Linguistic Denial and Linguistic Self-Denial: American Ideologies of Language

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Americans display multiple and contending perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and modes of reasoning about language policy issues. The major American ideologies of language are similar, however, in their denial of linguistic inequality: its existence, its consequences, and the possibility of overcoming it.

Those who fight for the rights of linguistic minorities accept some of the main assumptions of their adversaries. These assumptions include the politically disunifying impact of linguistic diversity within the citizenry, the validity of language competence as an indicator of national loyalty, the ethnic neutrality of standard English, the intrinsic inferiority of dialects, the adequacy of willpower for mastery of the society's dominant language, the adequacy of this mastery for upward economic mobility, and the rightful exclusion of language from the categories protected by law from discrimination.

These generalizations emerge chiefly from debates and judicial opinions about the official recognition of Spanish and Black English in elections and public schools.

Languages have unequal statuses. People sometimes describe, explain, justify, criticize, or propose to change this fact. Their arguments may be our best evidence of perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and reasoning about linguistic inequality. Do people see differences in the statuses of languages as good or bad, natural or arbitrary, inevitable or optional? Do they care more about the individual or the group effects of linguistic inequality? What do they think the effects are? What forces do they think rob languages of equal status? When they discuss ways to change the statuses of languages, which alternatives do they see as plausible, which do they not even consider, and how do they choose among the options?

While we cannot know what people think about such questions, we know what they say. At least in the United States, much of what is said denies observed or apparent facts about linguistic inequality. Three common objects of denial are (1) the existence of linguistic inequality, (2) the consequences of linguistic inequality, and (3) the possibility of overcoming linguistic inequality.

Who engages in these denials? Not only the linguistically advantaged but also, often, linguistic minority activists deny that

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linguistic inequality exists, does harm, and could be overcome. Even those who fight for the rights of linguistic minorities often accept some of the main assumptions of their adversaries.

This article examines debates primarily about two issues: the languages in which electoral activities (particularly voting) take place and the languages of instruction in public schools. The debates primarily involve three speech communities in the United States: those speaking standard English, those speaking Black English, and those speaking Spanish.

Linguistic Inequality and the Right to Vote

In the founding years of the United States, the fear of becoming an aristocratic nation helped make the new government tolerant of linguistic minorities (Heath 1976). Many leaders perceived official unilingualism as an obstacle to the communication of information and learning to all peoples of the new nation. Such an obstacle would limit participation in government to those who spoke the official language, thereby creating the rule of a few over many.

The American founding fathers were concerned with both legitimating their government and fostering national unity. According to Heath (1976: 14–15), they believed that legal tolerance of linguistic diversity would help spread support for the new regime and dissuade linguistic minorities from becoming "separate and distinct peoples within the nation," for it is the oppressed and untolerated who create disruption and revolt.

From the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the official use and recognition of multiple languages within the United States largely disappeared. As in other arenas, the electoral process became almost unilingual, and the states rarely published voter information or ballots in any language but English. Societal pressure to identify oneself as American by using English increased. Many Chicanos "came to believe that in order to be a true American it was essential to forget one's heritage, especially speaking one's native tongue. Many, in an attempt to become 'American,' learned English at the expense of Spanish" (San Miguel 1978: 93).

In 1975, amendments to the 1965 Voting Rights Act required bilingual, and in some cases multilingual, ballots and voting procedures in several states. The criteria were the speakers of certain minority languages as a proportion of the population in a state or political subdivision, and the level of education among them (*U.S. Code*, P.L. 94-73).

The debate over the limited federal guarantee of the right to use one's own language in voting tends to be two-sided. One side favors

this right and bases its argument on the assumption that those who don't speak English are poor. The other side rejects this right and bases its argument on the assumption that those who don't speak English are disloyal.

The "they are poor" argument can be inferred from the text of the voting rights amendment itself. The linking of linguistic minorities with low education (termed "illiteracy") in the statute suggests the belief that not speaking English is a characteristic of those who are less educated and less fortunate.

The "they are disloyal" argument is manifested in voluntaristic rhetoric about the learning and nonlearning of English. Those opposed to multilingual voting services talk about persons who "refuse," "don't bother," or "don't care enough" to learn English. They do *not* talk about those who "are too old," "don't have time," or "can't afford" to learn English. As long as the learning of English is presumed to be an act of will, knowledge of English can be seen as a measure of one's "Americanness." If one refuses to learn English, one is refusing to participate in the American process.

Exemplary of this view, a noted and popular California Republican commented, "Americans who care enough to vote care enough to learn English" (quoted by Goff 1976). And a California college student wrote, "It is doubtful if many native born citizens who take so little interest in American life that they have failed to learn English would want to vote" (Ross 1975).

The two sides also discuss different presumed consequences of the right to vote using one's own language. For those who advocate this right, it democratizes politics. For those opposed, it causes political disunity. "The Justice Department's decision that voters must be offered ballots in a choice of languages is a dangerous step for this country, as it opens the door to severe fragmentization [*sic*] of our society ..." (Bridges 1975). According to Drake (1978: 11), "the fear that many Americans have that the country will lose its national unity in the face of widespread bilingualism" is real.

Both sides, however, claim national unity as a desirable goal. One side sees tolerance of linguistic diversity as a threat to that goal. The other side sees tolerance of linguistic diversity promoting unity through equal opportunity for democratic participation.

