

Sociolinguistic dimensions of immigration to the United States

Kim Potowski

Since its inception, the U.S. has always been a nation of immigrants. Mainstream national discourses about the presence and value of non-English languages (and their speakers), however, are often negative and view linguistic diversity as a problem. This article summarizes some of the major influences on the national and the linguistic landscape of migratory movements to the U.S.

Keywords: United States, immigration, immersion education.

Dimensiones sociolingüísticas de la inmigración en Estados Unidos. Desde su creación, Estados Unidos ha sido siempre una nación de inmigrantes. Sin embargo, los principales discursos nacionales sobre la presencia y el valor de las lenguas diferentes del inglés (y de sus hablantes) a menudo son negativos y consideran la diversidad lingüística un problema. Este artículo resume alguna de las principales influencias en el panorama nacional y lingüístico de los movimientos migratorios hacia Estados Unidos.

Palabras claves: Estados Unidos, inmigración, inmersión educativa.

Introduction

Since its inception, the U.S. has always been a nation of immigrants. While the proportion of our immigrant population has remained generally steady since the 19th century, the overall numbers of immigrants, as well as the linguistic diversity they represent, has been increasing. What are some of the societal and linguistic ramifications of immigration to the U.S.? In this article, I summarize some of the major influences on the national and the linguistic landscape that migratory movements to the U.S. have had both in the past and in the present, as well as a few predictions for the future.

19th and 20th centuries: Immigration and the “polyglot boarding house”

The geographical area that is today the U.S. has always been ethnolinguistically diverse. In addition to the English settlers, many French, German, and Spanish-speaking populations arrived, in addition

to the already present indigenous Native American groups who spoke a total of over 300 languages. In colonial Pennsylvania, German-speaking immigrants made up about a third of the population and printed newspapers, conducted their businesses, educated their children, and drew up legal contracts all in German. Under the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the U.S. acquired a territory with a French-speaking majority. In fact, Louisiana's governor from 1816-1820, Jacques Villeré, spoke no English when he was elected, and Louisiana's Constitution of 1845 established that the state legislature would conduct business in both French and English. Residents of California have been conducting their lives in Spanish since the Spaniards' arrival in 1542. The first Anglo settler arrived some 275 years later, in about 1820. Thus, the Southwest is full of descendants of Spanish-speakers who are not post-colonial immigrants, but rather whose homelands were annexed by the U.S. In 1880, press publications in German, Yiddish, Spanish, Czech, Polish and Italian languages were very common. Colorado's 1876 constitution was printed in English, Spanish and French, and German maintained such a strong presence that many schoolchildren of German descent received a large portion of their primary education in German up until World War I (Schiffman 1996).

However, the "linguistic culture" (Schiffman 2008) of the U.S. has been one of total assimilation. Kloss (1998) notes that in the 1800s, nativism began primarily as an issue of schooling, as mainstream Americans resented paying taxes to support schools run by Catholics or in languages other than English. Public schools began appearing in the 1830s and took upon themselves the goal of "Americanizing" the children of immigrants. In order to become "good citizens", it was reasoned, they needed to know English. When immigration peaked during the Industrial Revolution, English-speaking U.S. residents resented what they perceived as a lack of willingness on the part of immigrants to assimilate and learn English. For example, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, nativist Americans criticized Italian immigrants' "lack of ability" (or willingness, as some accused) to master English. However, as we will see ahead, they learned English and lost their heritage language just as quickly as other groups.

A speech given by Theodore Roosevelt in 1918 clearly demonstrates the national monolingual ideology of the early twentieth century:

We have room for but one language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, and American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house; and we have room for but one soul [sic] loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people.

Roosevelt’s provocative term *polyglot boarding house* evokes a sense of transience and poverty – a multilingual nation to him represented a type of Babel-esque slum. In fact, knowing English was not considered sufficient to be considered a “true American”; one had to also completely abandon the language of their country of origin as well. Following World War I, the U.S. entered a period of isolationism characterized by “a period of witch-hunting and red-baiting” (Schiffman 2008). The Ku Klux Klan reemerged, not only to terrorize African Americans in the south but also to intimidate French-speaking Quebecois immigrants in Maine (Vermette 2006).

