

2. What is Hayakawa's assessment of countries that recognize two or more official languages? From what you know of multilingual countries, do you tend to agree or disagree with his assessment?
3. How does Hayakawa define bilingual education? What does he feel is its biggest flaw? Drawing from your own experience, do you agree with him? Explain your answer.
4. What alternative to current bilingual education does Hayakawa suggest? Do his alternatives seem like reasonable and feasible solutions?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Have you ever been in a place where you did not speak the language? What if you were a child entering a school in which you did not speak the local language? With your classmates, discuss what this experience might be like. If you have been in a similar situation, discuss how your experience influences your opinion about bilingual education.
2. Research the bilingual policy in your state. (If your state does not have a bilingual policy, find out if any legislation is currently under review for either a bilingual policy or to adopt English as the official language of the state.) What is the demographic profile of your state's immigrant population? How does your state provide for non-native speakers in terms of education and social policy?

Why the U.S. Needs an Official Language

Mauro E. Mujica

The question of whether America should have an official language is highly controversial. The English-only movement is particularly troubling for many Spanish-speaking areas of the country, such as California, the Southwest, and Florida. Opponents to the movement fear that laws forbidding the use of Spanish could violate their civil liberties. English-only proponents insist that linguistic divisions prevent national unity, isolate ethnic groups, and reinforce the economic disparagement between the haves and the have-nots. It may surprise Americans that outside the United States, many people believe the United States should adopt an official language: English. In the next essay, Mauro Mujica explains that Americans seem to be the last people to recognize the need for an official language, and why that language should be English.

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In June 2003, the Pew Research Center announced the results of an extensive survey on global trends such as the spread of democracy, globalization, and technology.

Titled "Views of a Changing World," it was conducted from 2001 to 2003 and polled 66,000 people from 50 countries. The survey received some publicity in the United States, mainly because it showed that anti-American sentiments were on the upswing around the world. Less publicized was the fact that there is a now a global consensus on the need to learn English.

One question in the Pew survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement "Children need to learn English to succeed in the world today." Many nations showed almost unanimous agreement on the importance of learning English. Examples include Vietnam, 98 percent; Indonesia, 96 percent; Germany and South Africa, 95 percent; India, 93 percent; China and the Philippines, 92 percent; Honduras, Japan, Nigeria, and Uganda, 91 percent; and France, Mexico, and Ukraine, 90 percent.

To an immigrant like myself (from Chile), these results come as no surprise. Parents around the world know that English is the global language and that their children need to learn it to succeed. English is the language of business, higher education, diplomacy, aviation, the Internet, science, popular music, entertainment, and international travel. All signs point to its continued acceptance across the planet.

Given the globalization of English, one might be tempted to ask why the United States would need to declare English its official language. Why codify something that is happening naturally and without government involvement?

The Retreat of English

In fact, even as it spreads across the globe, English is on the retreat in vast sections of the United States. Our government makes it easy for immigrants to function in their native languages through bilingual education, multilingual ballots and driver's license exams, and government-funded translators in schools and hospitals. Providing most essential services to immigrants in their native languages is expensive for American taxpayers and also keeps immigrants linguistically isolated.

Historically, the need to speak and understand English has served as an important incentive for immigrants to learn the language and assimilate into the mainstream of American society. For the last 30 years, this idea has been turned on its head. Expecting immigrants to learn English has been called "racist." Marta Jimenez, an attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, speaks of "the historical use of English in the United States as a tool of oppression."

Groups such as the National Association for Bilingual Education complain about the "restrictive goal" of having immigrant children learn in English. The former mayor of Miami, Maurice Ferre, dismissed the idea of even a bilingual future for his city. "We're talking about Spanish as a main form of communication, as an official language," he averred. "Not on the way to English."

Perhaps this change is best illustrated in the evolving views of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Started in 1929, the group was originally pro-English and pro-assimilation. One of the founding aims and purposes of LULAC was "to foster the acquisition and facile use of the Official Language of

our country that we may hereby equip ourselves and our families for the fullest enjoyment of our rights and privileges and the efficient discharge of our duties and obligations to this, our country." By the 1980s the executive director of LULAC, Arnaldo Torres, could proudly proclaim, "We cannot assimilate and we won't!"

⁹ The result of this is that the United States has a rapidly growing population of people—often native born—who are not proficient in English. The 2000 Census found that 21.3 million Americans (8 percent of the population) are classified as "limited English proficient," a 52 percent increase from 1990 and more than double the 1980 total. More than 5 million of these people were born in the United States.

