

CHAPTER 20

Bad Language—Bad Citizens

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*Is some language better than other language? Most people in most places feel that the answer is obviously “yes,” while anthropologists and linguists see the answer as “no.” Edwin Battistella looks at different kinds of language that tend to be evaluated negatively in his book *Bad Language: Are Some Words Better Than Others?* He considers bad writing, bad grammar, bad words, bad citizens, and bad accents. Judgments of all five of these could be regarded as arbitrary; they are socially determined, and they vary across time and space. But people within any given society see their judgments as natural, inevitable, and right.*

Linguists often distinguish between **prescriptive** and **descriptive** grammar. Prescriptive grammar is what we learn in school, telling us what we should say or write: “Don’t say *Him and me went*; the proper form is *He and I*.” “Make sure the items in a list are parallel.” Descriptive grammar, by contrast, analyzes what people actually say.

In many places in the world, multilingualism gives rise to formulas and policies that have value judgments attached to them, giving preferential treatment to one language or another. Some nations have officially designated languages while others—including the United States—do not. The Académie Française in France and the Real Academia Española in Spain offer pronouncements about how to protect, preserve, and improve their languages. In some countries, such as China, minority language rights are recognized in the constitution. In some countries, such as India, the officially recognized national languages are enumerated in the constitution. Some countries, such as Israel, recognize several official languages (Hebrew, Standard Arabic, English).

There are clear decisions that must be made when institutions such as government or education are involved: Which language(s) should be used? What are the positions of other languages? Should efforts be made to protect minority languages? Are national efforts primarily directed toward assimilation or toward diversity and pluralism?

How linguistic diversity is regarded depends on a number of underlying principles, and in many countries, these principles change over time, along with other historical factors. In this chapter, Battistella chronicles some of the ways multilingualism has been regarded in the United States.

Reading Questions

- What were the dominant concerns of the founders of the United States with regard to language?
- What attitudes did pre-twentieth-century Americans display toward linguistic diversity? What attitudes did they hold toward assimilation or cultural pluralism?

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- What seems to account for waves of concern about an official language?
- What are the similarities and differences among attitudes toward foreign language learning, deaf manualism, Native American language, bilingual education, and English-only legislation?

In a 1917 speech, Theodore Roosevelt famously made the link between speaking the English language and good American citizenship, saying that

We must have one flag. We must also have one language.... The greatness of this nation depends on the swift assimilation of the aliens she welcomes to her shores. Any force which attempts to retard that assimilative process is a force hostile to the highest interests of our country.¹

For Roosevelt, language was both a symbol of national unity, like the flag, and a means of creating that unity, by swift assimilation of immigrants to American language, customs, and values. For many, the foreign languages of immigrants, to the extent that they were maintained rather than given up, were a form of bad language that got in the way of their adoption of American speech and values.

[Elsewhere] I have examined how differences of grammar and vocabulary lead to judgments about speakers. The same is true of retention of foreign languages, which has often been seen as unpatriotic, uneducated, or separatist. [Here] I focus on American attitudes toward languages other than English, beginning with some history and case studies and moving forward to contemporary issues of English-only and **bilingual education**. In looking at the urge to assimilate other languages, my aim is to explore why some see foreign languages as making bad citizens.

BIRTH OF A NATION

The United States began as a developing nation. Much early American discussion of language issues focused on the relative merits of American versus British usage and whether British English should continue to be the standard in the United States. Writers like Benjamin Franklin, who helped to set standards for American prose style—and who were successful writers in part because their prose style satisfied English critics—argued for British standards. As historian Daniel Boorstin notes, Franklin wrote to his friend David Hume in 1760 that he hoped that “we in America make the best English of this Island our standard.”² John Pickering likewise argued that attention to English standards was necessary for literary appreciation, scientific communication, and international respect. Pickering cited English criticisms of American usage and remarked that, while the American language had changed less than might have been expected, “it has in so many instances departed from the English standard, that our scholars should lose no time in endeavoring to restore it to its purity, and to prevent further corruption.”³

On the other hand, writers like Thomas Jefferson and Noah Webster were proponents of an American language. Jefferson argued that language planning should look to the future by expanding the vocabulary so that English would be an appropriate vehicle for new knowledge. In a letter of 1813 stressing usage and innovation over grammar and tradition, Jefferson suggested that the new United States would require a certain amount of new vocabulary and that language, like government, ought to follow the will of the people.⁴ Jefferson’s own writing was criticized for using novel words and, in an 1820 letter to John Adams, Jefferson wrote, “I am a friend to neology. It is the only way to give a language copiousness and euphony,” adding that “Dictionaries are but the depositories of words legitimated by usage.”⁵

Noah Webster had a businessman’s interest in creating an independent American economy. He also had a revolutionary’s interest in creating a unified and independent American culture and language.⁶ He wrote that “Custom, habits, and *language*, as well as government, should be national. America should have her *own* language distinct from all the world.”⁷ In addition, Webster saw American usage as reflecting a conservatism that had been given up by British grammarians. In his view, the best speech was that of the American gentleman farmers, whom he saw as different from the English peasants—as better educated, landowning, and independent.