Clearly, this linguistic ideology was based almost entirely on immigration¹. Table 1 displays the proportion of foreign-born individuals in the U.S. between 1850 and 2010:

Year	% foreign born	# foreign born, millions	% change
1850	10.0	2.2	n/a
1890	14.8	9.2	318%
1900	13.7	10.4	13%
1910	14.7	13.5	30%
1920	13.2	13.9	3%
1930	11.6	14.2	2%
1940	8.8	11.6	-18%
1950	6.9	10.4	-10%
1960	5.3	9.7	-7%
1970	4.7	9.6	-1%
1980	6.2	14.1	47%
1990	7.9	19.8	40%
2000	11.1	31.1	57%
2010	13.0	40.2	29%

Table 1. *Proportion of foreign-born population in the U.S.*

We see that the percentage of immigrants in the U.S. reached its highest point during the period from 1890-1920, when 13-15% of the nation’s population was foreign born. However, the concentration of foreign-born individuals was denser in large cities like New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

Table 1 also shows that the proportion of immigrants in the nation today is actually smaller than in the past. But since the overall U.S. population is larger with each Census, there are a greater number of

foreign-born people living in the U.S. today than ever before. For example, the 14.7 percent foreign-born population in 1910 consisted of 13.5 million people, while the 13 percent in 2010 consisted of over 40 million – over triple the number of foreign-born people since 1910. How has this diversity affected the linguistic climate of the U.S. today? How many foreign-born residents are learning English, and are they retaining their heritage languages? These questions are addressed in the next section.

The 21st century

As of the year 2013, the U.S. does not have an official language; there is no law or constitutional amendment establishing a national language. However, 80% of U.S. residents report speaking only English in the home, and for most of these people it is their only language. The other 20% of people in the U.S. – that is, approximately 61 million people – report speaking a language other than English (or “LOTE”) at home. This represents a growth of 158% over the past 30 years². The countries of origin of today’s immigrants have also changed significantly. Whereas Europeans formed the bulk of immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is now groups from Latin America and Asia that are the most numerous among the U.S. foreign born (see Figure 1).

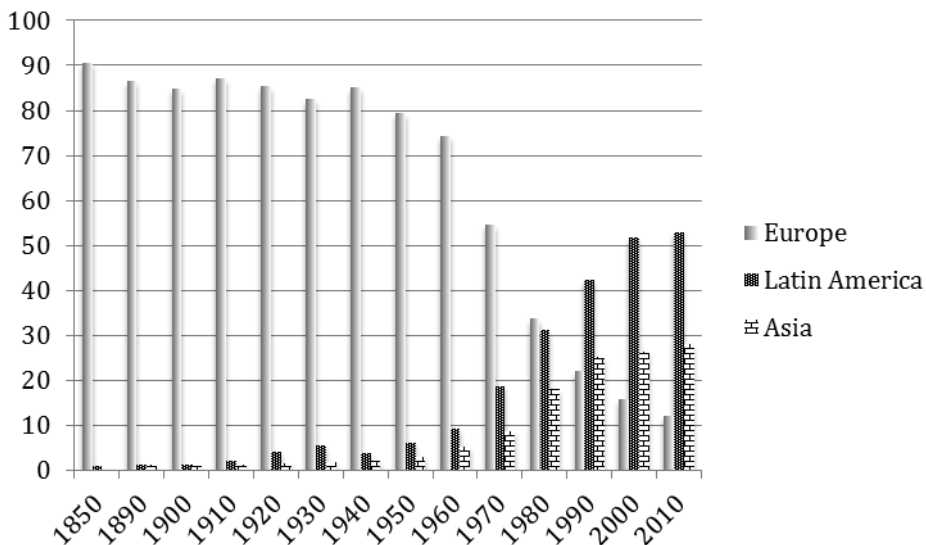


Figure 1. *Origins of U.S. foreign-born population*

This shift in countries of origin has affected the list of LOTEs spoken in the U.S., displayed in numerical order in Table 2.

Ranking	Number of speakers	% of the population	% change 1990 - 2000	% change 2000 - 2007	% of all U.S. LOTE speakers
English Only	225,505,953	80.27%	+8%	+5%	n/a
1. Spanish	34,547,077	12.30%	+62%	+23%	62.31%
2. Chinese	2,464,572	0.88%	+53%	+22%	4.45%
3. Tagalog/Filipino	1,480,429	0.53%	+45%	+21%	2.67%
4. French	1,355,805	0.48%	-3%	-18%	2.45%
5. Vietnamese	1,207,004	0.43%	+99%	+20%	2.18%
6. German	1,104,354	0.39%	-11%	-20%	1.99%
7. Korean	1,062,337	0.38%	+43%	+19%	1.92%
8. Russian	851,174	0.30%	+191%	+20%	1.54%
9. Italian	798,801	0.28%	-23%	-21%	1.44%
10. Arabic	767,319	0.27%	+73%	+25%	1.38%
11. Portuguese	687,126	0.24%	+31%	+22%	1.24%
12. Polish	638,059	0.23%	-8%	-4%	1.15%

Table 2. *Languages spoken in the U.S. (American Community Survey 2007)*

Connecting Figure 1 with Table 2, we see that European languages such as French, German, and Italian have not seen large waves of new arrivals in the last eighty years, and as a result, the number of speakers of these languages has declined. Given current immigration trends, it is likely that Asian languages such as Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Korean will soon displace these three European-origin languages on the list.