¹⁰ Citing census statistics gives an idea of how far English is slipping in America, but it does not show how this is played out in everyday life. Consider the following examples:

- The *New York Times* reports that Hispanics account for over 40 percent of the population of Hartford, Connecticut, and that the city is becoming "Latinized." Last year, Eddie Perez became Hartford's first Hispanic mayor. The city Web page is bilingual, and after-hours callers to the mayor's office are greeted by a message in Spanish. Half of Hartford's Hispanics do not speak English. According to Freddy Ortiz, who owns a bakery in the city, "In the bank, they speak Spanish; at the hospital, they speak Spanish; my bakery suppliers are starting to speak Spanish. Even at the post office, they are Americans, but they speak Spanish." Even Mayor Perez notes that "we've become a Latin city, so to speak. It's a sign of things to come."

- In May, about 20 percent of the students at Miami Senior High School, where 88 percent of the students speak English as a second language, failed the annual Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) exam, which is required for graduation. The poor results prompted protests and demands for the test to be given in Spanish as well as English. Over 200 students and teachers gathered outside the school waving signs and chanting "No FCAT." A state senator from Miami introduced a bill that would allow the FCAT to be given in Spanish.

- Just a day before the Pew survey was released, Gwinnett County in Georgia announced it will provide its own staff translators for parents of students who speak Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese. The school board approved \$138,000 for the new translators despite a tight budget. Donna Robertson, a principal at an elementary school in the county, claimed the translators are only a short-term solution. The real solution, she claims, is a multilingual school staff. There are 46 languages spoken among students in Gwinnett County.

- In May, a poll taken by NBC News and the *Sun-Sentinel* newspaper of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, found 83 percent of Hispanics in south Florida agreeing that "it is easy to get along day in and day out without speaking English well/at all."

The Costs of Multilingualism

¹¹ Multilingual government is not cheap. Bilingual education alone is estimated to cost taxpayers billions of dollars per year. The federal government has spent over \$100 million to study the effectiveness of bilingual education, only to discover that it is less effective at teaching English than English immersion programs are. Much

of the cost for court and school translators, multilingual voting ballots, and multiple document translations is picked up at the local level. Even during good economic times, this is a burden. In lean years it is a budget breaker, taking funds away from education, health care, transportation, and police and fire services.

¹² For example, Los Angeles County spent \$3.3 million, 15 percent of the entire election budget, to print election ballots in seven languages and hire multilingual poll workers for the March 2002 primary. The county also spends \$265 per day for each of 420 full-time court interpreters. San Francisco spends \$350,000 per each language that documents must be translated into under its bilingual government ordinance. Financial officials in Washington, D.C., estimate that a proposed language access would cost \$7.74 million to implement. The bill would require all city agencies to hire translators and translate official documents for any language spoken by over 500 non-English-speaking people in the city.

¹³ The health-care industry, already reeling from a shortage of nurses and the costs of treating the uninsured, was dealt another blow by President Clinton. Executive Order 13166 was signed into law on August 11, 2000. The order requires private physicians, clinics, and hospitals that accept Medicare and Medicaid to provide, at their own expense, translators for any language spoken by any patient. The cost of an interpreter can exceed the reimbursement of a Medicare or Medicaid visit by 13 times—costing doctors as much as \$500 per translator.

¹⁴ Of course, there are also nonmonetary costs associated with a multilingual America. These expenses often have a human cost.

¹⁵ A 22-year-old immigrant won a \$71 million settlement because a group of paramedics and doctors misdiagnosed a blood clot in his brain. The man's relatives used the Spanish word *intoxicado* to describe his ailment. They meant he was nauseated, but the translator interpreted the word to mean intoxicated.

¹⁶ Six children were killed when a loose tailgate from a tractor trailer fell off on a Milwaukee highway. The driver of the family's SUV could not avoid the tailgate, which punctured the gas tank and caused the vehicle to explode. An investigation found that other truckers had tried to warn the driver of the tractor trailer about his loose tailgate, but the driver did not understand English.

¹⁷ An immigrant in Orange County, California, died from a fall into a 175-degree vat of chemicals at an Anaheim metal-plating shop. Though the company's instructions clearly forbade walking on the five-inch rail between tanks, they were printed in English, a language that the worker did not understand. An inquiry into the accident found that many of the recent hires were not proficient in English.

¹⁸ Hispanics accounted for nearly one-third of Georgia's workplace deaths in 2000, despite making up only 5.3 percent of the state's population. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, a branch of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, blamed "misunderstandings arising from language barriers" for the deaths and said they "could be prevented and don't have to happen."