Webster also feared that copying British manners would mean carrying over British linguistic vices to the new American nation. As literary scholar David Simpson emphasizes, Webster saw the establishment of an American language as a way to recapture the former purity of the English language before its corruption by the London court and the English theater.⁸ This view arose in part from Webster’s Puritan suspicion of ornamentation, though disdain for the language of the court was also characteristic of reformers like Bishop Lowth. Webster’s distaste was particularly aimed at the language of writers like Samuel Johnson, which he viewed as pompous and antiquated. He believed that freed of British vices, educated usage in America would reflect principles of rational analogy and would preserve a uniformity of American speech against both literary affectation and dialect variation. And he hoped that adopting such a version of English, together with access to land and an egalitarian commercial environment, would preserve the social and moral health of America. As Simpson explains, Webster worried that Americans who adopted contemporary British speech habits would create disharmony in their own communities by introducing the class distinctions of England. Historian Kenneth Cmiel notes that such attitudes were common—many expressed a “fear of aristocratic overrefinement, of

using civil forms solely to maintain social distinctions.”⁹ But fears of refinement were balanced by a sense that eloquence was necessary for participation in political affairs. Cmiel notes that “even radicals understood that entrance to public life demanded verbal felicity.”¹⁰

The dispersion of the population in America and the distance from British cultural standards also raised concerns that linguistic corruption would follow from the lack of a cultural center. **Standardization** of usage was a concern to some of the political founders of the United States. One solution entertained was the establishment of a legal authority to govern language, with John Adams advocating that Congress establish a national academy to **standardize** usage and pronunciation. Adams feared a natural degeneration of English and saw a national academy promoting the study of English (and other languages) as key to diplomatic goals.¹¹ Adams, who was often characterized as a monarchist, was careful to stress the democratic effect of a common standard. In 1780 he wrote that, with a public standard in place, “eloquence will become the instrument for recommending men to their fellow citizens, and the principal means of advancement through the various ranks and offices of society.”¹² Adams also stressed that he was not advocating a new American language. He wrote that “[w]e have not made war against the English Language, any more than against the old English character,” and he suggested that an academy would be an American accomplishment of something that England had not succeeded in doing.¹³ The Continental Congress, however, did not place a high priority on a national academy, and the proposal never emerged from the committee studying it. While an official English Academy was never established, there does not seem to have been much doubt that English was intended as the de facto **standard language**. As John Jay noted in the *Federalist Papers*: “Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government.”¹⁴

In colonial and post-Revolution discussions of language, we find the familiar theme of choosing a standard. Here the choice was between British and American styles and involved considerations of simplicity, commonness, and refinement. The discussion of an American language was embedded in larger discussions of American and British culture, and language played an important role in defining an American identity that could be linked to the best of English values and culture yet remain separate from perceived English vices. A separate American language was seen as a means of representing and maintaining international status and of accommodating new knowledge and situations.

NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES

The founders of America understood the need to accommodate various European linguistic groups, as a means of fostering support for the revolution and as a means of encouraging settlement. While many of the founders were

sympathetic toward the learning of other languages, broader public attitudes toward foreign and minority languages have often been indifferent or hostile. In this section and the next, I look at two case studies of attempts at assimilation—Native American languages and the sign language of the deaf. While these cases are very different, what stands out is the way that language differences are seen as a social problem.

From colonial times, European settlers’ attitudes toward Native Americans often focused on civilizing and Christianizing, in part by forcing Native Americans to speak English. From the early 1800s, Congress provided funds for missionary Indian schools that promulgated official government views about land holding and resettlement. By the late 1800s, as the military was more capable of policy enforcement in the West, the government became much more directive toward Native Americans. As John Reyhner notes, when Congress ended treaty making in 1871, policy shifted from relocation to assimilation, and the government became involved in the operation of Indian schools.¹⁵ A report of the Commissioner for Indian Affairs in 1878 advocated removal of children from the influence of reservation life (and from parents) and proposed the creation of boarding schools. Prototype schools were developed in 1878 at the Hampton Institute in Virginia and in 1879 at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, a converted army barracks. By 1902 almost 10,000 children had been relocated to twenty-five Indian boarding schools where English-only rules were enforced by corporal punishment. Also during this period, mission schools that had been instructing students in Bible studies using their native languages were forced to conduct instruction only in English in order to retain federal funds.

Federal policy of the late 1800s was exemplified by the views of J. D. C. Atkins, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. In his 1887 annual report, Atkins cited the report of a commission on Indian conditions the previous year, which advocated that “barbarous dialects should be blotted out, and the English language substituted.” The report also linked assimilation of language to assimilation of thought and behavior, in language that foreshadows Orwell’s theme of language as a mechanism of conformity and social control:

Through sameness of language is produced sameness of sentiment, and thought; customs, and habits are moulded and assimilated in the same way, and thus in process of time the differences producing trouble would have been gradually eliminated.¹⁶

Adopting the majority language, in his view, would assimilate Indians to the majority perspective. Atkins went on to say that Indians “must be taught the language which they must use in transacting business with the people of this country. No unity or community of feeling can be established among different peoples unless they are brought to speak the same language.”¹⁷

Assimilationism remained the main policy direction in Indian affairs well into the twentieth century, though a shift away from the assimilationist perspective did occur in the 1930s. The Meriam Report of 1928, an extensive survey of

social and economic conditions sponsored by the Institute of Government Research, criticized the practice of breaking up Native American families and the practices of the boarding schools. The report led to such federal legislation as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which promoted self-determination and cultural pluralism. Federally sponsored day schools were also established to provide English training with less disruption of the family and community. During World War II, however, funding was reallocated to the war effort. After the war, assimilationism reemerged as a way of encouraging Native American urbanization, and a policy of terminating reservations emerged in the 1950s.

During the New Frontier and Great Society era, termination efforts were challenged and policy again shifted to ways of combining federal assistance with self-determination. President Lyndon Johnson called for the end to termination efforts in his March 1968 Special Message to Congress, "The Forgotten American," and won passage of the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968. The Nixon administration continued efforts to support self-determination, with the Indian Education Act of 1972 strengthening Indian control of education in their communities. In addition, the tribal college movement begun in the 1960s expanded Native American higher education. Most recently, the 1990 Native American Languages Act made it policy to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages."¹⁸ Among other things, the act encouraged Native American language survival and recognized the rights of tribes to use Native American languages as a medium of instruction in federally funded schools.

The support for Native American languages is a case in which the policy of assimilation and termination was recognized as counterproductive in a variety of ways—socially, educationally, and culturally. Earlier policies of relocation to boarding schools, restraint of language traditions, and termination of reservations have been supplanted by perspectives that give communities more voice in how schools educate youth and that encourage the use of native languages and cultures to strengthen educational opportunities for Native American students.