Large numbers of immigrants often leads to dense concentration of foreign-born residents in particular areas. For example, according to the 2011 American Community Survey, the largest foreign-born populations in U.S. cities were in New York (3 million), Los Angeles (1.5 million), Houston (593,000) and Chicago (579,000). Yet all regions of the country experienced increases in the foreign-born population, by nearly 90% in the South, 65% in the Midwest, 50% in the West and nearly 40% in the Northeast.

In part (but not solely) due to high percentages of foreign-born individuals concentrated in a geographic space, earlier concerns about immigration are repeating themselves today. Recent immigration patterns have heightened Anglo-American anxieties that English is threatened, along with our national unity and identity. A clear example is the presence of lobby groups such as U.S. English, with 1.8 million members in 2013. In addition, 27 out of 50 U.S. States have Official English laws. Shifts in educational terminology reflect this trend as well.

As part of 2002's federal No Child Left Behind educational act, the *Bilingual Education Act* was retitled the *English Language Acquisition Act*, and the *Federal Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs* (OBEMLA) was renamed the *Office of English Language Acquisition*. "Bilingual" has become almost a dirty word in educational circles, with more and more pressure to shift children to all-English classrooms as soon as possible. California, Arizona, and Massachusetts have eliminated bilingual education in favor of "sheltered English immersion" (see Freeman and Freeman 1998 and Adams 2006 for greater details on structured English immersion), although a similar proposition failed in Colorado.

Public manifestations of xenophobia in popular culture frequently make news headlines. For example, in June 2013, eleven-year-old San Antonio native Sebastien De La Cruz was invited to sing the National Anthem at a San Antonio Spurs basketball game. He did so wearing a Mexican *charro* costume, which incited negative comments in social media outlets, including those who questioned his citizenship status and his "right" to sing the national anthem. A month later, New York-born singer Marc Anthony, whose parents are from Puerto Rico (which is politically part of the U. S.) was also criticized for singing the national anthem at a major league baseball all-star game. Such reactions from the U.S. public, along with multiple smaller daily manifestations such as vitriolic comments on online forums, reveal both tremendous ignorance as well as profound anti-immigration sentiment. Thus, almost a century later, Roosevelt's "polyglot boarding house" ideology is still present in many sectors of the country, and perhaps even more strongly than in the past, given that neither De La Cruz nor Anthony sang in Spanish; the mere idea that they embodied something "foreign" caused many to react negatively to their publicly performing the national anthem.

An interesting fact largely absent from national discourse is that linguistic diversity does not itself cause political problems. For example, Fishman (1991) conducted an analysis of 238 variables in 170 different nation-states, concluding that linguistic heterogeneity could not predict either civil strife or gross national product. Civil strife was related to long- and short-term deprivation and coercive power relationships, while gross national product was connected to issues of modernization and industrialization. Thus, language diversity was not causally related to either civil strife or gross national product; it is not the case that a multilingual society necessarily results in a divided society.

It is also worth noting that today's overall percentage of foreign-born residents who have become naturalized U.S. citizens is the highest level in a quarter of a century and 14 percentage points higher than in 1990 (Passel 2007)³. This suggests that many immigrants are interested in becoming part of the political process and in being productive members of their community. The legal status of the nation's foreign-born

population (Table 3) remains fairly evenly divided between naturalized citizens (11.3 million), legal permanent residents (10.4 million) and unauthorized immigrants (10.3 million). It is often negative attitudes about the unauthorized immigrants that fuels linguistic intolerance towards the other two thirds of foreign-born individuals who are in the country legally.

Group	Proportion (number)
Naturalized citizens	32% (11.3 million)
Legal permanent residents	29% (10.4 million)
Unauthorized	29% (10.3 million)
Refugees	7% (2.5 million)
Temporary legal residents	3% (1.2 million)

Table 3. *Foreign-born population gaining naturalization*
Based on Passel (2007)

Two additional questions related to the foreign-born are these: To what extent are they learning English? And are they also retaining their heritage languages? The next section addresses these questions.

English language learning and heritage language maintenance

Even as the proportion of U.S. households that do not speak English has grown in number, the percentage of people in the U.S. who speak English proficiently has remained fairly steady. Most recent Census data shows that among those who speak another language, 78% said they speak English “well” or “very well” (up slightly from 75% in 2007) while only 22% said they speak English “not well” or “not at all.” And those who say they speak English less than “well” tend to belong to immigrant groups. A 2007 survey of Hispanic families, for example, found that 23% of immigrants reported speaking English “very well,” but the figure jumped to 88% in the second generation – that is, among children born in the United States to immigrant parents – and to 94% in the third generation. A 2005 report from the Migration Policy Institute likewise found that 80% or more of third-generation Vietnamese, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Indians spoke only English.

