

The labels we live by

Ben Goldstein

Some common labels

- 3rd year
- False beginner
- ESL student
- Near native
- Visual
- Introvert
- Time in course
- Proficiency
- Context
- Birthplace
- Learning Style
- Personality

Where do these labels come from and what do they refer to?

- "Tourist"
- "ELF user"
- "Long-term English learner"

1 “Tourist”



“... relies purely on a very finite rehearsed, lexically organised repertoire of situation-specific phrases”.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 33)

> A1

2 “ELF users...”



... “draw on their bilingual or plurilingual resources in order to project cultural identity, signal solidarity with an interlocutor, and prioritize communicative efficiency over correctness according to ENL.”

(Jenkins 2012, 489)

3 Long-term English learner



Enrolled in any of Grades 6 to 12 in the United States for more than six years, has remained at the same English language proficiency level for two or more consecutive years...

... as determined by the English language development test identified or developed pursuant to Section 60810 ...or any successor test.

and scores far below basic or below basic on the English language arts standards-based achievement test administered pursuant to Section 60640,

...or any successor test... California Education Code Section 313.1

Labelling the labels

"Tourist" - educational standard
(negative)

"ELF user" – academic category
(positive)

"Long-term English learner" – social
marker (negative / stigmatizing)

Some parents lie on survey to avoid English learner label for children

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff
11.30.14

Word Count **856**



In this Nov. 10, 2014, photo, Rosaisela Rodriguez (center) reads with her daughter and son, at their home in Pleasant Hill, California. Rodriguez deliberately lied on a school survey that she said her daughter knew Spanish when she enrolled them in school, adding that she did so regardless of whether they are bilingual. Photo: AP Photo/Ben Margot

“ELL” label in the United States

LA schools: California 'English learner' tests incorrectly label bilingual kids

Annie Gilbertson July 16 2014

Arianna Anderson takes a hula class at the George Nakano Theatre at the Torrance Cultural Arts Center. The daughter of a Hawaiian father and Mexican-American mother, Arianna has spent five years in the Los Angeles Unified school district's English learner program. The Andersons believe she didn't belong there in the first place.

BENJAMIN BRAYFIELD/KPCB

SLIDESHOW

THUMBNAILS 1 OF 5



The manufacture of a learner label: false assumptions

- there is a normative period for acquiring English ✘
- current assessment adequately represents English proficiency of multi-linguals ✘
- multilinguals' language systems can be compared to those of monolinguals ✘

Problems with labels

- Imprecise
- Bureaucratic
- Limiting
- Reductive
- Self-fulfilling

Paradigmatic

- General theory
- Formal system based on categorization and empirical truth

Narrative

- **Detailed**
- **Specific**
- **Time-sensitive**
- **Involves human action, affect and intent**

A way forward

FOR OUR COMMUNITY

- Be critical of labels that sell us something “new” or “necessary”.
- Focus on those categories that introduce important concepts (*learner vs user*).

A way forward

FOR YOUR LEARNERS

- Focus on learners' stories not their supposed styles
- Help develop their real voice

A way forward

FOR YOU AS A TEACHER

- Resist self-categorization
- Resist labels that are imposed on you
- Be who you are with your learners

Knowing yourself as a learner is NOT achieved by categorizing yourself according to someone else's paradigm.

IT IS ACHIEVED BY REMEMBERING,
TELLING AND DISCUSSING STORIES
OF YOURSELF AS A LEARNER

Watkins, C. "Meta-learning in the classroom" from "Sage Handbook of Learning", p.325