MANUALISM VERSUS ORALISM

Education of the deaf in the United States provides an interesting parallel to the assimilationist theme apparent in attitudes toward Native American languages. As historian Douglas Baynton points out in *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language*, attitudes toward sign language changed dramatically at the end of the nineteenth century. Deafness had been viewed as an affliction that isolated the deaf from religion and prayer. But after the Civil War period, it came to be seen as a social condition, isolating groups from the nation as a whole.¹⁹ Baynton remarks that "the ardent nationalism that followed the Civil War—the sense that the divisions or particularisms within the nation were dangerous and ought to be suppressed—

provided most of the initial impetus for a new concern about what came to be called the 'clannishness' of deaf people."²⁰ The deaf were treated essentially as immigrant communities and sign was referred to as a foreign language by Alexander Graham Bell and others. Bell in fact warned of the dangers of intermarriage of deaf adults creating a separatist race of deaf people.

The sentiment that deafness was a social problem as well as an individual affliction was reflected in a shift in the methods of teaching the deaf from **manualism** to **oralism**. Manualism, the use of sign language as a means of communication, had arisen from the work of reformers like Thomas Gallaudet, an evangelical minister who founded the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817. Gallaudet and others believed that the deaf could not acquire moral understanding without taking part in group religious exercises, which sign made possible. Gallaudet's manualism reflected a somewhat romantic view of the deaf as in need of salvation, but at the same time it acknowledged that the deaf were a cohesive community. By contrast, oralists tended to see community among the deaf as a danger and viewed sign as encouraging the deaf to communicate primarily among themselves. As Baynton notes, the focus of oralism was not on the individual but, as with the assimilation of Native Americans, on "national unity and social order through homogeneity in language and culture."²¹

Oralism focused instruction on the goal of speaking. It drew support from popular ideas from the emerging theory of evolution: sign language was seen as reflecting lower orders of communication and oral language as one of evolution's higher achievements. In fact, the view that oral language had arisen from gesture was taken as evidence that sign represented an evolutionary step back.²² With its apparent progressive flavor and with advocates like Alexander Graham Bell, the oralist position took hold in the education system. According to Baynton, by 1899 sign was prohibited in about 40 percent of schools for the deaf and by 1920, in about 80 percent, establishing a pattern that held for the first half of the twentieth century.²³

During the twentieth century, advocates of oralism also stressed pedagogical and psychological factors. Alexander and Ethel Ewing's 1964 *Teaching Deaf Children to Talk*, for example, argued that "the highest priority for deaf children is learning to talk, this not only in terms of speech as a means of communication, but because the spoken language is a prime factor in social development (from its very beginning with the mother-child relationship) in thought-patterning and the development of intelligence."²⁴ And as Marc Marschark notes, until the late 1960s many hearing people still saw sign as "a relatively primitive communication system that lacked extensive vocabulary and the means to express subtle or abstract concepts."²⁵

Like Native American languages, sign has enjoyed a resurgence in the last forty years. One factor in this was a critical mass of studies in the 1960s and 1970s confirming that oralism had failed. Education researcher Herbert Kohl,

for example, in his 1966 study *Language and Education of the Deaf*, described deaf education as dismal. Kohl drew on government statistics showing that of the 1,104 sixteen-year-old students leaving deaf schools in 1961–1962, 501 graduated (with a mean grade level of 7.9) and 603 left without graduating (at a mean grade level of 4.7). He characterized the deaf child as isolated from the start of life, likely to show “outbursts of anger, rage, and frustration” in school, and to be “further frustrated by their failure in language” due to oral instruction.²⁶

There may be other factors as well in the renewed viability of sign. Marschark notes that the number of deaf children experienced a tremendous growth in the 1960s due to the rubella epidemic of 1962–1965, which left close to 40,000 infants born deaf. This undoubtedly focused attention on improving deaf education. In addition, linguistic researchers from the 1970s on have emphasized the affinities of sign with spoken language. And members of the deaf community themselves have become very effective at making the case for sign language and deaf culture and at pointing out the failures of oralism.²⁷ Federal legislation has also benefited sign users: the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 required programs receiving federal aid to provide access to individuals with disabilities, with sign interpretation as a possible way of doing this for the deaf. And the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act required comparable access in all state and local government schools, regardless of whether or not the schools get federal assistance.²⁸ For a variety of reasons, sign language has survived the assimilationist efforts of the oralist movement. Sign is accepted by many universities as meeting a second language requirement and major sign research centers exist at the Rochester Institute of Technology, the Salk Institute, and of course Gallaudet University. As with Native American languages, issues of access, education, and culture have reversed an earlier trend toward assimilating language communities.

RESTRICTIONS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGES

So far we have seen how late-nineteenth-century thinking reflected the assimilationist ideology of “one nation—one language.” The national language impetus of colonial times evolved so that minority languages such as sign language and Native American languages came to be treated as diversity problems—as barriers to efficiency, national unity, and civic participation. The tension between assimilation and pluralism also provides a context from which to consider language issues that arise from immigration and settlement. In the early twentieth century, concerns about assimilation reached a fever pitch after the influx of immigration that lasted from 1880 to 1919. Some reactions, such as literacy tests and proposals for the deportation of immigrants who failed to learn English, were clearly exclusionary.²⁹ Other initiatives, such as those that focused on Americanization, were motivated by concern for the newcomers’ welfare, as well as for promoting American ideas.