Even the most recently arrived groups exhibit patterns of language use that suggest that the adoption of English is well underway (McKay and Wong 2000: 81). Veltman (2000), for example, found that after zero to five years in the U.S., 20 percent of immigrants aged 0-14 at the time of arrival had already adopted English as their preferred, usual language. After five additional years, the number rose to 40 percent. In

addition, Veltman found that younger people today are more likely to adopt English than their older peers did when they were young. This is the trend all over the U.S. and is likely due to urbanization, universal education, mass communication, and greater regional integration into the national economy.

In spite of this abundant evidence of rapid acquisition of English, among some observers, today's large numbers of new immigrants create the impression of a lack of linguistic assimilation. In his 2004 book titled *Who are we?*, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington worried about the collapse of the U.S. national identity due in part to the persistence of Spanish among Mexican immigrants. "There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society," writes Huntington, and "Mexican-Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English." However, Huntington would need look no further than the second generation of Mexicans in the U.S., who are typically English-dominant, and the third generation, who are often monolingual in English, to see that these concerns are largely unfounded. One recent development that has disturbed the migration pattern of some Mexican nationals, however, may in fact contribute to Huntington's alarm. Typically, families would make a few trips to the U.S. lasting several months to a year to earn money, and then return permanently to Mexico. But as border security has tightened, it has become more dangerous and expensive to make these trips, so many have settled in the U.S. Yet given that the majority (60%) of U.S. Latinos are born in the U.S. and grow up to become either English dominant or English monolingual, there is no strong evidence supporting Huntington's argument.

Thus, contrary to the fears of Huntington (2004) or groups such as "U.S. English", there is no evidence that any minority language group is resisting English. In spite of the undeniable existence of linguistic assimilation in the U.S., we might view such assimilation as existing on a continuum, with absolute heritage language loss and English monolingualism on one end, and fluent bilingualism on the other. According to Portes and Schauffler (1996: 25), it is "the character of the immigrant community—its internal diversity, history, and cohesiveness—that seems to hold the key to whether second generation children successfully combine two languages."

As we have just seen, immigrants to the U.S. are learning English, most likely at a faster speed than in the past. But acquiring English does not have to mean abandoning the family language. Unfortunately, however, this is almost always the case in the U.S. In fact, according to Veltman (2000), no immigrant group in the history of the nation has been able to preserve its language longer than two or three generations; the only possible exceptions appear to be isolated religious communities such as the Amish and Hassidic Jews. The most common scenario is that the

grandchildren of immigrants not to develop proficiency in their family's non-English language. Some research suggests that shift to English may be happening even more quickly than that. In 2006, Rumbaut, Massey and Bean (2006) found that the "life expectancy" of five languages in southern California (Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean) was no more than two generations. That is, Spanish can be expected to begin to die out with the children of immigrants, and not be spoken well or at all by the grandchildren of immigrants – and the Asian languages die out even faster, often not being spoken well by the children of immigrants. This led the authors to propose the idea of the U.S. as a "linguistic graveyard" (2006: 458). At least one international study suggests that, among 35 different world nations, in no other country is the rate of mother tongue shift toward monolingualism in the national dominant language as fast as in the United States (Lieberson, Dalto, and Johnston 1975).

It is worth mentioning that immigrants abandon their heritage languages for a variety of reasons including peer pressure, lack of opportunity to use the language, or fear that it will interfere with their ability to learn English or get ahead in American society. As noted by Tse (2001: 33), "[w]hereas knowing English may bring prestige and acceptance, speaking another language – especially a low-status language – can do the opposite" by causing shame for being different or attracting xenophobic reactions in others. Even so, loss of the heritage language can have serious negative consequences. It can create feelings of linguistic insecurity (Krashen 1998) and identity loss (Fought 2006). Zhou and Bankston (2000a) argue that loss of heritage language and identity leads some students to engage in delinquent behavior at school in the quest for a new identity. Particularly devastating is the weakening of the family, as parental authority is often diminished when parents and children cannot communicate with each other, and elders can no longer transmit family and ethnic values (Rodriguez 1981; Tse 2001: 52; Wong-Fillmore 1991).

Two additional arenas in which immigration-related multilingualism affects the U.S. landscape are education and legal rights/access to services.

Education

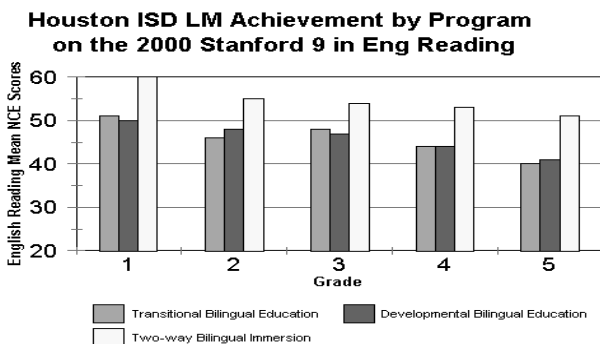
In 2011, fully 22% of all U.S. school-aged children spoke a language other than English at home, a figure that has more than doubled since 1979. The field concerned with helping children learn English as well as their school subjects – referred to as "bilingual education" or "English as a Second Language" (ESL) – is clearly affected by these changes. They must determine which programs are most successful for these students and prepare capable instructors to teach them. Four major program

models for these students are as follows (see Baker 2011 for more about these program models):

