

# Status of English in the US and English Only Movement

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## Introduction

Why do you speak a particular language? How did you learn to speak your language? These questions are seldom asked unless we are studying such disciplines such as linguistics because languages are such an integral part of our everyday life that we assume that being able to speak a language is a matter of fact and we just take them for granted. We are speaking languages just as if we breathe the air and we are most of the time unconscious about the most integral human activity. We learn languages unconsciously and speak one unconsciously, however when we are deprived of this integral part of our human activity, we are faced with so many problems starting from the lack of the mean to communicate inability to think. Contrary to the belief that languages are a tool we can take for granted, we encounter many problems in the world that stem from the uniqueness of language. Civil wars happening all around the world can be in most cases attributed to the differences and tension created by linguistic differences and tensions created from various factors..

In this thesis, I would delineate how language, especially, English is causing a great controversy in the United States of America over its status as an official language of the US. As stated above, languages are intricately related to the human activity and to deprive people of their language to impose another would cause a lot of problems. Especially in the United States where the concept of bilingualism is relatively new because of the wide spread assumption that English's the norm in US and other languages are minorities which would not pose much threat to English , the recent surge

in the concept of English Only movement is something that catches our attention. I would delineate in this paper how this movement began and what kind of consequences are observed as a result. I would also analyze in details the possibility and the feasibility of English Only movement, in other word a trend against bilingualism, scientifically against the backdrop of current research into bilingual education. As mentioned above, language is closely related with education which is one of the most important aspects of our life in order to have a life of better quality. English Only Movement is not only a question of language but also a question of equal access to education and equal opportunity. To put this movement is perspective and to analyze the feasibility of this movement is the general purpose of this research paper.

### Common View on Languages

When we start having a look at linguistic phenomena in the world we simply start from a monolingual perspective. According to Susanna Romaine, it would be odd to read a book with the title MONOLINGUALISM, and yet monolingualism is the underlying construct on which most linguistic theory and description is based. For example, the famous model of an ideal speaker and a listener first introduced by Noam Chomsky is a good example of the linguistic construct based on monolingualism. Romaine ends her book by quoting from the late Peter Stevens ("The localized forms of English" in Kachru 1982:23) as follows

“a central problem of linguistic study is how to reconcile a convenient

and necessary fiction with a great mass of inconvenient facts. The fiction is the notion of "language"-English, Chinese, Navajo, Kashmiri. The facts reside in the mass of diversity exhibited in the actual performance of individual when they use a given language. “

Romaine concludes by saying that “it serves to remind us that linguistic theory is still far from being able to deal analytically with performance and what people do when they use language rather than a given language.”

Her comments imply the underlying assumption in the layperson's mind that monolingualism is the norm and we do not have to pay any attention to individual linguistic activity. This is far from strange highlighting the fact that most of the literature in linguistics so far has been explored from the point of monolingualism and it is only recently that we have begun to study the definition of bilingualism and pertaining questions. Against the backdrop of such reality, we are going to review in details the history of English Only Movement in the US.

#### Status of English in the History of the US

In the United States, where they boast of diverse ethnicity and different cultures, the question of an official language rarely occurred. After the first immigrants from England arrived in the United States, the land of new life and opportunity, people began to use English mainly in public life and there were no major competition amongst languages on a large scale. English was used in sermons in churches and it was the main medium for

communication. But this does not mean that languages other than English did not exist in the US. The common assumption that America has been a monolingual nation is a faulty explanation which fails to explain the linguistic diversity in the US. James Crawford calls this kind of attitude a mere projection of today's concerns onto an unexamined past. The fact that English is accepted in the US and most people assume that it has the official status does not mean that other languages can be ignored without exploration. Linguistic diversity in the US still remains unexplored. James Crawford gives an example of diversity in US in the original thirteen states even before territorial expansion and immigration swell the number of non-English speaking Americans.

As we have seen, the linguistic diversity in the US has not been thoroughly revealed. However it is not only in the US that though the complete picture of the whole picture is not known, some minority groups become the scapegoats for various problems a country encounters. Recently in Australia as well, where a government promotes a fair for all society highlighting the unique composition of its population, a parliamentarian named Pauline Hanson singled out Asian for the ills in Australia. One of the similar incidents that took place in the US is recounted in Crawford's book that talks extensively on English Only Movement.

