

“THIS IS AMERICA – SPEAK ENGLISH.” THE ENGLISH-ONLY MOVEMENT AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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We must have but one flag. We must also have but one language. That must be the language of the Declaration of Independence, of Washington's Farewell address, of Lincoln's Gettysburg Speech and second inaugural.
THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1917)

I hope very much that I'm the last president in American history who can't speak Spanish.
BILL CLINTON (2000)

But understand this: instead of worrying about whether immigrants can learn English –they'll learn English– you need to make sure your child can speak Spanish.
BARACK OBAMA (2008)

Language and Identity

Language holds an important place in the theories of nation and nationalism. It is often considered an important consciousness-raising and nation-building factor. Depending on the perspective, it is perceived either as a primordial, mythical foundation of a national culture, or a foundational factor on which—or thanks to which—the national identity is created. For some, it is the factor that most clearly defines a nation; for others, it is an instrument used by the elites to build nations and legitimize their power. In short, most scholars agree that language plays a vital role in the process of national consciousness raising and its development, a factor that unites and integrates different groups within one community. Not surprisingly, it is also highly important to immigrants and conquered peoples as a crucial instrument for forming and/or preserving their unique ethnic identity. Since the mother language reflects a group's roots, culture, tradition, and distinctive way of seeing the world, language change is one of the symptoms of assimilation.

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The English language is merged with American national identity. However, the Founding Fathers did not grant English the status of an official language; instead they made what Shirley Brice Heath is widely quoted as calling “a deliberate choice of *policy not to have a policy*.” The general U.S. language policy was that of tolerance. English became dominant without actually being declared official because of the prevalence of Anglo-Saxons among the colonizers and early immigrants and, thus, as an outcome of historical processes and events.¹ It was at the turn of the twentieth century that the “ideological link” between the American national identity and proficiency in the English language was established. Several factors contributed to this merger: vast U.S. territorial acquisitions in the nineteenth century, which also meant confrontation with foreign-language speakers; mass immigration from Europe (1880-1920); anti-German sentiments in the U.S. during World War I; and the Red Scare following the Bolshevik Revolution.

Contemporary immigration to the United States, predominantly by Latin Americans (especially Mexicans), makes the issue of U.S. language policy very timely. A rapidly growing Hispanic/Latino population is sometimes perceived by some, including distinguished scholars and important politicians, as a threat to American national identity. What fuels such sentiments are, for example, the on-going debate about immigration policy and regulations —Arizona’s harsh April 2010 SB1070 is one of them— border enforcement operations (the “prevention through deterrence” strategy, or the recently approved fence on the U.S.-Mexican border), as well as other actions and proposals, such as the idea of barring U.S.-born children of illegal immigrants from automatic U.S. citizenship.

The English-Only Movement, whose goal is to establish the English language as the country’s official language, is undoubtedly one of the manifestations of the strong anti-immigrant —mostly anti-Hispanic— sentiments in the country. Even though no *federal* regulations have yet been passed, Official English measures have been adopted by the majority of the American *states*. The English-Only Movement has also focused on the reduction or elimination of language assistance (e.g., bilingual materials and programs), the elimination of bilingual ballots, the promotion of English only in the workplace, etc.

This article focuses on how the English-Only Movement stems from, and has contributed to, anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States in recent decades. The problem is presented within the broader context of earlier attempts to restrict foreign-language use.

¹ Today English is the common language in the country (the *only* language spoken at home by over 80 percent of the population) (U.S. Census Bureau 2000c).

The English Language And American Identity, Then...

The fact that the Founding Fathers did not grant English official status may have been motivated by several factors, as summed up by Terrence G. Wiley: first, “the dominance of English was self-evident”; second, “the founders respected linguistic diversity and minority rights”; and third, they did not want to “offend minorities who had supported the revolutionary cause” (2004, 320). Not mentioning English in the Constitution could also have been more symbolic, expressing a rejection of any cultural continuity with the British crown. In fact, as Baron writes, in the 1780s the Marquis de Chastellux noted that Americans preferred their language to be referred to as “American” rather than “English” (1990, 42). Despite the fact that after the revolution, some even suggested that the country choose a different language (Baron 1990, 42; Shell 1993, 108), English became the most common language in the colony, and Americans acted *as if* it were an official language.

At that time the general language policy was that of tolerance toward other languages. Many churches and parochial schools operated in other languages, while in some areas with a high concentration of German speakers, even public schools operated in German, for example, in Pennsylvania, Ohio, or Wisconsin (Schmid 2001, 19). The first state to authorize bilingual (German-English) teaching was Ohio in 1839 (Crawford 2001, 20).