During this period public schools increasingly focused on Americanization and civics, and civics instruction included

fostering certain attitudes toward language. There was an increased pressure to ensure that English was the language of the classroom by restricting foreign language instruction. The most famous incident of this sort is the case of *Meyer v. Nebraska*.³⁰ The *Meyer* case arose in the context of anti-German sentiment following World War I. Several states adopted laws that restricted the use of foreign languages in public, that prohibited foreign language parochial schools, and that proscribed the teaching of modern foreign languages to young children. Nervous about its state’s German-speaking population, the Nebraska legislature passed two laws restricting foreign languages. In 1919 legislators passed an open meeting law which required that meetings concerning “political or non-political subjects of general interest... be conducted in the English language exclusively.” The other law, known as the Siman Law after its legislative sponsor, prohibited the teaching of any foreign language before the completion of the eighth grade and provided for a fine of up to \$100 and a jail sentence of up to 30 days.³¹

The Siman Law was challenged when parochial school teacher Robert Meyer was fined for teaching German during the school’s lunch hour. Meyer, who had been reading a Bible story in German to a student, claimed that he was merely providing religious instruction outside of normal school hours. While extracurricular religious instruction was allowable under the law, state prosecutors noted that the school had extended its lunch recess specifically to permit the lunchtime study of German. The Nebraska Supreme Court, voting 4–2, ruled that the school curriculum was within the state’s jurisdiction and took the view that the teaching of foreign languages was harmful to the country and to young children. The Nebraska Court wrote:

To allow the children of foreigners, who had emigrated here, to be taught from early childhood the language of the country of their parents was to rear them with that language as their mother tongue. It was to educate them so that they must always think in that language, and, as a consequence, naturally inculcate in them the ideas and sentiments foreign to the best interests of this country.³²

The case was appealed to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled in 1923 that the restrictions on foreign language instruction were unconstitutional abridgements of liberty. Justice James McReynolds wrote the majority opinion voiding the Siman Law on the basis of the Fourteenth Amendment. McReynolds wrote that “the protection of the Constitution extends to all—to those who speak other languages as well as to those born with English on the tongue.”³³ He agreed that all citizens needed to be literate in English, writing that the Court appreciated “the desire of the legislature to foster a homogeneous people with American ideals, prepared readily to understand current discussions of civic matters.” But he maintained that English literacy could not be promoted through an unconstitutional ban on foreign language instruction. McReynolds argued in addition that the state could not interfere with parents’ natural duty to provide for the education of their children. The decision was

not unanimous, however. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., dissented in the concurrent case of *Nebraska District of Evangelical Lutheran Synod v. McKelvie*, drawing on the idea that childhood is a critical time in establishing language skills:

Youth is the time when familiarity with a language is established and if there are sections in the State where a child would only hear Polish or French or German spoken at home I am not prepared to say that it is unreasonable to provide that in his early years he shall hear and speak only English at school. But if it is reasonable it is not an undue restriction of the liberty of either of teacher or scholar.

Meyer v. Nebraska provides a good illustration of the way in which foreign language issues were seen by policy makers in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Foreign languages were seen as promoting a heterogeneity at odds with good citizenship. Even as it accepted the rights of parents to have foreign languages taught to children, the Court asserted the desire of the majority for English literacy and for, in McReynolds's words, "a homogeneous people."

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Just as earlier controversies about the teaching of foreign languages prefigure some of today's English-only debates, the issue of bilingualism and bilingual education has an interesting history as well. Though some of us may associate debates over bilingualism with issues arising in the last forty years, it has actually been a policy concern since the founding of the nation. In fact, the eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century discussions of the role of German in Pennsylvania are similar to discussions heard today regarding Spanish. Benjamin Franklin worried about the third of the state's population who were German-speaking, fearing that Pennsylvania would become a German-dominated colony. Fears of political and cultural domination—and of possible sedition—led to proposals for Americanization of German areas and for English requirements for public discourse. But some early policy makers also advocated bilingual education as a means to assimilate the German population to English political and religious ideas, while at the same time providing them with an education in a language they could understand. Bilingualism came to be an important issue in the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837–1838, at which Charles Ingersoll proposed that schools provide education in both English and German. According to linguist Dennis Baron, objections to Ingersoll's proposal included the fear that other languages would need similar provisions. Concerns were also expressed that bilingual teachers were generally less qualified and that bilingual education would corrupt schoolroom English. Some delegates also argued that there was little need for bilingual education because most Germans had been already assimilated to English and that educated Germans themselves favored assimilation. The Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention rejected

Ingersoll's bilingualism proposal by fewer than ten votes.³⁴ As we will see, similar objections recur today in debates about bilingual education and English-only legislation.

The impetus for modern bilingual education efforts came from studies in the 1960s showing that schools were ignoring the language barrier between Spanish-speaking children and English-speaking teachers, and in some cases even punishing children for speaking Spanish. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act, sponsored by Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas, was originally proposed as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs aimed at improving school success and economic opportunity. In his January 1967 speech introducing the act, Senator Yarborough spoke of the disparities in the education of Mexican-American children in the Southwest in language echoing that of the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision outlawing school segregation:

Little children, many of whom enter school knowing no English and speaking only Spanish, are denied the use of their language. Spanish is forbidden to them, and they are required to struggle along as best they can in English, a language understood dimly by most and not at all by many.

Thus the Mexican American child is wrongly led to believe from the first day of school that there is something wrong with him, because of his language. This misbelief soon spreads to the image he has of his culture, of the history of his people, and of his people themselves. This is a subtle and cruel form of discrimination because it imprints upon the consciousness of young children an attitude which they will carry with them all the days of their lives.³⁵

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act established federal jurisdiction over bilingual education and provided financial assistance for new programs, though without specifically defining what bilingual education was. Later amendments to the act, in 1974 and 1978, emphasized assimilation but also promoted **language maintenance** as well. Equally important in determining educational policy was Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race or national origin in federally funded programs.