- a) *Sheltered immersion*⁴ (see also Freeman and Freeman 1998 and Adams 2006).
- b) *Transitional* bilingual education, which offers instruction in the home language for 3-5 years until students are deemed ready for all-English classrooms. At that time, home language instruction ceases.
- c) *Developmental* bilingual education, where some degree of home language instruction continues even after children are transitioned into all-English classrooms.
- d) *Two-way bilingual immersion*, where 50-90% of school content is delivered in the home language during the entire schooling period, and (ideally) half of the students are English speakers whose parents enroll them so that they can learn the minority language.

A fact that may at first seem counter-intuitive is that educational programs that use the heritage language actually result in **higher** levels of English and overall academic proficiency than programs that immerse children in all-English instruction (Thomas & Collier 2002; Lindholm-Leary 2001). Figure 2, for example, compares the standardized test outcomes of Latino students learning English in Houston, TX, in

English reading



English math

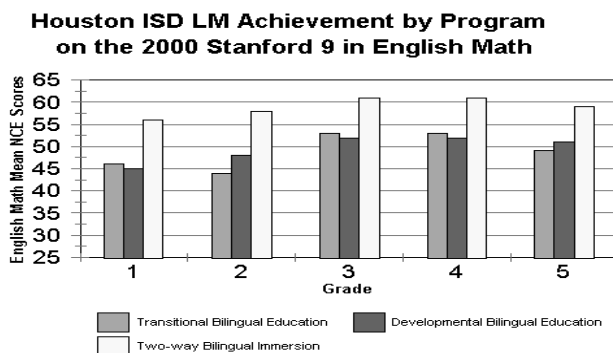


Figure 2. *Achievement outcomes in three educational program types*

Similar results have been documented in programs around the nation. In addition to better performance in English and overall academics, the positive effects of dual immersion include stronger proficiency in the home language. Thus, they are seen by most scholars of language and education as the most desirable way to educate language minority students.

Regarding adult immigrants, an important factor in the U.S. language equation is the acute lack of accessible and well-taught English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in many communities. In some cases, when ESL classes are available, some individuals cannot take advantage of them due to scheduling problems involved with holding more than one job (which can entail working up to 16 hours per day) or problems with transportation or childcare. But the biggest problem seems to be lack of availability of affordable ESL classes. A 2006 study found that 60% of the free ESL programs in 12 states had waiting lists, ranging from a few months in Colorado and Nevada to as long as two years in New Mexico and Massachusetts (Tucker 2006). In 2005 there were 1.2 million adults enrolled in ESL courses, which is about one in ten of those who reported speaking English “Less than very well” or “Not at all” (National Center for Educational Statistics 2005). The federal government provides money for such classes, but each state decides how much of these funds to spend on ESL classes. According to Santos (2007), advocates for more English classes argue that this state-federal financing split leaves a system whose quality varies widely from state to state, and is lacking most everywhere.

Rather than blame the victims of these shortages, Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, where the immigrant population tripled between 1990 and 2010, sponsored a bill in 2006 that would have given legal immigrants \$500 vouchers to pay for English classes since so many of the free ones were full. As he stated, “Most education policy is the

prerogative of state and local governments, but I would argue that the prerogative to help people learn our common language is a federal responsibility” and that “If we make it easier for people to learn English, they will learn it. I think that ought to be a priority of our government, and I don’t think it has been” (Santos 2007a). The idea was resurrected in 2009 as the *Strengthen and Unite Communities with Civics Education and English Skills Act* of 2009, which addressed demands for ESL by offering tax benefits for ESL instructors. However, the bill was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor and has not moved forward since that time.

Senator Alexander’s position of actually helping immigrants attend ESL classes stands in stark contrast to the idea that passing laws forbidding the use of non-English languages will somehow promote greater English learning. That is, some Americans seek to promote English language acquisition through legislative means. In 2007, there were three bills proposed to make English the official language of the U.S. (S133, HR 769 and HR 997). Although all three were referred to subcommittees but never came up for a vote, this clearly demonstrates that some lawmakers and their constituents, much like the large lobbying groups English Only and U.S. English, feel a need to officially protect and promote English. With immigration reform now a top issue on the national scene, several senators are attempting to introduce such amendments to the Senate’s bipartisan immigration reform bill (currently, U.S. law requires immigrants to demonstrate the ability to read, write and speak “basic English” prior to becoming naturalized, but this often goes unenforced). Amendment proposals filed in 2013 by Senators Inhofe and Fischer would:

- Make English the official language of the federal government;
- Protect private employers who have English-on-the-job policies from “frivolous EEOC language discrimination” lawsuits;
- Require federal entities to report the amount of taxpayer dollars spent each year on translation and interpreter costs;
- Require immigrants to demonstrate English proficiency prior to applying for a green card.