### Status of English Challenged

In the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin expressed alarm over the Pennsylvania German's alleged refusal to speak English. His complaints

about bilingual. street signs anticipated a contemporary target of English only wrath. He went so far as to say that Germans are "Palatine Boors", which revealed more than a little ethnic resentment. Crawford speculates that this stems from Franklin's failed attempt to publish a German-language newspaper.

However not all the people took antagonistic attitude toward minority languages. America won the war of independence against United Kingdom and its principle of liberty and freedom should not only be restricted to English language alone but it should be translated to other languages as well

was the response from people like Benjamin Rush, who encouraged Germans to assimilate through the means of voluntary bilingual college. John Adams called for setting English as an official language in his call for LANGUAGE ACADEMY, the leaders of early US rejected the idea out of the belief that governments has no mandate over the linguistic activity of people.

So the early policy of the US government toward different languages were characterized by the policy of not having the policy, in this sense we can

make a general statement that the government did not necessarily envisage language as a symbol of national unity but rather as an instrument in the society through which people of the US can make an ordinary life. Although the public authority did not exercise much in language planning in the early US, the private sector such as publishers took the initiative in outlining the

linguistic formula for the United States. One example is a dictionary compiled by Noah Webster and this dictionary still keeps its prestige even now and students of English have heard of this dictionary at least once.

As mentioned above, English was not thought of as a unifier of the country of great diversity at first, however there was some movement that attempted to make English have a nationalistic role. However this was not a movement in opposition to other minority languages such as German and Spanish, rather it was an attempt by the US to distinguish itself from the legacy of Great Britain. As a country grows to be a responsible independent country with sovereignty, it is often the case that people look for some kind of national identity that distinguishes themselves from others.. This was a movement to distinguish American English against British English and above-mentioned Webster's played a great role in fostering a sentiment in favor of American English. The sentiment amongst American in favor of distinguishing themselves from English was such that there was even an idle talk about getting English in favor of English, making America so different from England.

#### The First Attempt at Giving Legal Status to English

In 1923, Washington J. McCormic, a Montana Congressman, introduced the first official language proposal ever considered at the federal level. It was a bill to enshrine AMERICAN in place of ENGLISH. This reflects the underlying sentiment amongst American people that they want to be different from British people and be considered as such. Underlying this

also

is a fact that there was a tension between New English immigrants and the Westerners and Irish Americans against the British. Important to note here is the fact that these movement was not taken in opposition to particular language groups but against ENGLISH .

Although the climate for English as a symbol of national unifier grew, it is important here to note that there were some bilingual education to be observed in the colonial period. Nineteenth century saw the increase in the number of German-English school elsewhere. In this sense bilingual education is not really a new phenomena. Other European languages were also taught but this liberal attitude toward languages did not extended to those of Native Americans. Indian languages were regarded as savage and incomplete in comparison with European languages thus in need of purification by European languages. Such was the climate that some children were forcibly removed from parents for the GOOD intention of assimilating them into Anglicized society. This practice is similar to what happened in Australia (Stolen Generation), and these practices were carried out with the ultimate purpose of wiping the SAVAGES out completely. This stems partly from the idea of social Darwinism which held that inferior species would die out naturally because of the inability to adapt to the new environment. D.C Atkins ,federal Indian Commissioner in the 1880s describes the policy of eradicating students' barbarous dialects along with very other remnant of Indian-ness.

Other examples of intolerance toward languages include the treatment

of Spanish people in the Southwest and Puerto Rico. The 1845 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo , which ended the Mexican-American war, made various guarantees to the people of the annexed. Though there was no explicit comment about languages and cultures people assumed that it was implicit in the treaty. But Spanish people's right to speak Spanish was not recognized until 1912, when the state finally adopted a constitution with the protection of the Spanish speakers. Only then it became possible the Spanish speakers to obtain official documents in their own language.

At the turn of the century, assimilation policy which attempted to coerce people to leave their ethnic identity in favor of Americanization came into being. This was in response to the wide spread fear that new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe were resisting English compared with the early immigrants.

