ANTI-HISPANIC SENTIMENT AND ENGLISH-ONLY POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

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LANGUAGE DEBATE IN THE UNITED STATES

• Three main concerns in the language debate:
  • Bilingual Education
  • Non-English Citizen’s Access To Political Rights
  • English-only (Official English)

• Increased focus on English-only debate since the 80s
  • Proposal of the English Language Amendment (1981)
  • Creation of U.S. English (1983) and English First (1986)
  • States implementing English-only/Official English laws
  • Private sector, English-only workplace policy
ENGLISH’S STATUS IN THE UNITED STATES

• English is not the official language of the United States

• U.S. Naturalization Test and “official English” status:
  • “demonstrate understanding of English language including ability to read, write, speak…”
  • Evaluation criteria: Speaking & Reading
    • Failure = not reading a sentence, omits/substitutes content word
    • Makes pronunciation/intonation errors that interfere with meaning

• Added in 1906/1915, period of mass immigration

SCORING GUIDELINES FOR THE U.S. NATURALIZATION TEST

Section 312 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) provides that most applicants for naturalization demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language, as well as a knowledge of U.S. government and history ( civics). This document provides a general description of how the U.S. Naturalization Test is evaluated and scored by Officers of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

**SPEAKING:** An applicant’s verbal skills are determined by the applicant’s answers to questions normally asked by USCIS Officers during the naturalization eligibility interview. USCIS Officers are required to repeat and rephrase questions until the Officer is satisfied that the applicant either fully understands the question or does not understand English. If the applicant generally understands and can respond meaningfully to questions relevant to the determination of eligibility, the applicant has demonstrated the ability to speak English.

**READING:** To sufficiently demonstrate the ability to read in English, applicants must read one sentence, out of three sentences, in a manner suggesting to the USCIS Officer that the applicant appears to understand the meaning of the sentence. Once the applicant reads one of three sentences correctly, USCIS procedures require that the USCIS Officer will stop administering the reading test. Applicants shall not be failed because of their accent when speaking English. A general description of how the reading test is scored follows:

**Pass:**
  • Reads one sentence without extended pauses
  • Reads all content words but may omit short words that do not interfere with meaning
  • May make pronunciation or intonation errors that do not interfere with meaning

**Fail:**
  • Does not read the sentence
  • Omits a content word or substitutes another word for a content word
  • Pauses for extended periods of time while reading the sentence
  • Makes pronunciation or intonation errors that interfere with meaning
IMMIGRATION AND LANGUAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

• Increase in immigration from Latin American countries
  • Increase from 4.5% of population identifying as “Hispanic” in 1970 to 11.3% in 1998
    • 64% of this population have Mexican ancestry, 1996 (Kilty & de Haymes, 2000)
  • Expected 35% of population by 2050 (Brandes, 2006)
IS SPANISH A THREAT TO ENGLISH?

• Perceived threat between in-groups and out-groups (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996)

• Negative beliefs about minorities increased by lack of inter-group contact (Allport, as referenced by Shin, Leal, & Ellison, 2015)

• Language rights afforded to linguistic minorities (Native Hawaiians, no perceived threat) (Brandes, 2006)
Many people believe that English has become a cultural component of American identity (Brandes, 2006)

Poll-takers in 2000: 65%-85% support Official English (Kilty & Dehaymes, 2000)

Common beliefs:
- Hispanic-Immigrants are refusing to learn English
- Immigrants are “self-segregating”
- Forcing Spanish-language education on English-speaking Americans
MISCONCEPTIONS EXPLAINED

• Previous generations of immigrants:
  • Learned English, rejected Spanish, assimilated

• Recent generations of immigrants:
  • Learn English, retain Spanish, integration
  • Many on ESL waiting lists, children speak English with native fluency
  • Bilingual education implemented to help Spanish-speaking children/lower drop-out rates
    • Initial push during Civil Rights & Chicano movements of 1960s (Shin et al., 2015)
REFERENCES