The view that equal treatment alone did not address the needs of students with limited English proficiency led to lawsuits such as *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974. In the *Lau* case, parents of about 3,000 students in San Francisco filed a class-action suit that argued that the city of San Francisco had not provided sufficient supplementary instruction in English to students whose primary language was Chinese. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately reversed a Federal District Court ruling that having access to the same curriculum entailed lack of discrimination.³⁶ However, the Supreme Court's opinion did not provide a specific remedy; it only required that the Board of Education solve the problem. The *Lau* decision was extended to all public schools as part of the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunity Act but again without identifying

solutions. In 1975, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare began outlining so-called Lau remedies, which included a requirement that students' native languages be used in instruction and that native cultures be taken into account as well. Compliance to the Lau ruling was monitored by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights. But as many states adopted bilingual education measures, school systems often were compelled to develop bilingual programs whether or not they had any expertise in doing so. As linguist Lily Wong Fillmore has noted, many programs that arose this way were perfunctory and understaffed, leading to poor results.³⁷

As English language education became more central to the work of schools, various types of programs developed. English as a second language instruction is typically geared to classes that are made up of students from many different languages and often focuses specifically on English skills. By contrast, **transitional bilingual education** programs involve classes of students who share the same second language. In such cases, instruction in school subjects takes place in the native language but time is also spent on English. **English immersion** approaches are ones in which instruction is entirely in English (often simplified) and which focus both on English skills and on other academic subjects. Still another approach is **dual-immersion** (or two-way bilingual education), where instruction is given in two languages. Here classes include native speakers of two languages, for example, English and Spanish, with the goal being dual proficiency.

Transitional bilingual education came under increasing attack in the 1980s as Hispanic and Asian immigration increased and as social programs lost federal funding. Such critics as Education Secretary William Bennett argued that there was no evidence that bilingual education programs helped students learn English. In 1980, an English-only Lau remedy had been approved in Virginia because the number of language groups made bilingual education less feasible than intensive English instruction. Soon Congressional amendments began to focus on the possibility of adding English-only immersion methods to Lau remedies, and a 1988 reauthorization designated up to 25 percent of the federal funding for immersion methods. Amendments to the Bilingual Education Act in 1994 increased emphasis on bilingual education, bilingual proficiency, and language maintenance, but funding was then cut by over 30 percent in 1996.

The broad policy goal of bilingual education programs remains educational opportunity and assimilation of minorities to English. Opponents of bilingual education often see it as unnecessarily delaying the learning of English and as unrealistically assuming that minority children can be comfortable in both cultures. Arguments are often focused on the effectiveness of bilingual programs and the claim that they are costly diversions from English instruction that reduce incentives to learn English. Opponents also argue that bilingual education serves more as a means of preserving ethnic cultures than of assimilating speakers to English and American culture. Bilingual education has been

characterized by some as a cultural program for minorities rather than an educational program aimed at fluency in English. In a 1985 opinion piece in the *New York Times*, writer Richard Rodriguez argued that bilingual education efforts, despite the outward focus on learning English, reflect ethnic identity movements that romanticize dual culture. In Rodriguez's view, the cost of bilingual efforts is the embarrassment and silence of working-class immigrant children who do not succeed in mastering English.³⁸

In June of 1998, 61 percent of California voters approved Proposition 227 (*English Language in the Public Schools*), which required that students from non-English backgrounds be taught in intensive immersion classes rather than bilingual programs. The initiative was part of a broader "English for the Children" campaign initiated by California activist Ron Unz. As a result, California law now requires that schools place children with limited English skills in an English immersion program for at least a year. As the name of Unz's campaign suggests, the rationale is that early literacy in English is fostered by rapid exposure to native speakers of English in mainstream classrooms. In 2002 Massachusetts voters followed, overwhelmingly rejecting bilingual education in favor of English immersion classes. Massachusetts had been the first state to enact bilingual education in 1971, but 70 percent of voters approved ballot Question 2, funded by Unz.³⁹ Like the California measure, Question 2 called for placing most non-English-speaking students in English immersion classes for a year. Under the Massachusetts bilingual education plan that had existed, about 30,000 non-English-speaking students took subjects like math or science in their native languages, easing into English over time. In California, bilingual programs served about 30 percent of that state's 1.3 million limited-English-proficiency students. Critics of these measures have expressed concern about inflexible, state-mandated curricula and about the potential difficulty of obtaining waivers for parents who choose not to have their children participate in immersion. Educators have concerns as well. One is the effect that mainstreaming limited English speakers after just one year of English instruction might have on the broader learning environment. Another is the consequence of grouping students by English proficiency rather than age.

Proponents of transitional bilingual education often view sink-or-swim approaches as ineffective and unfair, arguing that non-English-speaking children fall behind in early learning and cognitive development when they are unable to comprehend classroom language. Supporters of bilingual education may also argue that rejection of the home language in English-only immersion affects children's self-perception, as Senator Ralph Yarborough did in introducing the act. In addition, proponents often stress bilingual education as a positive factor in developing a workforce competent in languages other than English, and see support for bilingualism in childhood as a way to foster adult second-language proficiency.

Does bilingual education work? Is it better or worse than immersion programs? A review commissioned by the

National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine assessed the success of various types of bilingual and second-language learning efforts. Chaired by Stanford University psychologist Kenji Hakuta and directed by Diane August of the National Research Council, the study was unable to answer the question of what type of program was best. Hakuta and August found beneficial effects to both bilingual programs and structured immersion programs, and noted that successful bilingual and immersion programs had elements in common. They concluded that questions of effectiveness needed to be community based. Equally significant, the study condemned the "extreme politicization" of the research process by advocates, noting that "most consumers of the research are not researchers who want to know the truth, but advocates who are convinced of the absolute correctness of their positions."⁴⁰

ENGLISH-ONLY

In the background of the debate over bilingual education and immersion is the recent campaign to make English the official language of many states. The origins of this English-only effort began with California Senator S. I. Hayakawa's unsuccessful English Language Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In the early 1980s, Hayakawa and others believed such an amendment was necessary to prevent language differences from becoming divisive. Following the defeat of that amendment, Hayakawa and John Tanton of the Federation for American Immigration Reform founded the group U.S. English in 1983.⁴¹ This group saw a number of political successes including initiatives that made English the official language of various states (in Virginia, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Alaska, Tennessee, California, Georgia, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Dakota, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Alabama, New Hampshire, Montana, Utah, South Dakota, Iowa, and Wyoming). Some of these initiatives were characterized by proponents as merely symbolic. Others, however, were intended to curtail demands for bilingual services. As linguist Geoffrey Nunberg reports, English-only advocates have petitioned for limits on the number of licenses for foreign-language radio stations and have attempted to halt the publication of such resources as the *Hispanic Yellow Pages*.⁴²