The Dis-United States

¹⁹ We need only look to Canada to see the problems a multilingual society can bring. America's northern neighbor faces a severe constitutional crisis over the issue of language. In 1995, the predominately French-speaking province of Quebec came

within a few thousand votes of seceding from Canada. The secessionist Parti Québécois ruled the province until this year. The national government must cater to Quebec to preserve order and maintain a cohesive government. This has spurred secessionist movements in English-speaking western Canada on the grounds that the Canadian government favors French speakers.

Of course, battles over language rage across the globe, but since Canada is so similar, it offers the most instructive warning for the United States. While the policy of official multilingualism has led to disunity, resentment, and near-secession, it is also very costly. Canada's dual-language requirement costs approximately \$260 million each year. Canada has one-tenth the population of the United States and spent that amount accommodating only two languages. A similar language policy would cost the United States much more than \$4 billion annually, as we have a greater population and many more languages to accommodate.

Unless the United States changes course, it is clearly on the road to a Canadian-style system of linguistic enclaves, wasteful government expenses, language battles that fuel ethnic resentments, and, in the long run, serious ethnic and linguistic separatist movements.

What is at stake here is the unity of our nation. Creating an American-style Quebec in the Southwest as well as "linguistic islands" in other parts of the United States will be a disaster far exceeding the Canadian problem. Now, over 8 percent of the population cannot speak English proficiently. What happens when that number turns to 10 percent, 20 percent, or more?

The American assimilation process, often called the melting pot, is clearly not working. Declaring English to be our official language would bring back the incentive to learn it. Specifically, this step would require that all laws, public proceedings, regulations, publications, orders, actions, programs, and policies are conducted in the English language. There would be some commonsense exceptions in the areas of public health and safety, national security, tourism, and commerce.

Of course, declaring English the official language would only apply to government. People can still speak whatever language they choose at home and in private life. Official English legislation should also be combined with provisions for more English classes for non-English speakers. This can be paid for with a fraction of the money saved by ending multilingual government.

A bill in Congress would make this a reality. . . . If it passes, we can start to rebuild the American assimilation process and lessen the amount of linguistic separation in the United States. If it fails, we might have lost the last best chance for a sensible and cohesive language policy in this country. If that happens we can say "hasta la vista" to the "United" States and "adelante" to Canadian-style discord over the issues of language and ethnicity.

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. The Pew study reported that many people outside of the United States strongly feel that knowledge of English is necessary for success. What is the basis for this sentiment? Does it surprise you? Why or why not?
2. In paragraph 4, Mujica postulates, "one might be tempted to ask why the United States would need to declare English its official language. Why codify something

that is happening naturally and without government involvement?" Evaluate his argument as to why it is indeed important that the United States adopt English as its official language.

3. What is the irony of the "retreat" of English in the United States? Explain.
4. According to Mujica, what are the costs of multilingualism? Include in your answer the cultural, political, intellectual, social, and economic ramifications of a nation that does not adopt an official language.
5. Other countries such as France, England, and Brazil are not deemed "racist" (paragraph 6) for having national languages. Is the United States different from other countries that have official languages? Why or why not? In your opinion, do you think that adopting English as the official language of the United States would be racist?
6. According to Mujica, what are the social issues behind opposition to English as the official language?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Interview a number of people who had to learn English as a second language. How did they do it? What difficulties did they encounter? What assistance were they given as they learned English? How did learning English affect their lives? Encourage your interviewees to share stories of success as well as of failure.
2. An argument in favor of bilingual education is that mother-tongue instruction increases cultural and ethnic pride in the heritage of the mother country. Immigrant children are allowed to take pride in their home culture, while learning in their native tongue. Do you think denying them this heritage and forcing English upon people is, as Marta Jimenez asserts, an attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, "a tool of oppression"? Write a paper in which you explore your feelings on this pro-bilingual perspective.

Proposal for an American Language Academy

John Adams

John Adams was the first (1789–1797) vice president of the United States and the second president of the United States. As an author, Adams helped define and outline the principles of American values and the core of legislature and government. In 1780, Adams, recognizing the unifying nature of language, lobbied Congress to institute an American Language Academy, to "correct and improve" the English language in the newly formed United States. Perhaps inspired by the illustrious L'Académie Française, which was created to preserve and refine the French language, Adams forsook that English was "destined to be more generally the language of the world." His proposal to Congress, written while on a mission to Europe during the Revolutionary War, appears below.

As eloquence is cultivated with more care in free republics than in other governments, it has been found by constant experience that such republics have produced the greatest purity, copiousness, and perfection of language. It is not to be disputed that the form of government has an influence upon language, and language in its