This does not mean, however, that as early as the colonial times the newcomers were not sometimes perceived as a “cultural threat.” Even though America welcomed settlers from different countries from Northern and Western Europe, and was thus multilingual (Castellanos 1983), some negative, anti-immigrant sentiments arose. Benjamin Franklin himself openly expressed his concerns about the growing number of Germans.² One of the most infamous and widely quoted is in a 1753 letter to Peter Collinson, a member of the British Parliament, where he states, “Those [Germans] who come hither are generally the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their Nation” (Franklin 1753). In *Observations on the Increase of Mankind* (1755) he also called Germans “Palatine boors,” but, as James Crawford writes, this fragment was later removed from subsequent editions, probably because Franklin must have felt embarrassed by his own words (quoted in Schmid 2001, 15).

The concerns about the progress of assimilation of immigrants were particularly loudly voiced at the turn of the twentieth century, in the era of heavy immigration (1880-1920). In that period alone, 23.5 million immigrants arrived in the United States (Daniels 2004, 5), almost 90 percent from Europe (Daniels 1991, 122).

² At the end of the eighteenth century the number and status of the German group was strong enough to become part of the so-called “Muhlenberg legend,” according to which it was only one vote that prevented the German language from becoming a national language of the United States. In reality, as Carol L. Schmid writes, the whole case referred to a petition by a group of Germans from Virginia asking for some U.S. laws to be published in German as well as in English. In 1795, the House of Representatives rejected this proposition by one vote (42-41), probably cast by Frederick August Muhlenberg, then speaker of the House of Representatives (2001, 17).

The influx was so substantial that in 1890 and 1910, almost 15 percent of the population was foreign-born, the highest rate in U.S. history so far (Daniels 2004, 5). What is important about this is that, while the majority of immigrants arriving in the United States up until the 1880s were of Northern and Western European origin (Daniels 1991, 122),³ at the turn of the twentieth century a substantial group of the newcomers came from Southeastern Europe: Italians, Poles, as well as immigrants from Austria-Hungary, and Russia (Daniels 1991, 122).⁴ As Charles Jaret puts it, "This change was seen as more than a mere geographic shift; it was widely accepted that the 'new' immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe differed 'much more radically in type from the earlier American residents than did the old immigration, and that in consequence the problem of assimilation has become much more difficult'" (1999, 11). Thus, the "new" immigrants were seen, even by some of the brightest minds of the country, as less educated and skilled, racially inferior, and generally less desirable than those from Western and Northern Europe.⁵ Some official reports supported these positions. Research conducted in 1912 by Henry Goddard concluded that 83 percent of Jews, 80 percent of Hungarians, 79 percent of Italians, and 87 percent of Russians recently arrived in the U.S. were "feeble-minded" (Ricento 1996, 4). Unsurprisingly, these conclusions, as Thomas Ricento writes, helped establish migration quotas in 1924 (1996). Also, the 1911 Dillingham Commission Report suggested that "new" immigrants were not suited to the American reality (Baron 1990, 134-136).

This big influx of "new" immigrants awoke xenophobic sentiments and spurred nativist anti-immigrant movements, like Catholic immigrants or Chinese workers had in earlier periods. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century, the short-lived American Protective Association (APA) played on the fears of Americans mainly in the rural Midwest and Pacific Northwest, while in the 1920s, the "new" anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant Ku Klux Klan had about 4 million members nationally (Beirich 2010b, 8). At the same time, different organizations, for example Boston's Immigration Restriction League, some of whose members, as Joe R. Feagin points out, were also fascinated with eugenics (1997, 23),⁶ were trying to pass restrictive immigration laws.

The broadest Americanization campaign took place in the first two decades of the twentieth century (Higham 1988). By 1923 as many as 34 states introduced teaching in English only, in public as well as private schools (Leibowicz 1985, 105-106). Also, some businesses, like Ford Motor Company, started obligatory English language classes for its workers. Furthermore, some states introduced regulations restricting other language use and/or limiting the rights of the foreign-born. For example, New York, among other states, required public school teachers to be

³ Ninety-five percent of immigrants in 1820-1860, 68 percent in 1861-1900, and 41 percent in 1900-1920.

⁴ Twenty-two percent in the years from 1861 to 1900, and 44 percent in the 1900-1920 period.

⁵ For Roger Daniel's discussion of the inadequacy of the concepts of "old" and "new" immigration see Daniels 1991, 183-184.

⁶ For more on eugenics in the United States, see, for example, Black (2003).

U.S. citizens, while Oregon required English translations of foreign-language newspapers (Higham 1988). Licensing laws, which banned foreigners from certain jobs, such as being an attorney, a medical doctor, a surgeon, an engineer, or even a bus driver, were also a form of discrimination. So was the prohibition in some states (e.g., California) of owning agricultural land by those not eligible for citizenship (i.e., Asian-born) (Jaret 1999, 17).

