paved the way to making instructional shifts. Later, the school turned their attention towards changing classroom practices, and eventually their language education policy, as theirs was one of the schools that went on to start a formal bilingual education program.

Most of the schools began to address the challenge of increasing the multilingualism of their schools by changing the physical LL as a first step. For instance, multilingual welcome signs in the front hallways were quickly developed and displayed in almost every school, and hallway information likewise was presented in many languages. This transformation alone was extremely significant to students and their families, as described in our findings, and served as an open contestation of the English-only policies and practices that are commonplace in U.S. schooling. At the same time, it was relatively easy for schools to develop multilingual signs and displays – hence the principal quoted above describes doing so as an “easy win,” and identifies the work of transforming instruction as more challenging.
It is important to note that for the purposes of this paper, we focused on ways CUNY-NYSIEB schools made their schoolscapes more multilingual, but this is not to imply that all schools were equally engaged or active in the project. Our findings in fact suggest there was a trajectory of change in the sample of participating schools, starting with the visual LL, moving on to pedagogy and language ideologies, and then making structural changes such as starting a formal bilingual education program. A few schools in our sample just changed their displayed LL in a limited way, and stopped there. Most schools changed both the visual LL and their instructional practices, albeit to varying degrees. Some took this even further to codify new ideologies about language in official language education policies.

On one hand, our findings offer further support for existing research about the LL in schools by reiterating the pedagogical value of multilingual schoolscapes (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Malinowski, 2015; Sayer, 2010). For instance, we showed how the presence of multilingual word walls, books, and other materials offered students the possibility to access course content and participate in classrooms where previously they had been silenced, with a multilingual LL serving both functional and symbolic purposes in schools. Our findings also support research showing how LLs reflect and assert language policies, and how LL is thereby a language policy mechanism (Brown, 2012; Gorter & Cenoz, 2014; Shohamy, 2006, 2015). However, on the other hand, our research differs from that of the past, which has typically focused on the dominance of certain languages at the expense of others, exposing how the LL perpetuates language ideologies and (re)asserts the status of dominant languages. By contrast, our research offers a counter narrative whereby minoritized languages are brought into schoolscapes with the aim of disrupting existing language hierarchies. Specifically, the hegemony of English was challenged when bilingual students’ home languages were brought into the LLs of CUNY-NYSIEB schools, which in some cases led to new multilingual education policies. In this way, our findings suggest that the relationship between LL and language policy may be bidirectional each holding the potential to influence the other.

As demonstrated in this study, examining the visual schoolscape without considering the language practices in classrooms offers only a partial understanding about LL in a given school context. What is more, the English-only policies and practices typical of U.S. schooling can only truly be disrupted when multilingualism in a school's LL is encouraged and corresponds to language education policies that are bi/multilingual. Moving forward, there is a need for further LL research in schools, and especially that which considers not only visible language displays but also the connection between those representations and pedagogy, programming, and language policies.
References


**Appendix A. Semi-structured exit and follow-up interview protocol for principals, assistant principals and lead teachers**

1. What has been your involvement in CUNY-NYSIEB to date (Exit Interview) and/or since the beginning of this school year (Follow-Up Interview)?
2. In what ways, if any, has your participation in CUNY-NYSIEB impacted your thinking and beliefs about emergent bilinguals and bilingualism? Please can you give an example or tell a story to describe this?
3. How would you describe your knowledge base regarding the education of emergent bilinguals prior to participation in CUNY-NYSIEB and how would you describe your knowledge base now?
4. In what ways, if any, has your participation in CUNY-NYSIEB impacted your school’s programming for emergent bilinguals? Please can you give an example or tell a story to describe this?
5. To what extent is bilingualism being regarded as a resource in instruction? Has it changed since the school’s participation in CUNY-NYSIEB?
6. Have any barriers arisen in your efforts to improve your school’s programming and services for emergent bilinguals? If so, please describe these.

**Additional question for principals and/or assistant principals:**

1. To what extent are teachers implementing translanguaging strategies in their classrooms?

**Additional questions for lead teachers:**

1. To what extent, if any, have you observed changes in how your principal (and/or assistant principal, in schools where the AP has been a key player) regards emergent bilinguals and bilingualism?
2. In what ways, if any, has your school’s participation in CUNY-NYSIEB impacted the instruction you provide to emergent bilinguals?

**Abstracto**

En este estudio de investigación cualitativo, examinamos los cambios llevados a cabo en 23 escuelas en la Ciudad de Nueva York que participaron en un proyecto en el cual se les pidió a los planteles participantes que considerasen el bilingüismo como un recurso en la instrucción y que desarrollasen un paisaje lingüístico multilingüe. Los hallazgos documentan los esfuerzos...
hechos por las escuelas para cambiar su paisaje lingüístico reconociendo las muchas culturas y lenguas de los estudiantes, cambios ideológicos significativos y correspondientes por parte de los líderes escolares de perspectivas monolingües a multilingües sobre el lenguaje y el aprendizaje del lenguaje, la incorporación por parte de los educadores de los idiomas de los hogares de los estudiantes en la instrucción y, como resultado de estos esfuerzos, nuevas políticas formales de la enseñanza del lenguaje. Documentamos el impacto de todos estos cambios en los estudiantes y sus familias y sugerimos que las investigaciones sobre el paisaje lingüístico llevadas a cabo en las escuelas deben tomar en cuenta no sólo el paisaje físico, sino además sus conexiones con la pedagogía, la programación y las políticas del lenguaje.

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