It was then the concept of Anglo conformity was for the first time linked with the idea of loyalty. For the first time English was recognized as a symbol of national unifier and patriotism. It was in 1924 what the Congress enacted the strictest immigration quotas in US history.

### Second Wave of Legalizing English as an Official Language

For a long time, the debate over the official status of English has gone quiet until early 1980s. As mentioned earlier though there were some movements on a small scale on the side of the government to regulate languages, there was no major move to make English the only official language of the US. This is because for a long time it was assumed that

English has been settled as a national language of the United States and no one doubted that English was the official language of the US, regardless of whether it is stipulated in the law or not. People took it for granted that all the documents be written in English because of the wide spread concept of US as a country of only one language, so the idea of bringing up the topic of protecting English from the threat of other languages seemed absurd to most people of the US. According to the Census carried out in 1980, English was spoken by all but 2 percent of residents above the age of four and only 11 percent were the regular speakers of other languages. This reflects the common assumption that Americans are mostly monolingual. In 1987, two-thirds of the respondents to the national survey assumed that the Constitution of the US has already stipulated that English is the official language of the US. This just reflects the attitude prevalent among American people toward English at that time.

#### Hayakawa's Attempt at Protection of English

First person to bring the topic of protecting English against the threats from other languages was Senator S.I Hayakawa, Japanese American, who spoke up against bilingual education and bilingual voting rights. But when he first introduced the concept of English as an official language of the US, it was not taken seriously as speculated by a comment made by a New York Congressman who said that it was another of the crazy California movements with an apocalyptic vision to expose. But when Hayakawa introduced a constitutional amendment to make English official, it is

important to note that beside his attempt to ratify the obvious there was more that was at work. His idea to make English the official language of the US did not only mean a ceremonial gesture but it was an attempt to make bilingualism in the US invalid. If enacted, it would have prevented states from using languages other than English to publish laws and ordinances. Since the 1960s there was a trend that tried to accommodate the needs of linguistics minorities but Hayakawa`s move was a step toward reversing this

trend. But because of the indifference by most American people toward this proposal by Hayakawa, English language Amendment was ignored and died without a hearing in the 97th Congress. This reflects the wide spread assumption among American people at that time that it is a matter of fact that English is regarded as an official language and that there is no need to to waste the extra time in ensuring its status in the constitution.

But Hayakawa did not give up his effort to make his idea known to people, after he retired from his office as a Senator in 1983, he helped to found US English, a lobbying effort to caught national attention. This lobby launched a program called, "In defense of Our Common Language", this move was greeted by journalists as rather curious and a lot of newspapers took up this topic in their articles. One of them is New York Times, which in its article announced that, " The Mother Tongue Has a Movement". Soon, this had become a trend and a lot of celebrities lent their names to US English

Advisory Board, among whom are Alistair Cooke, Saul Bellow, Arnold

Schwarzeneger. In a Forth of July column, George F. Will pontificated on the connection between the English language and America Liberty. William F. Buckley, Jr., citing the Canada's Frog Nuisance, endorsed Hayakawa`s approach for quelling the militant Spanish minority.

The biggest boost to the English Only Movement came when Philip Donahue featured English Language Amendment on his talk show, staged before thousands of screaming guests in a Miami stadium. " I LOVE English" bumper-sticker began to appear in Florida and other parts of the US. This was in response to the fear among Americans due to the influx of Hispanic and Asian immigration. People feared that English would be threatened unless protected by legal measures. In five years, this movement mushroomed into a 400,00-member organization with a 6 million dollars annual budget. It is important to note here that the fear among American against the influx of immigration is not substantiated and the fear was incited out of prejudice and ignorance. This is not at all limited to the US but can be observed in many other countries of the world. When transcontinental

railway was established in US, the Chinese were welcomed by employers as cheap labors but as fear spread around that Chinese are taking the jobs away from the AMERICANS, whatever the definition of this means, the immigration of Chinese was limited drastically. This is another example of sad chapter of history which took place in US.

Meanwhile, legislators are always looking for something that catches their attention which turns to their advantage as a vote winner. In 1987

alone, thirty-seven state houses considered official English. As a vote winner it was an once in a life time chance for politicians to appeal to their constituents. US English passed a ballot initiatives in California and other Sunbelt states, usually by large margins. Opinion polls showed support ranging from 60 to 90 percent. More than dozen version of the English Language Amendment appeared in the Congress since Hayakawa's first proposal. By 1990 seventeen had adopted statues or constitutional amendments declaring English as their official language.