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the passage of important immigration and naturalization regulations. In 1906, basic English-language skills became a requirement for naturalization. In 1917, a literacy test became the main tool for restricting immigration as a criterion for admitting immigrants to the U.S. (Daniels 1991, 276-279; Leibowicz 1985, 106-107). The culmination of the Americanization campaign was the adoption of a restrictive national quota system in immigration law (1921 and 1924) that sharply reduced immigration from Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe (immigration from the Western Hemisphere was outside the quota system). The "new" Europeans, however, were neither the first group to face hostility, as mentioned before, nor the first to trigger immigration restrictions. Asians were the first to be barred. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, and a few years later Japanese immigration was restricted on the basis of the 1907 "Gentlemen's Agreement." The following year President Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order stopping Asian immigration from Hawaii (Ngai 2003, 114-119). The Immigration Act of 1917 set up an Asiatic Barred Zone from which no immigrants were admitted, and in 1924 all Asian immigration was outlawed.

Language restrictions introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century thus stemmed from the desire to preserve the American-ness of the United States and assimilate immigrants. They were also rooted in internal security considerations. After World War I fueled hostile attitudes toward Germans, in different parts of the United States various attempts were made to eliminate the use of the German language in public life. In many states, it was forbidden in schools (even German language classes were stopped), sermons, and public addresses, while, as Carol L. Schmid writes, in Iowa and South Dakota, it was even forbidden over telephones. In some localities, people speaking German on the street could be fined (2001, 36). Hostility toward Germans would also take the form of physical violence or the symbolic burning of German books.

In fact, the arguments that newcomers pose a "cultural" or a "political threat" are, as Jaret points out, two of the common fears that generate anti-immigrant attitudes and actions (besides considering them a threat to the economic system or even to the natural environment) (1999, 20). Seeing Germans (and later the Japanese) as disloyal and subversive is only one possible manifestation of these attitudes. This fear may also express itself in perceiving immigrants as unqualified or unable to understand the principles of democracy. Thus, for example, today Mexican immigrants are accused of not having "good citizenship qualities" and of being "too apolitical and indifferent," and hence unwilling to participate in the political process. They are also accused of having "political interests and values" that are different from those respected by "real Americans" (Jaret 1999, 23-24).

Language (and cultural) assimilation was also important in the case of the colonized and the conquered. A striking example of Americanization through education is, clearly enough, the system of boarding schools for Native American children (1879-1920), which led to the “cultural disintegration” of Indians (Schmid 2001, 23-25). English also finally became the language of instruction in the Southwest, Louisiana, and Hawaii; however, in Puerto Rico neither English-only nor bilingual education programs proved effective (Schmid 2001, 25-27, 175-177; Baron 1990, 166-170),⁷ and in 1948 Spanish became the language of education there again (Crawford 2001, 18). “Foreign” languages were also restricted through various regulations. As for California, for example, although the first state Constitution (1849) guaranteed that state laws also would be published in Spanish, the new Constitution (1878-1879) was pro-American (Schmid 2001, 28). It gave official status to English (dropped in 1966) and abolished publications in Spanish (Constitutional Convention of the State of California 1879; Crawford 2001, 14-15).

Louisiana was the only territory to become a state (1812) with a non-English-speaking majority (Crawford 2001, 13). All the other states became states after the English language and American culture had become dominant. In the Southwest, annexed in 1848, this happened much earlier in California (1850) than in New Mexico (1912), due to their distinct demographic and economic development. While the “Gold Rush” changed California’s ethnic composition immediately after annexation (Crawford 1992, 51), the immigration of English-speakers to “Spanish” New Mexico was very slow, and they remained a minority till the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸ The language issue and Hispanic culture are also seen as an important obstacle to Puerto Rico becoming a new American state. Today the island is mainly Spanish-speaking (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b),⁹ even though since 1993 both languages are official.

...And Now...Anti-Immigration Sentiments And the English-Only Movement

Minority language rights in the United States stem from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. By the 1980s other federal laws were also adopted to give protection to non-English speakers. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 in fact started bilingual education programs; the 1975 amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provided for bilingual ballots in specific situations; and the Court Interpreters Act of 1978 provided interpreters in Federal Court. In 1990, a Native American Languages Act was also passed to maintain and recover languages spoken by the

⁷ For more see also The Language Policy Task Force (1978, 63-71).

⁸ For more on language rights in New Mexico see, for example, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1972, 58-63).

⁹ According to the 2000 U.S. Census data for Puerto Rico (2000b), 85.6 percent of the population speaks Spanish at home (3 million out of 3.8 million).