As of 2013, 27 states have declared English their official language, while only three states have any kind of protected bilingualism (Hawaii, Louisiana, and New Mexico)⁵. And although Native American languages are official or co-official on many reservations, language loss among Native American communities has been systematic (McCarty 2010).

The truth is that such laws do very little to provide any practical assistance to anyone who is trying to learn English. According to the Institute for Language and Education Policy (Crawford 2006), “official English” policies are unnecessary at best, and punitive, divisive, and

self-defeating at worst. Far from simply seeking to promote English proficiency, ulterior motives for such laws might lie elsewhere. Urcioli (2001), for example, argues that race has been remapped from biology onto language. In past discourses on race, it was posited that there were inherently superior and inferior races, each with intellectual traits attributed to them. Such arguments have become less acceptable in public discourse, but language is seen as fair game, allowing it in many cases to become a proxy for discrimination. Unlike biological race, however, most people think that individuals can and should control their language; if they do not, it is considered acceptable for them to suffer the economic consequences. Urcioli contends that what drives movements like the English Language Amendment is precisely such mapping of race onto language. Race ideology emphasized the importance of compartmentalization such that the inferior would not contaminate the superior; acknowledging any languages other than English with official status would permit such “contamination.”

It is ironic what we invest so much time and resources in foreign language instruction – over 1.6 million enrollments in colleges and universities alone according to 2009 survey data (Modern Language Association 2010) – yet we squander our nation’s heritage language resources. This is particularly egregious considering the amount of time it takes for the typical foreign or second language learner to reach high levels of proficiency. Data compiled over decades by the Foreign Service Institute reveal that the average learner needs between 2,400 and 2,760 hours to reach a level of working professional proficiency in Chinese. Translated into classroom seat time, this is between 80 and 92 weeks of 30 contact hours per week (McGinnis 1994). Taken together with the sociocultural knowledge that heritage speakers develop at home, it seems highly economical to tap into our national heritage language resources.

In fact, sections of the U.S. government have increasingly come to recognize the importance of identifying and encouraging the maintenance and enhancement of these national linguistic resources. In May 2007, General Dynamics Information Technology was awarded a contract by the U.S. Department of Defense National Security Education Program to develop a national volunteer civilian National Language Service Corps. Members of that Corps would be available for federal activation during times of international crisis, national emergency, or to fulfill other national needs. The presumption is that for such a program to be worth the money invested in it, a significant number of diverse heritage language speakers need to be not only identified, but also encouraged to retain their heritage languages. In this vein, several states including California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia offer students foreign language or general credit for their studies at a heritage language school (ACTFL 2008), and as of

2013, school districts in Illinois can recognize graduating high school students who demonstrate high levels of competency in English and one or more languages. “Saturday schools” are very popular in some heritage language communities, and can contribute to heritage language development and maintenance.

When these students get to high school and college, they come into contact with the field of foreign language education, which refers to them as “heritage speakers” of the non-English language. Heritage speakers are different from traditional foreign language learners in many ways (Valdés 2000; Potowski and Carreira 2004), so foreign language educators must accommodate instructional materials and methodologies for these students, who often become bored in classes that are designed for foreign language students and thus do not address their own linguistic and cultural profiles. There is a large and growing body of literature about the needs of heritage language students and best practices in teaching them, including work published in journals such as the *Heritage Language Journal* as well as in numerous books and other sources. Considering the largest group of heritage speakers, however – those of Spanish – the majority do not have access to specialized heritage speaker courses. At the secondary level, just nine percent of high schools surveyed in 1997 offered heritage Spanish speaker instruction (Rhodes and Branaman 1999). In the early 2000s, the National Foreign Language Center and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (Ingold, Rivers, Tesser and Ashby 2002) found that only 18% of the college and university programs surveyed had Spanish for heritage speaker classes, although a more recent study (Beaudrie 2012) found that 40% of universities nationwide are now offering heritage Spanish speaker courses, an increase of 45% since 1990.

Legal rights and access to services

We have seen that linguistic diversity does not create conflict nor threaten national unity. What undoubtedly poses a greater threat to national unity and leads to greater conflict among communities is the bullying of immigrants⁶ and language minority groups. Examples of linguistic bullying include cases such as the 38 drivers in Dallas, TX, who were issued citations for “not speaking English” between 2006–2009, although such a law does not exist in that city (Martinez 2009); the high school student in Kansas City suspended for speaking Spanish in the hallways (Reid 2005); a teacher in Phoenix who hit children for speaking Spanish in class (Ryman and Madrid 2004); two Vietnamese-Americans chastised for speaking Vietnamese at a graduation ceremony (Pleasant 2008). Even though the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission states that mandating that employees speak English on the job constitutes national origin discrimination⁷, there have been

nationally-publicized cases such as that of two employees in New York who were fired for speaking Spanish during breaks (Valenti 2003).