While the U.S. English group has been successful in promoting English-only legislation at the state level, restrictive legislation has been challenged in courts. Arizona's 1988 English-only amendment, for example, was struck down in 1990 because it required the use of English by state employees on the job. Judge Paul Rosenblatt ruled that by prohibiting state legislators from speaking to their constituents in languages other than English, the state amendment abridged First Amendment rights. Judge Rosenblatt noted that while the government may regulate the speech of public employees in the interests of efficiency, "a state may not apply stricter standards to its legislators than it may to private citizens, ... nor may a state require that its officers and employees relinquish rights guaranteed them by the

First Amendment as a condition of public employment."⁴³ Rosenblatt stopped short, however, of ruling that the plaintiff had a First Amendment right to speak Spanish at work.

The arguments of English-only proponents draw on the idea of English as having an economic and civic value, but also on fears about linguistic diversity.⁴⁴ English-only rhetoric casts English as the bond that unites us as a nation and sees that unity as threatened by bilingual services, foreign-language mass media, and the preservation of heritage languages. Such services and efforts are seen as a disincentive to the transition to English and as serving the interests of separatist ethnic leaders. For example, a U.S. English fundraising brochure from the mid-1980s describes English as being "under attack" and raises fears of "institutionalized language segregation and a gradual loss of national unity."⁴⁵ The brochure also refers disapprovingly to "new civil rights assertions" such as bilingual ballots and voting instructions, to "record immigration... reinforcing language segregation and retarding language assimilation," and to the availability of foreign-language electronic media as providing "a new disincentive to the learning of English." In addition to the English-only constitutional amendment, the brochure called for elimination of bilingual ballots, curtailment of bilingual education, enforcement of English language requirements for naturalization, and the expansion of opportunities for learning English.⁴⁶

English-only rhetoric also draws on the fears of the kind of violence and fragmentation that have affected Canada. In the 1960s the Canadian province of Quebec became the focus of militant efforts to establish a separate French-speaking nation. Beginning in 1969, a series of riots and terrorist acts, including the kidnapping and murder of Quebec's minister of labor and immigration, led the Canadian government to temporarily suspend civil liberties in 1970. After a political accommodation was reached, French became the official language of Quebec in 1974. In 1976 Quebec separatists won the provincial election and soon passed a charter that restricted education in English-language schools, changed English place-names, and established French as the language of government and public institutions. While Quebec voters rejected referenda to make the province an independent country in 1980 and again in 1995, the earlier pattern of violence, legislation, and separatism has made many Americans nervous about heritage language retention, especially in the Southwest where there are large numbers of Hispanic speakers.

English-only rhetoric incorrectly assumes that today's immigrants refuse to learn English and that official status is an effective means of fostering identification with the majority culture. Sociologist Carol Schmid has summarized a number of surveys of immigrant attitudes which suggest that there is little danger of English losing its desirability for nonnative speakers, and which dispel the fallacy that Spanish speakers don't want to learn English.⁴⁷ She notes that surveys of Hispanics find that they overwhelmingly support the idea that speaking and understanding English is necessary for citizenship and economic success, a fact that is also supported

by the robustness of advertisements for English training on Spanish-language television. And there is also evidence that speakers of other languages shift to English over time. Schmid cites the well-known study by Calvin Veltman which found that about three-quarters of Spanish-speaking immigrants were speaking English regularly after about fifteen years of residence.⁴⁸ She also emphasizes that language loyalty rates of Spanish speakers in the Southwest actually declined between 1970 and 1990. The idea that English is in danger from Spanish is not supported by such data.

The English-only movement of the 1980s and 1990s has been counterbalanced to some extent by the work of groups such as the English Plus Clearinghouse and the English Plus Coalition, both of which were established in 1986. These groups see the learning of languages as a resource and argue that English-only restrictions are counterproductive both economically and politically. They have also argued that English-only laws are unnecessary as a means of fostering assimilation. As linguist Robert King has emphasized, linguistic diversity does not necessarily entail political violence.⁴⁹ The English-only rhetoric ignores the many linguistically heterogeneous nations that lack the separatist violence that has existed in Belgium, Sri Lanka, and Canada. Switzerland, for example, has a long tradition of language rights, decentralization, and power sharing among groups, and the Swiss very successfully accommodate multilingualism. Schmid sees the Swiss adaptation to multilingualism as an instructive model for both the United States and Canada.⁵⁰ Switzerland arose from a military confederacy of German states dating from 1291, which gradually added French, Italian, and Romansch allies. Though German remained the alliance's official language until 1798, there was little linguistic conflict among the various cantons, and a tradition of local autonomy and diversity was an important factor in attracting new groups to the confederation. An 1848 constitution established the equality of French, German, and Italian in the Swiss confederation by making them all national languages. And while today's French-speaking minority in Switzerland has a strong linguistic identity, the intensity of that identity is attenuated by Swiss national pride and the allegiance of French and German speakers to a common civic culture. There are also important differences between the language situations in the United States and in Canada which suggest that the Canadian experience is not likely to be repeated in the United States. Schmid emphasizes that the dominance of English has historically been much stronger in the United States than in Canada, and she notes the strong interest that nonnative speakers in the United States have had in learning English. She attributes the interest in separatism in Canada to French-Canadians' worries over assimilation, to optimism about the sustainability of a separate existence, and to the failure of Canadian political institutions to accommodate the collective identity of a French-speaking region. These different conditions suggest that the United States is in no danger of being overcome by linguistic separatism.