Native American population, the natives of Hawaii, and the Pacific Islands. One of the newest regulations is Executive Order 13166 ("Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency"), signed by President Bill Clinton in 2000 to improve access of limited English proficiency persons (LEP) to federally conducted and assisted programs and activities. EO 13166 and bilingual education programs and bilingual ballots are criticized by the advocates of English as an official language. While bilingual education programs were virtually ended when President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, the other two are still being challenged.

The current English-Only Movement had its beginning in the early 1980s. By then, a huge new wave of immigrants (4.5 million in the 1970s, 7.3 million in the 1980s, and 9.1 million in the 1990s [Daniels 2004, 5-6]) caused an explosive rise in anti-immigrant sentiments.¹⁰ Some language restrictions were in fact introduced even before the English-Only Movement started. One of them is the very restrictive Anti-Bilingual Ordinance, adopted in 1980 in Dade County, Florida. This regulation banned county expenditures on languages other than English, at the same time changing the 1973 resolution, which made the county officially "bilingual and bicultural." All Spanish-language signs and bus schedules were thus removed and the publication of informational leaflets brought to an end. A 1984 amendment to the ordinance allowed county spending on public health, emergencies, and tourism (Crawford 1992, 131), before, finally, the ordinance was repealed in 1993 (Crawford 2001, 26).

What actually caused the increase of immigration to the United States in the second half of the twentieth century were the reforms and liberalization of immigration laws, which also led to an important change in the national origin of newcomers: the dominant groups now were Latin Americans and Asians.¹¹ The Walter-McCarran Act of 1952 abolished "all racial and ethnic bars to immigration and naturalization" and continued a non-quota system for Latin Americans. The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the national quotas and introduced numerical restrictions for both hemispheres. It also put a preference on family relations with U.S. citizens. The closest family members could, therefore, migrate to the U.S. outside the numerical restrictions. Later, other preferences, based on national origin, were also established. Another important immigration act was the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which, on the one hand, introduced some restrictions, as far as the "unlawful employment of aliens" is concerned, for example, but on the other hand, granted amnesty to about three million illegal immigrants, who met all the specified conditions. This amnesty, paradoxically, led to the increase in the legal immigration of closest family members. It was especially important to

¹⁰ For the discussion of the similarities and differences between the anti-immigrant attitudes in the 1880-1920 and 1970-1998, see Jaret (1999).

¹¹ According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the majority of foreign-born are from Latin America (about 52 percent), mainly from Mexico, and from Asia (about 26 percent), mainly China and the Philippines (Malone et al. 2003, 5).

the Mexican group since they comprised 70 percent of the people admitted into the program (Daniels 2004, *passim*).

In fact, increased immigration rates, alongside a high birth rate, contributed to very fast growth in the number of Hispanics/Latinos. In only two decades (1980-2000), their absolute numbers and their share in the U.S. population doubled (from 6.4 percent to 12.5 percent, and from 14.6 million to 35.3 million, respectively) (Hobbs and Stoops 2002, 78). The fact that in mid-2006 the Hispanic/Latino group reached over 14.8 percent of the population (44.3 million) (U.S. Census Bureau 2007) and is constantly growing enhances the stereotype of all Latinos as “immigrants.” The advocates of immigration restrictions also emphasize that for the first time in U.S. history, the majority of immigrants speak the same language: Spanish. In their opinion, this is a threat to the future of the English language in the United States and even to American identity (Huntington 2004, 256).

In April 1981 Senator Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa, a Canadian immigrant of Japanese origin and a naturalized U.S. citizen, proposed an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, SJ Res. 72, which would establish English as an official language of the country. Even though it was not voted by the Congress, it did become the first proposal that referred to an official status for English.

In 1983 Hayakawa and John Tanton established an organization, U.S. English, to lobby for the establishment of English as an official language of the United States. The organization sees several reasons for Official English (U.S. English n.d.b). First, “Official English promotes unity.” It is argued that the long tradition of assimilation “has always included the adoption of English as the common means of communication. Unfortunately, the proliferation of multilingual government sends the opposite message to non-English speakers: it is not necessary to learn English because the government will accommodate them in other languages” (U.S. English n.d.b). Immigrants, as the argument goes, are slower to learn English when they receive support in their native languages. Moreover, language diversity contributes to racial and ethnic conflicts. Second, “Official English empowers immigrants.... Life without English proficiency in the United States is a life of low-skilled, low-paying jobs. Studies of Census data show that an immigrant’s income rises about 30 percent as a result of learning English. Knowledge of English leads to the realization of the American dream of increased economic opportunity and the ability to become a more productive member of society, which benefits everyone” (U.S. English n.d.b). Hence, to succeed in the U.S. you must know English, while language assistance, in fact, deprives you of full participation in the society. Third, “Official English is common sense government.” It would eliminate the need to spend money on services in different languages, which could be spent on English language classes for the immigrants. U.S. English also emphasizes that giving English the status of an official language does not mean that other language use would be absolutely banned. It would be possible in emergency situations, judicial proceeding as well as *foreign-language instruction* and the *promotion of tourism* [sic!] (U.S. English n.d.b). Regulation, as they write, would not impose a language on private firms, religious celebrations, or private conversations.