As mentioned earlier, languages are most important part of our lives and without them we will encounter serious problems. Thus the move by the authority to regulate languages has to take into consideration various factors. Language planning is far from easy and it should not be implemented from a narrow, shortsighted viewpoint. If language planning is carried out without taking into consideration various conflicting factors, we would be facing a lot of problems such as the discrimination against certain people based on language. Because language is not only a tool of communication, but also they are social identifier. Socrates once said that the human beings are social animals. Languages have social functions and should be regarded as such. So when we consider the most serious part of our life, linguistics, activity, we have to have a holistic view of what is entailed in the problem rather than seeing only a part of the problem. We should not be in such a situation where we can not see the wood for the trees. William J. Benne, then the Secretary of Education said that Bilingual Education Act is a failed

path,

a bankrupt course and a waste of 1.7 billion dollars of the tax. His office announced that they are receiving hundreds of letters supporting his opinions. But to everyone's surprise, these supporting letters had less to do with schooling for non-English speaking students than with illegal foreigners on the welfare, communities being overrun by Asians and Hispanics, macho-oriented foreigners trying to impose their culture on Americans and a special concerns, out of the control birthrates of linguistic minorities. These claims have nothing to offer to justify English Only movement and rejects bilingual education. At best this is a mere misunderstanding of the problem and at worst it is a mean-spirited attempt to scapegoat the immigrants based on languages they speak.

So far we have looked at the history of English Only Movement from historical point of view without sorting out the fors and againsts. In the next section we will have a look at what is happening in the US right now especially in the educational settings for the purpose of considering the feasibility of English Only Movement.

## Feasibility of Legalization of English and Linguistic Diversity in US

Amid the influx of Spanish and Asian immigration, bilingual education in US was harshly attacked as waste of money and the larger picture of the problem was often ignored, in this section we will explore the possibility of English Only Movement against the backdrop of various problems US is

encountering now and the linguistic diversity in the US. English Only Movement started not only as an attempt to make English the official language of US but also as an attack against bilingual education, we will also

have a brief look at the history of bilingual education in US.

During the past decade the enrollment of limited English proficient (LEP) children nearly tripled in California's public schools, far outpacing the states ability to train or recruit bilingual and English as a Second Language teachers. The number of the fastest growing groups, Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Filipino, Farsi, and Armenian is on the constant increase. The number of LEP children in US is high if we have a look at the statistics released in the Census data. The shortage of qualified teachers is greatest for the 75 percent of California's LEP students who speak Spanish. In California alone, the number of identified LEP people stands at 986,462. For the details refer to the statistic. This is a serious problem in light of education of LEP children, if we do not take some measures to mitigate this problem we are headed for more serious problems. To solve these problems relating to LEP children and to address their needs in the US there are a lot of ESL programs and bilingual programs. The concept of bilingual education is far from new and we will have a brief look at the transition of bilingual education in US.

Although bilingualism has been extremely unstable in the US up until the first World War, there has been a considerable tolerance toward bilingual

education in the US. The concept of bilingual education is not far from new and this is something that has been observed in US before. As mentioned earlier, the government did not try to meddle around with languages in the early part of the US immigration history. Since 1854, various states passed laws which prevented schools from interfering with the use of German language and other foreign languages in public schools. But with the rise in nationalistic sentiments in the US during the First World War, there was a wave of anti-German sentiment sweeping across US. Japanese was also the target of such sentiments and the use of foreign languages was limited.

The roots of contemporary bilingual education can be found in the experimental bilingual program set up in Dade county, Florida in 1963 under the sponsorship of Ford Foundation. According to Hakuta, this was in response to the influx of Cuban refugees into Florida in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The purpose of this program was to educate the children of new immigrants both in English and Spanish so they can obtain balanced level of linguistic ability in both languages. Students who attended these bilingual program received instruction in their native language in the morning and in English in the afternoon. The problem of this program was the resentment expressed by non-Spanish speaking parents because having this kind of program meant that they had to have more Spanish-speakers. However, both language groups, English speaking children and Spanish speaking children who attended this program showed great development in their literacy in both languages and this was lauded as a great success. Following this success, the number of bilingual schools in US has

increased. In 1974, there were 3,683 students attending bilingual elementary school and around 2,000 at the secondary level.