ONE FLAG, ONE LANGUAGE

The ideology of language assimilation arises from several factors. It is motivated by the belief that a common language is necessary for national unity and for economic productivity. It is also motivated by the assumption that a common language resolves social differences and builds understanding among those of different backgrounds. And it is motivated by the fear that language diversity will lead to political disunity and potential violence. In the United States there have also been sustained periods in which foreign and minority languages have been stigmatized, suppressed, and seen as problems to be overcome rather than resources to be fostered. As a result, foreign languages and minority languages have been the focus of social engineering that often attempts to legislate a process of assimilation already underway and to dictate its nature as monolingual rather than bilingual. The acceptance of sign language and the preservation and revitalization of Native American language are areas where progress has been seen. But the perception of foreign languages seems to have changed little since Theodore Roosevelt's 1917 statement extolling language as the symbol of national unity.

Notes

1. Theodore Roosevelt's "Children of the Crucible" speech is reprinted in *Language Loyalties: A Source Book on the Official English Controversy*, ed. James Crawford (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 84–85.
2. Daniel J. Boorstin's *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Vintage, 1958), chs. 41 and 42, is the source for background on colonial attitudes and for the citation to Franklin's 1760 letter to Hume (278); for Boorstin's views on descriptive linguistics, see *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 452–62.
3. The quote from John Pickering's "Essay on the Present State of the English Language in the United States" is excerpted in C. Merton Babcock's *The Ordeal of American English* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 30.
4. David Simpson's *The Politics of American English, 1776–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 32, is the source for the citation to Jefferson's 1813 letter. Writers such as John Witherspoon also advocated an American style. Witherspoon saw the issue as a contest between the more cultured nature of British speech and the potential for uniformity that an American language might foster, particularly in light of the mobility of Americans. He saw the common speech in America as less parochial than the common speech of England, but nevertheless cautioned against too common a style, arguing for a language that expressed neither "bombast and empty swelling" nor "low sentiments and vulgar terms." See the excerpts of *The Druid*, no. 5, collected in Babcock's *The Ordeal of American English*, 74.
5. See Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1957), 109, for the citation to Jefferson's 1820 letter to Adams. As Julie Tetel Andresen notes in her *Linguistics in America, 1769–1924: A Critical History* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 57–62, Jefferson also advocated spelling reform and the resurrection of provincial archaisms.

6. Webster is most famous for his spelling reforms, and as a publisher he was sometimes accused of self-interest for these since he would profit from Americanized editions of books. Webster saw spelling reform as a means to reduce the gap between speaking and writing and to foster communication and opportunities for unified political action. Webster's own reforms were largely unsuccessful in his lifetime, and his greatest influence may have been the association of correct language with American values, which ensured the success of his competitors Murray, Brown, and Kirkham.
7. Webster, quoted in Simpson, 65.
8. Simpson, *The Politics of American English, 1776–1850*, 52–72, is the source for the summary of Noah Webster's views. Both Webster and Jefferson were influenced by the revival of interest in Anglo-Saxon as a source of English political and linguistic traditions. Webster, in particular, was influenced by the Saxonist speculations of John Horne Tooke. See Simpson, 81–90.
9. Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 45.
10. Cmiel, 47.
11. As Shirley Brice Heath notes, antimonarchists in the United States were skeptical of a centralized authority setting cultural norms, so proponents focused the debate on the role of language in education and law. See Shirley Brice Heath, "A National Language Academy? Debate in the New Nation," *Linguistics* 10.189 (1977), 9–43.
12. Simpson (30) is the source for this quote from John Adams.
13. Heath (21) is the source for this quote from Adams and for information generally on the language academy issue.
14. The quote from John Jay is cited in Carol Schmid's *The Politics of Language: Conflict, Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18.
15. The sketch of Native American language policy draws on John Reyhner's "Policies Toward American Indian Languages: A Historical Sketch," in *Language Loyalties: A Source Book on the Official English Controversy*, ed. James Crawford (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 41–47, and William Leap's "American Indian Languages," in *Language in the USA*, ed. Charles Ferguson and Shirley Brice Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 116–44.
16. The report of the 1868 commission on Indian conditions is cited by Atkins (48).
17. J. D. C. Atkins, Annual Report [of the Federal Commissioner of Indian Affairs] (excerpted as "Barbarous Dialects Should Be Blotted Out" in Crawford, *Language Loyalties*, 50).
18. The Native American Languages Act is Public Law 101–477 (Oct. 30, 1990). For a report on the Native American educational experience, see *Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1991, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED339587).
19. See Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 15–26. Baynton's book was a key source for many of the facts in this section: Alexander Graham Bell's views (30–31), Thomas Gallaudet's beliefs (17–20, 113–14), John Tyler's comments (36–38), the influence of evolution (38–44), and teacher statistics (25).
20. Baynton, 29.
21. Baynton, 16. The impetus for assimilation in the post-Civil War period reform mentality was also connected to "widespread fears of unchecked immigration and expanding, multi-ethnic cities."
22. Baynton cites an 1899 keynote address by John Tyler to the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, which characterized sign language as brutish and advocated education based on the characteristics that evolution had promoted, namely speech. Baynton notes also that religious advocates of sign interpreted the origin of language differently, some seeing sign as closer to creation and thus representing a morally superior state.
23. In his 1943 book *Deafness and the Deaf in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 524), Harry Best notes that opponents of sign continued to stress the social dangers of separatism.
24. Alexander Ewing and Ethel Ewing, *Teaching Deaf Children to Talk* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), viii.
25. Marc Marschark, *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 54.
26. Herbert Kohl's observations are from his *Language and Education of the Deaf* (New York: Center for Urban Education, 1966), 4–5; for citations to other summaries of the research on sign language and oralism, see Baynton 166, n.11.
27. Baynton (155) suggests that another factor in changing attitudes toward sign was a cultural shift in the 1960s in the way people viewed physicality. He notes that this included "such things as new and more sensuous forms of dance, a greater openness concerning sexuality, and an expanded tolerance for nudity and the celebration of the body, . . . [a] renewed fascination with "body language" generally, . . . more open expressions of passion and personal feelings, . . . [and] the popularity of new psychotherapies."
28. Earlier, the Bilingual Education Act of 1988 had included sign language for the first time.
29. The 1917 Immigration Act, passed over Woodrow Wilson's veto, excluded immigrants over the age of sixteen who were physically capable of reading but could not. Earlier literacy restrictions had been vetoed by Grover Cleveland and William Howard Taft.
30. Jack Rodgers's review of the "The Foreign Language Issue in Nebraska" (*Nebraska History*, 39.1 [1958], 1–22) was a source for the facts of *Meyer v. Nebraska*.
31. The relevant statutes can be found in *Nebraska Laws* 1919, chapter 234 (Nebraska's open meeting law) and chapter 249 (the Siman Law).
32. The 1922 Nebraska Supreme Court ruling can be found at 187 *Northwestern Reporter* 100, 1922.
33. The Supreme Court's *Meyer v. Nebraska* ruling may be found at 262 U.S. 390 (1923) and its *Nebraska District of Evangelical Lutheran Synod v. McKelvie* ruling may be found at 262 U.S. 404 (1923).
34. Dennis Baron's *The English-Only Question: An Official Language for Americans* (64–83) was a valuable source for background on