U.S. English won the support of many prominent Americans. In its Advisory Board sits, for example, the former governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger (U.S. English n.d.b). As Crawford writes (2001, 5), the organization was also endorsed, for example, by former-President Richard Nixon, Senator Eugene McCarthy, writer Saul Bellow, and actors Charlton Heston and Whoopi Goldberg, as well as other figures, some of whom later withdrew their support. The number of U.S. English members grew substantially in a few years: from 300 in 1983, to 400 000 in 1990. In 2000, it claimed 1.4 million members, while in 2009, 400 000 more (Schmidt 2001, 44; U.S. English n.d.b). The survey commissioned by the organization itself in the 1980s revealed that their members were mostly wealthy, college-educated men over 60, conservative, of Northern European origin (Crawford 2001, 24).

Apart from U.S. English, some other organizations support giving English an official status. One of them is ProEnglish, which had its beginnings in 1994 as an initiative known as English Language Advocates that was defending Official English law in Arizona (ProEnglish n.d.). Another organization, English First, founded in 1986 by Larry Pratt, a former Virginia state representative, and the president of Gun Owners of America, currently has about 150 000 members (English First n.d.). Worth mentioning is also the American Ethnic Coalition, founded that same year in Texas by Lou Zaeske, which aims "to prevent the division of America along language or ethnic lines" (quoted in Draper and Jimenez 1996, 3).

Official English opponents do not agree with the arguments of the English-Only Movement. In their opinion, English is not in danger in the United States, since even such groups as Hispanics/Latinos, considered very loyal to their mother tongue, show a tendency to language assimilation. The Spanish language as immigrants' dominant language gives way to English as the dominant language in the second and subsequent generations, and in many cases it is finally completely dropped.¹² Hispanics/Latinos are simply perfectly aware of the fact that English proficiency is important for their socioeconomic mobility. Psychologists also point out that if immigrants are forced to shed their language and culture, it may result in serious identity problems, especially among children (Padilla et al. 1991, 4). As for bilingual education, research shows that it is effective, and, what is more, "when bilingual education is implemented in a context that fosters an attitude of additive bilingualism, then marked changes in school achievement, self-esteem, and intergroup cooperation are observed" (Padilla et al. 1991, 9). Other arguments against Official English are for example: it would limit the government's communication with those who have limited language skills or do not speak English, including American citizens; it will enhance hostility toward minority groups, especially Asians and Hispanics/Latinos; and it is inconsistent with American values, violating, basically, the right to freedom of speech, etc. (Crawford 2006, 1-2).

¹² See, for example, Alba and Nee (2003, 217-220); Padilla et al. (1991); Pew Hispanic Center and Kaiser Family Foundation (2002 and 2004, 16).

The belief that instead of language restrictions the United States needs the protection of cultural rights led to a proposal for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution (A Cultural Rights Amendment), presented to Congress in 1987. Proposed by Louisiana Democratic Senator John Breaux and Representative Jimmy Hayes, it would have granted “the right of the people to preserve, foster, and promote their respective historic, linguistic, and cultural origins” (quoted in Draper and Jimenez 1996, 3). In clear opposition to Official English also stand state English Plus resolutions. Their supporters believe that the retention and the development of a person’s first language should be encouraged, and bilingual assistance programs and policies should be strengthened. As the “Statement of Purpose” of the English Plus Information Clearinghouse (EPIC) reads, “The English Plus concept holds that the national interest can best be served when all members of our society have full access to effective opportunities to acquire strong English proficiency *plus* mastery of a second or multiple languages” (1987, 152). The first state to approve a non-binding English Plus resolution was New Mexico in 1989, followed by Oregon and Washington, and then Rhode Island in 1992.