Such conflicts over language may in fact be mostly symbolic, hiding other fundamental cleavages that continue to exist in the U.S. For example, McKay and Wong (2000: 45) argue that the debate over bilingual education is in part a battle over the demographic composition of the nation: One side wants to control borders and assimilate immigrant children, while the other accepts that diversity is here to stay, showing a reflection of the rest of the world, and should be a hallmark of the nation's policy and planning. Lopez (1991: 133) posits that much of the controversy over language in the U.S. has obscured (or perhaps served as a proxy for) racial hostility and conflict. Although the fixation over language policy as a means to increasing equity and opportunities for minorities may lead to the neglect of other more fundamental problems, those involved in language education see an opportunity to promote linguistic pluralism, particularly when faced with an ever-growing population of heritage language learners.

But even those who agree that official English policies are unnecessary may ask themselves: "Why should the U.S., where 80 percent of the citizens are monolingual English speakers, provide services like voting, driver's licenses, and those of other agencies in non-English languages? Doesn't this take away all incentive for immigrants to learn English?" If we refer back to the acute lack of ESL classes and the long waiting lists to enroll, we may conclude the following: While there may be some individuals who feel they can live life in the U.S. perfectly well in their non-English language – particularly the elderly – it is generally the case that immigrants realize all too well the need for English to get ahead economically and secure the futures of their families, and many are diligently trying to enroll in ESL courses. We must also keep in mind that the children of immigrants will be English-dominant and have no need for such courses.

Regarding the issue of translating public services, in 2008 Mayor Bloomberg of New York City signed Executive Order 120, probably the boldest act of its kind in the nation. It requires every city agency that has direct interaction with customers to provide language assistance in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Italian and French Creole, with a telephone-based service linked to interpreters who speak Urdu, Hindi, Arabic and dozens of other languages. According to Mayor Bloomberg (Santos 2008):

The fundamental basis of government is its interaction with its citizens. If people don't know what we do, don't know what they should do, what the law requires them to do, don't know how to get services, all the money that we're spending providing those services, providing those laws, is meaningless.

That is, language assistance programs for immigrants link them to the services that the host communities have already decided to provide them, services which contribute to the overall wellbeing of the immigrants, their neighbors, and their surrounding communities. Given the contributions of immigrants to the national economy (Orrenius 2003)⁸, there is no reason for the mainstream not to assist them in acquiring services they need and in exercising their rights. However, as noted earlier, given that a portion of the U.S. mainstream shows great hostility when, for example, U.S.-born Hispanics enact public performances of the national anthem *in English*, they certainly reject even the most minor presence of non-English languages, such as those on public signage or in telephone prompts offering “*Para español, marque el número dos*” (“For Spanish, press two”).

This section has outlined several sociolinguistic effects of immigration in the U.S. A final point that is rather minor but merits mention is more structural than social. For the period of time that non-English languages remain in use among U.S. families – even though this is usually no more than three generations – they undergo intense contact with English, which typically results in the development of contact features. For example, many languages in the U.S. undergo verbal simplification (see Silva-Corvalán 1994 for Spanish), adopt English lexical borrowings as well as semantic and syntactic extensions, and speakers often code-switch between English and the other language. The chapters in Potowski (2010) document specific examples of such linguistic phenomena in the top 12 non-English languages spoken in the U.S. (listed in Table 2).

Into the future

Despite some of the troubling conditions outlined in this article, there have been signs of improvement in our national linguistic culture. Counterforces have begun to appear that challenge a monolingual ideology⁹. Some national groups, such as the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages (National Heritage Language Resource Center 2007) as well as city-based efforts like those in San Bernadino, California (Sauerwein 2003) and in Chicago (Multilingual Chicago, n.d.), have declared appreciation of the multilingual character of these cities and seek to promote the learning of English *in addition* to the maintenance of heritage languages by immigrant children. This goal of English acquisition with heritage language maintenance has been referred to as *English Plus*. Crawford (2006: 7) describes English Plus in the following way:

This approach begins with the recognition that, of course, we should pursue the goal of English proficiency for all Americans. But while English is necessary, it is not sufficient in today’s world. To prosper

economically and to provide security for our people, we need well-developed skills in English, plus other languages. Step one is to conserve and develop, not destroy, the language resources we already have. Rather than treating bilingualism as a nuisance or a threat, we should exploit our diversity to enrich the lives of individuals and foster the nation's interests, while encouraging ethnic tolerance and safeguarding civil rights.