the colonial German questions and on the origins of bilingual education policy, including the objections to Ingersoll's proposal (74–77) and Franklin's comments (66).

35. The quote from Ralph Yarborough's 1967 speech is from Crawford, *Language Loyalties*, 324.
36. The Supreme Court's *Lau v. Nichols* decision may be found at 414 U.S. 56 (1974).
37. Lily Wong Fillmore, "Against Our Best Interest: The Attempt to Sabotage Bilingual Education," in Crawford, *Language Loyalties*, 369.
38. Richard Rodriguez, "Bilingualism Con: Outdated and Unrealistic," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1985, sec. 12, 83. See also his *The Hunger for Memory* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1981).
39. Similar efforts passed in Arizona in 2000 and failed in Colorado in 2002.
40. Diane August and Kenji Hakuta, *Educating Language-Minority Children* (Washington, DC: National Academic Press, 1998), 61. The National Academy of Sciences is a private, nonprofit group operating under a congressional charter.
41. Tanton was also associated with the Federation for American Immigration Reform. He resigned from U.S. English in 1988 after the release of a controversial anti-immigration memo. See James Crawford's "What's Behind the Official English Movement," in *Language Loyalties*, 171–77.
42. Geoffrey Nunberg, "Linguistics and the Official Language Movement," *Language* 65.3 (1989), 580–81, was the source of the observations on the range of official English laws and some of their intended consequences. For discussion of English-only workplace rules and legal challenges to these, see Carol Schmid, *The Politics of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 65–68.
43. Judge Paul Rosenblatt's opinion appears as *Yniguez v. Mofford*, 730 F. Supp. 309 (D. Ariz. 1990). Rosenblatt rejected Arizona's position that the amendment was merely intended to be used

by the state in its official capacity and that it was not intended as a blanket prohibition on state officials and employees.

44. Geoffrey Nunberg, for example, notes that English-only assumes that "acquisition of English and assimilation to the majority culture are incompatible with retention of the native language and cultural values; that people will not learn a second language as long as the native language is kept available as a 'crutch' and so on" ("Linguistics and the Official Language Movement," 583–84).
45. Reprinted as "In Defense of Our Common Language..." in Crawford, *Language Loyalties*, 143–48.
46. Journalist James Crawford also points out that English-only proponents assume that English is best learned by immersion and assume that ethnic leaders who argue for bilingual programs do so out of self-interest (for example, to provide jobs for bilingual educators). See his "What's Behind the Official English Movement," in *Language Loyalties*, 171–77.
47. Schmid, *Politics of Language*, 88–89. Surveys conducted in 1984, 1988, and 1990 found 61 percent, 66 percent, and 90 percent of Hispanics agreeing that it was important for citizens to speak and understand English. A 1985 Miami survey found 98 percent of Hispanic parents agreeing that English was essential for children's success.
48. Schmid, *Politics of Language*, 47–48. She also reports on surveys about the relation between education and assimilation. See also Calvin Veltman's *The Future of the Spanish Language in the United States* (Washington, DC: Spanish Policy Development Project, 1988). For a study of African-American attitudes toward English-only, see Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk* (London: Routledge, 2000), 297–302. Smitherman reports on a survey of 216 African-Americans in five cities in which over half (64.6 percent) said that they would not support English-only laws.
49. Robert King, "Should English Be the Law?" *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1997, 55–64.
50. Schmid, *Politics of Language*, 195–97.

Critical Thinking and Application

- Is maintenance of a language—as for Native Americans—necessary for cultural survival?
- Contrast the outcomes, motives, and contexts of the French Canadian and English-only movements.
- What is the difference between bilingual education and English-immersion education? What are the arguments in favor of each? How could their effectiveness be measured? Why do you think advocates and opponents are so passionate?
- Research English-only, English-plus, bilingual education, and the Unz amendment. What kinds of arguments is each group using (moral, psychological, pedagogical, etc.)? Are they addressing the same issues? How could someone decide between their positions? What are the participants' assumptions about the relationship between linguistic diversity and national unity? Do they use evidence from other societies to support their position? How do they evaluate individual and collective needs and rights?

Vocabulary

bilingual education	language maintenance	standard language
descriptive grammar	manualism	standardization, standardize
dual immersion	oralism	transitional bilingual education
English immersion	prescriptive grammar	

Suggested Further Reading

Center for Applied Linguistics. <http://www.cal.org/>

Crawford, James, ed. 1992. *Language Loyalties: A Source Book on the Official English Controversy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Edwards, John R. 1994. *Multilingualism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ethnologue: Languages of the World. <http://www.ethnologue.com/web.asp>

Schmid, Carol. 2001. *The Politics of Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.