Crawford suggests that, the *covert agenda* of the English-Only Movement is a “determination to resist racial and cultural diversity in the United States” (2001, 23). In fact, the Southern Poverty Law Center publication *The Nativist Lobby* (2009) calls John Tanton, the co-founder of U.S. English, “the most important figure in the modern American anti-immigrant movement for three decades” (Beirich 2009, 5). As the report shows, Tanton has been interested in eugenics, linked to racist ideas, and had contact with the leading white nationalists, as well as Holocaust deniers and Klan lawyers. Widely discussed in many publications on Official English is Tanton’s 1986 memorandum “Memo to WITAN IV Attendees,” which leaked out to the public and left no doubts about what he thought about Hispanics/Latinos. He wrote, “Will the present majority peaceably hand over its political power to a group that is simply more fertile?...Can *homo contraceptivus* compete with *homo pro-genitiva* if borders aren’t controlled?” (1986). The leak had some important consequences for Tanton and U.S. English. He himself resigned, while some important members left the organization truly appalled by his statements (Crawford 2001, 33).

Tanton is also the founder of “the leading organizations of the nativist lobby” (Beirich 2009, 5). One of them is Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR),¹³ founded in 1979, which supports restrictive immigration policies and border control. FAIR is known to have accepted over US\$1.2 million support from the Pioneer Fund, “dedicated to furthering the scientific study of human ability and diversity” (Pioneer Fund n.d.). FAIR is currently listed as a “hate group” by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The second organization, the Center for Immigration Studies, is “the nativist lobby’s supposedly ‘independent’ think tank,” producing studies on immigration aspects, and which, as Beirich writes, “has never found any aspect of immigration it likes” (2009, 13). The third organization,

¹³ See also Beirich (2007).

NumbersUSA, is a grassroots organizing group whose founder, Roy Beck, has strong links to Tanton (Beirich 2009, 18-21). Tanton also currently sits on the Board of Directors of ProEnglish.

Recently there has been a substantial rise in the number of anti-immigrant movements nationwide. An important trigger for the appearance of about 300 similar groups, some more "hard-line" than others was the Minutemen Project border watch in Arizona (2005) (Beirich 2010a). In May 2010, the Minuteman Project itself started a SB1070 task force to help the state enforce the regulation. At the same time, various "hate groups," to use the Southern Poverty Law Center terminology, such as the traditionally white supremacist Council of Conservative Citizens, also became engaged in the immigration problem (Beirich 2010a).

Official English Regulations

Since Hayakawa proposed the aforementioned constitutional amendment in 1981, several other measures seeking to establish English either as an official language of the *United States* or as an official language of the *American government* have been introduced in Congress.¹⁴ Until the 110th Congress (2007-2008), five of them passed one house.¹⁵ One was the Bill Emerson English Language Empowerment Act of 1996 (HR123), approved by the House of Representatives, but not voted in the Senate. Had this regulation been adopted, English would have become the official language of the U.S. government (and, thus, of federal legislation); it would also have amended the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to repeal bilingual voting requirement provisions. Then, in May 2006 an amendment to a proposal of immigration legislation (S2611), declaring English the national language of the United States, was passed by the Senate. However, it died at year's end.

As for state legislation, in 2010, English was an official language of the majority (i.e., 29) of American states, of which Nebraska, Illinois, and Virginia had adopted Official English laws even before the English-Only Movement started, while Hawaii has been officially bilingual since 1978. Adopting English as an official language of Nebraska in 1920 was a direct consequence of anti-German sentiments caused by World War I and the Americanization campaign (Tatalovich 1995, 33-62). In Illinois, the 1969 Official English law was, in fact, an amendment to the 1923 regulation that gave "American" language an official status (and which resulted from, as the sponsor of the 1969 amendment expressed it, "Anglophobia hysteria" (quoted in Tatalovich 1995, 65-69). Official English in Virginia (1981), adopted shortly before the organization U.S. English was formed, as Raymond Tata-

¹⁴ The first "language of government" proposals were introduced in the 101th Congress (1989-1990) (HR4424 and S3179). See, for example, Legislative History at the U.S. English website.

¹⁵ Ninety-seventh Congress (1981-1982), S. Amdt. 2019 to S. 2222; 98th Congress (1983-1984), S529; 99th Congress (1985-1986), S. Amdt. 559 to S1200; 104th Congress (1995-1996), HR123; 109th Congress (2005-2006), S. Amdt. 4064 to S. 2611. See Legislative History at the U.S. English website.

lovich writes, was not symbolic: "Opposition to bilingual education was clearly the motivation behind this statute" (195-200).