The government of US responded to this by passing a bill which provided 7 million dollars to support this program. The Bilingual Education Acts of 1968 were aimed at special education of LES children, and the budget for bilingual education increased steadily until 1980. The budget had reached a total of 191.5 million dollars.

In 1988, the Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized but it is important here to be aware of the fact that this program did not specify bilingual education as its primary aim but the conflict between the emphasis on bilingual education and native language education has been always present. So although schools were given the chance to set up bilingual program, they were not under any legal obligation to do so. Some critics criticized this as only paying a lip service. Under this situation, litigation brought to courts on behalf of group of students led in some cases to the court mandated bilingual education. The most famous case of this kind is that of *Lau vs. Nichols*. A class action suit was brought against San Francisco Unified District by Chinese public school students who complained that the school did not provide them with the program to address their needs. This took place in 1970 but this suit was not based on Bilingual Education Act but on Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although the students' demand for bilingual education was lost, the Supreme Court overturned the decision of the federal district court and concluded that the Chinese speaking minority receives fewer benefits than English speaking

majority from respondents' school system which denies them the meaningful opportunity to participate in the educational program.

The Lau decision led to other cases as well and it was instrumental in setting up policy guidelines at the federal level. A document referred to as, "Lau Remedies" was produced and it was aimed at schools to identify students whose first language was other than English to assess their proficiency in their first language and English, so they can be taught in their first language until they reached a point where they can learn the content matters in English.

But it is important to note here that the aim of such bilingual program was not to have a bilingual program where students can learn the content matters in both languages. The main purpose of this program was on the transitional nature of this program. Students were able to have the initial education in their first language but the ultimate purpose of the program was to mainstream the students into the English only education without the use of their mother language. In this sense this is different from the practice of Dade County where the focus was on the enrichment of the students' linguistic resources. In other words, the purpose was the acquisition of English along with their native language. Maintenance of the mother language of students was encouraged. In a sense it is ironic that even though it is called a bilingual program, the aim was not to preserve both English and the native language this was out of fear that English will be replaced by other languages by implication, cultures.

Most recently in 1994, the Bilingual Education act was reauthorized

for the fifth time. This is known as Title VII and this is in response to the dire needs of those children who need assistance in education other area. However, shortly after the reauthorization of the Title VII, the policy it proposes came fierce attack on capital Hill and the press. The 104th Congress even considered to repeal the law and eliminate the funding for this program. Fortunately none of this took place. Still the attitude toward bilingual education is at worst point in the history. Budget was reduced by 38 percent between 1994 and 1996, terminating teacher training and reducing the budget for research. Recent press coverage of bilingual education has been hostile and between 1984 and 1994, 82 percent of empirical studies and literature reviews were favorable to the bilingual education. This reflects the deep disparity between the press coverage and the scholarly work.

In the next section we will have a look at the arguments carried out concerning bilingual education and we will try to come up with a balanced view as to whether bilingual education is feasible or just a waste of money as English Only Movement criticises.

### Discussion on Bilingual Education

In this section we will have a look at bilingual education from two points of view and try to sort out opinions about bilingualism and try to come up with some scientific data to have a balanced view of this controversial topic.

As we have seen so far bilingual education has a lot to do with national

identity as can be seen by the fact that this issue involved people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The issue of language is not only linguistic but also social as well. People who are against the idea of bilingual education ask what happens if other languages other than English are allowed and as a result the country begins to have barriers along language lines and fissures as a whole? What happens if Americans become less able to talk with each other as a result of bilingual education? One of the greatest fear among American of course is that English is losing ground to other languages and as a result racial and ethnic segregation of minority languages occur. This is understandable give the unique national composition of US. The strength of US has been unity and what happens if this crumbles?