“English Plus” is consistent with Richard Ruiz’ (1984) conception of language as a resource. Ruiz proposed three fundamental orientations toward language diversity: *language-as-a-problem*, *language-as-a-right*, and *language-as-a-resource*. According to the first paradigm, linguistic diversity is quite simply a “problem” that needs to be solved; this was historically the dominant position in the U.S. and is still quite strong among the population today. Language-as-a-right advocates insist that people have the right to speak minority languages, but also tend to view these languages as a problem with regard to school achievement (although their “solutions” tend not to involve discrimination against students and their communities). For the language-as-a-resource orientation, linguistic diversity is considered of national value and something that should be appreciated and developed both within schools as well as in larger society¹⁰. Most laypeople and scholars alike agree that immigrants to the U.S. should learn English and should learn it well. However, many feel that this goal should not require the abandonment of the heritage language; promoting linguistic diversity and helping immigrants learn English are not contradictory goals. Rather than the U.S. as a “melting pot,” a model such as one of *selective acculturation* could provide a healthier framework for integrating immigrant groups into mainstream activities while simultaneously encouraging ethnolinguistic diversity. That is, immigrants and their descendants can and should exercise the right to maintain their ethnic language and not compromise their U.S. citizenship or their perceived “Americanness.”

Another glimpse into the future is provided by Xiao (2011), citing others who have claimed that the 21st century will be the “Chinese century.” China’s emerging status on the world stage could impact the maintenance of Chinese in the U.S. if, for example, the Chinese government invests in heritage language programs and periods of study abroad in Chinese-speaking nations for Chinese-American youth. Heritage speaker courses in elementary and secondary schools in Chinese as well as in other languages might boost young people’s linguistic confidence and the total number of speakers of these languages.

With immigration constituting a whopping 80% of the total U.S. population growth between 2000-2010 (Camarota 2012) and showing no signs of abating, it is in the nation’s best interest that these individuals be well educated. Educational research has shown that dual language

education is extraordinarily successful for the learning of English, content areas, and literacy in the heritage language. As noted by Valdés (2011), “if a society views dual cultural and ethnic membership as positive, and if children are made to feel that there are no insurmountable contradictions in belonging to two groups,” it is more likely that they will develop into bilingual and bicultural individuals.

It remains to be seen whether the U.S. population will grow in its appreciation of diversity and embrace people who use non-English languages in public forums. The recent cases of backlash against De La Cruz and Anthony, individuals from non mainstream Anglo origins who in fact use English in public forums, suggests that as a nation we have a long way to go.

Kim Potowski
The University of Illinois at Chicago
Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies
60607 – Chicago, IL – U.S.
kimpotow@uic.edu

Notes

- ¹ Even though technically all languages in the U.S. are “immigrant” languages except for Native American languages.
- ² For an interactive map of where these languages are spoken, see the website of the American Community Survey (2011).
- ³ This increase was not due to any significant change in the total number of non-citizen legal permanent residents, which was 11.8 million in 2005 and 11.5 million in 1995. Also, the number of unauthorized immigrants grew from 20 to 31% of the foreign-born between 1995 and 2005, so this ten-year period saw a growth “among both the most and the least rooted of immigrants” (Passel 2007).
- ⁴ Total immersion in English, commonly known as “sink or swim,” is technically illegal based on the 1974 court case *Lau v. Nichols*. That is, all schools are legally obliged to provide some kind of assistance to children who do not yet know English.
- ⁵ Hawaiian was declared a co-official language in Hawaii in 1978. In Louisiana, English and French are both legally recognized, although there is no official state language. New Mexico was declared “English plus” in 1989, with Spanish as the *de facto* second language.
- ⁶ It is outside of the scope of this article to detail the deplorable problems faced by many immigrants, such as workplace abuse, factory raids, and immigrant-targeted homicides among others.
- ⁷ The EEOC stipulates that an employer can impose an English-only rule solely when necessary for conducting business.
- ⁸ This report states the following: “The pace of recent U.S. economic growth would have been impossible without immigration. Since 1990, immigrants have contributed to job growth in three main ways: They fill an increasing share of jobs overall, they take jobs in labor-scarce regions, and they fill the types of jobs that native workers often shun. The foreign-born make up only 11.3 percent of the U.S. population and 14 percent of the labor force. But amazingly, the flow of foreign-born is so large that immigrants currently account for a larger share of labor force growth than natives.” (p. 16).

- ⁹ Of related interest are groups that seek to promote linguistic diversity worldwide, such as Enduring Voices (National Geographic 2008) and Living Tongues (2007).
- ¹⁰ Urcioli (2001), however, argues that “there is a false dichotomy between ‘diversity-as-a-wonderful-garden’ and ‘diversity-as-polluting-and-dangerous.’ It is false because it positions language as a ‘thing’ in a neat package that maps neatly onto ethnic, regional, racial, or national types of people.” These debates have such teeth because “people can’t leave them alone: they feel compelled to take and defend positions because these are not debates about language so much as they are about being ‘American.’ Hence the moral edge” (2001:191).

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