By 1990, 14 other states had approved Official English laws: Indiana (1984), Kentucky (1984), Tennessee (1984), California (1986), Georgia (1986), Arkansas (1987), Mississippi (1987), North Carolina (1987), North Dakota (1987), South Carolina (1987), Arizona (1988, though later ruled unconstitutional), Colorado (1988), Florida (1988), and Alabama (1990). What undoubtedly contributed to the "second wave" of the Official English campaign were the aforementioned amnesty programs under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, on the one hand, and, on the other, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in regions that had experienced a big influx of immigrants in previous years. This was, for example, the case in California, where in the 1980s and the 1990s alone several harsh measures were approved, with an impact on immigrant and minority communities: an Official English law,¹⁶ a ban on bilingual education, a ban on affirmative action, and a harsh anti-immigrant law (Proposition 187).¹⁷ As a matter of fact, 1994's Proposition 187 is sometimes pointed out as a regulation that *revived* the English language campaign (e.g., Bender 1996). Montana, New Hampshire, and South Dakota adopted official English regulations in 1995. They were followed by Wyoming (1996), Missouri (1998), and Alaska (1998, challenged in court, but later upheld). Utah followed in 2000, and Iowa in 2002. The third wave started only recently. As Tony Dokoupil wrote in May 2010, "About 10 additional states have passed 'official English' laws through at least one legislative body since immigration reform broke down in 2006." Meanwhile, three states (Arizona for the second time in 2006, Kansas in 2007, and most recently, Oklahoma in 2010) approved such laws.

Apart from the 29 states, the organization U.S. English also lists Louisiana (1812) and Massachusetts (1975) as having English as an official language (U.S. English n.d.a). Yet, Crawford argues that none of them ever *officially* adopted an Official English law. Massachusetts is claimed by Official English supporters "on the basis of a casual (and uninformed) statement by a state court in 1975" (Crawford n.d.). Louisiana's first state Constitution (1812) stated that all laws and official documents would be published in the language "in which the Constitution of the United States is written" (quoted in Crawford 2001, 13). However, as Crawford writes, it did not restrict other languages. French was still used in state government and the state's second governor did not speak English at all. English as the only language of teaching was introduced in 1921. In 1974, French was granted protection by the state Constitution, as a part of its cultural heritage (Baron 1990, 87).

What is interesting, as Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and Teiahsha Bankhead point out, is that in the states where Official English was adopted by state legislators, the law is symbolic, while in the states where Official English law was accepted by state voters (e.g., Arizona, California, Colorado, and Florida), this law is a reflec-

¹⁶ For more information on Official English in California, see Adams and Brink (1990).

¹⁷ For more information on these regulations, see Gibbs and Bankhead (2001).

tion of the real concerns of the inhabitants and their will to preserve the dominant status of English (Gibbs and Bankhead 2001, 131).

But why did voters support the idea of giving English official status in the first place? As already mentioned, it has to do with the current immigration rates as well as the changes brought by the newcomers to the U.S. communities and towns (changes in ethnic composition, increased crime rates, etc.) (Crawford 2001, 24-27). Still, as Carol L. Schmid writes, public support for Official English in polls depends to a great extent on how the question itself is formulated and who is asked. A more general idea of giving English an official status, if no information is included about its possible restrictions and consequences, meets with wider support. It seems to reflect the strong symbolic meaning of the English language for American national identity. On the other hand, if the question is more detailed and includes some additional information about the Official English law and its consequences (e.g., a ban on other language use by federal institutions, even where English is spoken by a limited number of people, etc.), support for it is lower. This is why the polls range from 50 percent to almost 90 percent in favor of Official English law (Schmid 2001, 76).

Some states also adopt other regulations, which to some extent restrict other language use. In 1983, San Francisco voters supported Proposition 0 (on ballots and voting materials in English only).¹⁸ One year later, a similar initiative, Proposition 38 ("Voting Materials in English Only"), sponsored by S.I. Hayakawa and other U.S. English leaders, was supported by the state of California. California thus opposed the 1975 federal amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which guarantees ballots in other languages in specific situations. Still, both propositions were non-binding because, as Kathryn A. Woolard states, "Federal legislation does not derive its authority from local voters" (1990, 125).

The supporters of Official English also object to the possibility of taking driving tests in other languages. Among those states which in 2009 offered the most opportunities in this respect were, as quoted here from the U.S. English website: California (32 languages), Massachusetts (25), Kentucky (23), Connecticut (21), and Iowa (21) (2009a). Recently, more states restricted the number of languages (8) than added new languages to the list (7). At the same time, the number of states that offer these exams *only* in English increased. In 2009 this group consisted of Arizona, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Utah (2009b).