Although there is fear that English is losing ground in US, if we have a more balanced look at history of US, we can easily recognize that this is not really the case. More world languages are spoken in US today than ever, this is a quantitative not a qualitative change from early periods. As we have seen earlier when we had a look at early form of bilingual education in US, it is readily recognized that high concentration of non-English speaking people was observed in the early periods. In 1900, there were at least 600,000 elementary school children, who were receiving part of their instruction in German. Yet English survived without any legal protection and this number is a conservative estimate so to say that English is losing ground based on the diversity of languages present in US is not substantiated and a bit alarmist in nature.

How about the fear that bilingual education is encouraging racial discrimination and ethnic segregation? In the past there was a possibility that minority students be segregated from others, but since 1970s, several states are trying to mitigate this problem by requiring the inclusion of English proficient students in bilingual classrooms. But in some court-ordered mandates, providing appropriate language assistance is necessary so some grouping of children by language is necessary but this does not prevent students from integrating with English proficient peer for certain class or in two-way bilingualism.

People who are concerned with children's English ability might say that the more students are exposed to English, the more fluent they will be in English. So they might reject the idea of bilingual education as rather odd. This sounds like a common sense but we know from various literatures that learning language is a mere imitation of sounds. We do not learn language as Pavlov's dog responds to the sound of the bell. If so what we speak is a recreation of what has been heard but our language is unbounded and language has no limit, it is creative. We do not reject the behaviorist's idea of stimulus and response outright but we have to note that this is not the only thing we do when we learn a language. Learning a language is not a passive action but it is highly interactive which has a lot to do with cognitive capacity as well. Even if we are exposed to English 24 hours a day if the input is something beyond the child's comprehension, they are just sounds and not language. Krashen has introduced the concept of comprehensive input and this is another important result of research.

Some people also claim that learning a native language prevents the child from learning English because of interference from the native language. But this is another example of influence from behaviorist psychology which assumes that languages are learned habits and this was at the basis of such research as contrastive analysis which tried to determine which features are difficult for whom.

However from the point of view of formal cognitivism, formulated by Noam Chomsky, language capacity is characterized as species specific and also innate. The most famous model of his idea is LAD, language acquisition device. Because of the idea that language is innate and that it unfolds rather than constructed through experience, the competition between first and second language is no longer a focus. Recent research in the language learning focused more on how second language learning is unrelated to the quality of first language and how much they have in common in the process of acquisition. According to Rod Ellis, although the rate of acquisition might vary according to various variables, the route of acquisition is much the same across language lines.

Another problem we have to encounter when we try to promote bilingual education is the fact that people expect these programs to yield the instant result. However, the process of language acquisition is not that easy. It is often said that daily conversation-level English is readily acquired by children but this does not guarantee their academic success in school. Cummins said that the daily conversation-level language is context-embedded which is helpful to children such as gestures but the

academic level language is context reduced and language is the only source of information that children can refer to. He distinguished this by the paradigm of BICS and CALP, basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic linguistic proficiency. It is often said that to develop CALP it takes at least seven years. In this sense it is not plausible to expect hasty results from these programs.

### Conclusion

We have seen so far how English Only Movement has developed and how this has influenced the bilingual education program in the US. Language are the most important part of our live and because of their nature they are also closely related to out sense of identity and social status. When certain group of people are deprived of their language we will encounter many problems which just reflect how much languages are part of our lives. Issues related to education is a huge problems and more research is needed in this field. In the early part of bilingual research the focus on what kind of negative effects bilingualism would have on people but currently the focus is rather on what kind of positive influences bilingualism would have. We know from research such as Hakuta that bilingual children show more cognitive flexibility than monolingual children and the early research questioning the intelligence of bilingual children is being reviewed.

However we are facing one of the most crucial moment of bilingual education program, because of the resurgence of English Only Movement we are seeing the drastic cuts of appropriation for bilingual program. What is

more tragic is the fact that when this issue is taken up the core of the problem is not discussed in a professional manner but only on the surface of the problem which is often confused with immigration policy and welfare policy. Our hope is that these trends against bilingualism would subside soon that see a day when every child has the chance to realize his potentiality. Those who are in the position of making decision or doing a research should realize the fact that out purpose of doing so should not be for near-sighted reasons but far reaching reason which we have to fulfill as a human being.

*In the beginning was the word,*

*And the word was with God and the Word was God,*

*(John 1.1)*

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