Language restrictions have also been adopted at a local level; the aforementioned Dade County "Anti-Bilingual Ordinance" is one example. U.S. English and other organizations also report American *towns* adopting Official English laws. In this context a border town of El Cenizo, Texas, is worth mentioning. In this small town of 3 500 inhabitants, in 1999, special status was granted to a language by the Predominant Language Ordinance. It was, however, not *English*, but *Spanish*. According to 2000 U.S. Census data (2000a), almost 99 percent of the inhabitants of El Cenizo were Hispanics/Latinos, over 42 percent were foreign born, and

¹⁸ For more information on Proposition 0, see Woolard (1990, 125-138).

as many as 33.5 percent were not U.S. citizens. What is more, over 90 percent of the population spoke Spanish at home. These very special characteristics of the town make its development difficult (Hart 2003, 200-201). The ordinance gave Spanish a status of a predominant language to incorporate people of limited English language skills into a broader community. It is, thus, a kind of legislation that focuses on the real needs of community members (Hart 2003, 200). Many people consider the Predominant Language Ordinance to be a Spanish-Only law, even though the document refers to Spanish as a “predominant,” not an “official” language.¹⁹

Final Thoughts

Even though the dominant status of English in the United States does not seem to be challenged, Official English advocates have continued their efforts. During the 111th session (2009-2010), several projects were presented to Congress that aimed, for example, to designate English as an official language of the U.S. government or of the United States, or challenged bilingual voting ballots and Executive Order 13166.²⁰ Meanwhile, on November 2, 2010, Oklahoma voters approved an Official English measure. Hence, Official English is seen as unifying the nation and essential to social mobility and economic advancement.

An important question needs to be answered, however, as well-known U.S. sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman pointed out (1988, 168-169). While the supporters of Official English/English Only focus on *immigrants* and the assistance they may require, the question is why the *next generations* of Hispanic/Latino immigrants, who already speak English—and in some cases this is the only language they speak—remain in the *barrios*. English proficiency turns out, thus, to be *not* the only problem, because it is *not the only* condition of their social mobility. As Fishman wrote in 1988, “The Official English/English Only movement may largely represent the displacement of middle-class Anglo fears and anxieties from the more difficult, if not intractable, *real* causes of their fears and anxieties, to mythical and simplistic and stereotyped scapegoats” (1988, 169). The American middle-class feels insecure and uneasy about immigrants due to the socio-economic changes in the U.S. (slower economy, the discourse of multiculturalism, next generations having smaller possibilities of social mobility, etc.). Thus, the deep roots of the English Only movement lie in the economic, social, and political problems of the United States. At the same time, it seems to be a safety valve, a way of channeling, to repeat Fishman’s words, “middle-class Anglo fears and anxieties.”

It has been over 20 years since Fishman formulated these opinions. Since then, immigration from Latin America, mainly from Mexico, has grown substantially. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data show that almost 18 percent of the U.S. pop-

¹⁹ For more information, see Hart (2003, 201-208).

²⁰ See, for example, the U.S. English website for more about these bills.

ulation uses a language other than English at home, and in most cases they speak Spanish (2000c), while the 2010 data may be even higher.²¹ However, as has already been mentioned, research confirms that even this group undergoes language assimilation and is aware of its important role in socioeconomic advancement. At the same time, as a group, Hispanics/Latinos are still below average as far as education, wages, or other indicators are concerned.²² Although there is evidence for some socioeconomic upgrading in the second generation (including in the groups dominated by traditional labor migrants, e.g., Mexicans), concerns continue to exist, like, for example, the possible impact of parents' illegal status on the socioeconomic attainment of their U.S.-born children. Studies also find a worrying fact: the third generation shows "a stagnation in educational attainment relative to the second generation." What is more, there has been "the emergence of an oppositional culture deriding school achievement among some [Mexican-American schoolchildren] who are not immigrants" (Alba and Nee 2003, 230-248). Thus, the question may be asked: to what extent are the third generation's stagnation and derisive attitude toward education a consequence of U.S. society still perceiving Hispanics/Latinos as the "others"? Fishman's question still remains valid.

The language struggle in the United States seems to be more than just an illustration of how important language is in the national identity discourse. Promoting "unity," which is what Official English supporters claim to be doing, is another way of forcing assimilation. Those who speak an "alien" language and do not speak English are perceived as not wanting to assimilate, and therefore, as un-American "strangers." And even though most of the Official English measures do not seem to have much impact on state policies and actions, they do serve one purpose: instead of promoting "unity," these measures divide people and make them look at their fellows as "others." The mere fact of declaring English an official language turns ordinary citizens and public officials into "language vigilantes." The examples of language vigilantism (Baron 1990, 20-21; Crawford 2006, 5) show intolerance and harmful resentment toward language minorities and immigrants. At the same time, denying access to the mother tongue and imposing English on children may have a very significant impact on their identity and lead to their marginalization. In fact, the contemporary language struggle may be seen as a struggle against the "aliens," a fight to restrict immigration from culturally (and racially) different regions. Also the fact that the movement has close ties to immigration restrictionists and anti-immigration organizations leads many observers to conclude that its agenda is more far-reaching.

²¹ The 2010 U.S. Census data are not available yet at the moment of this writing.

²² See, for example, Ramirez (2004).

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