Both sides also adhere to "individualism." Individualism, interpreted as "rights of the individual," inspired the founders of the United States to let groups maintain their languages (see Heath 1976) and thereby preserve their distinctiveness as groups. This pluralistic view advocates the right to use minority languages and treats competence in the dominant language as a tool for access to resources, not as a step in molding minorities to the dominant

culture. An opposing interpretation of "individualism" focuses on success through enterprise and hard work. This is the interpretation of those who believe minority-language speakers should ignore group pressures for linguistic solidarity and assimilate to English, a necessity for realizing the American Dream. "While one suffers a diminished sense of *private* individuality by becoming assimilated into public [English-speaking] society, such assimilation makes possible the achievement of *public* individuality" (Rodriguez 1981: 26). In this view, a minority language is a burden from which a rational individual wants to escape. The minority group exerts "pressure" to be "different." The majority exerts an "attraction," and assimilation is voluntary. The opposing pluralist view is criticized for "insist[ing] on a rigidity of boundaries and a commitment to group" and "limit[ing] the autonomous, the adventurous, and the ambitious" (Drake 1978: 8).[1]

It is understandable that the opposing parties both claim their views promote national unity and individualism, since these are axiomatic values in American politics. But reconciling these values to experience can be difficult. Persons who assimilate to the dominant language and then discover that they still suffer ascriptive discrimination tend to become disillusioned or even mentally ill (Kochman 1974: 43). Persons expected to be "individualists" while also identifying with their minority group often find that they can't choose which role to emphasize. As Jefferson (1979) stated, "People see us by our color," rather than as individuals. Minority group resentment against members who adopt majority speech traits is also commonly reported.

Language and Educational Equality

English vs. Spanish

The choice of languages as media of instruction in American public schools underwent a unilingualization similar to that in the electoral arena. Similarly, those opposed to the sole role of English made federal legislative gains in the mid-twentieth century. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act (Title VII amendment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) and subsequent

1. It should be pointed out that Drake criticizes both the pluralist and assimilationist models. His critique of the latter, however, does not question its interpretation of individualism, but rather, relying mainly on Higham's work (1975), criticizes it for alienating and inducing self-hatred for those minority individuals who fail in competition. He doesn't ask why they fail.

congressional, administrative, and judicial rulings required that for at least some groups of students, some subject matters, and some school levels more than one language be used in instruction.

Those supporting and opposing such requirements differ principally in how they describe (1) whom the requirements would affect, (2) what the effects would be, (3) what forum and methods are appropriate for deciding the issue, and (4) what uses, if any, public schools should make of minority languages for instruction.

The proponents tend to presume that the beneficiaries of these requirements would be American citizens no less deeply rooted in American society than anyone else. The opponents tend to describe those affected as foreigners, immigrants, new arrivals, or persons not yet fully socialized into the American political system. The proponents claim that giving school pupils the right to receive instruction through their native languages would help them learn whatever their schools tried to teach them, including the English language, and that they would thereby become better educated and more likely to escape from poverty. The opponents claim that this same policy would result in less proficiency in English by pupils with other native languages than they would achieve if they were taught in English, and that, in addition, these pupils would be less loyal politically to the United States. The proponents tend to regard political organizing at all levels of government among the beneficiaries of the proposed requirements as appropriate, while the opponents tend to assert that the issue should be resolved by local-level educational agencies alone.

The debate about the effects of using native languages in education tends to be summarized by the question, "Does bilingual education work?" "Experts" disagree (see Hakuta 1986: 219–222), but the very fact that the debate focuses on this question reflects a consensual denial of an absolute right of each individual to native-medium education, and thus a victory for the pro-English side.

The grounds for and against using native languages in instruction are often insinuated rather than explicated. For example, Cohen (1985) says a new educational report "stresses that all Hispanic students must learn English ...," as if everyone agreed and the only question were how emphatically. He notes that Spanish "take[s] a back seat" in the report and contrastingly describes the 1960s as a time when educational reformers were not very interested in "standards." He then speculates as to the reasons for "the new emphasis on quality." Later, he says the report shows a "commitment to more equality." This author links the study of more English at the expense of Spanish to "standards," "quality," and "equality" not by assertion (which would open his claims to

counterarguments and require support), but by synonymization. He uses "standards," etc., as *synonyms* for "English," hiding the potentially controversial nature of these links.

The claim that education in a minority native language breeds disloyalty is often defended by pointing to countries where linguistic diversity and political separatism are both perceived to be strong. Some members of the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies were reported (Nieto 1979) to see bilingual education as a divisive force possibly leading to separatism analogous to that demanded by French Canadians. Quigg (1978) wrote that "immigrants" should be helped to learn English and "North Americans" should be encouraged to study Spanish, but that "creating a bilingual society" would make the United States "unique in fostering national divisiveness" and "destructive tensions." It would create "for our children the fearsome dissension that Canadians, Belgians and others cannot escape." A federal appeals court, ruling against demands for native-language instruction, commented (*Guadelupe* 1978: 4156),

> Linguistic and cultural diversity within the nation-state, whatever may be its advantages from time to time, can restrict the scope of fundamental compact. Diversity limits unity. Effective action by the nation-state rises to its peak of strength only when it is in response to aspirations unreservedly shared by each constituent culture and language group.

Hispanic leaders deny that their goal in demanding bilingual education (and bilingual ballots) is to create national disunity. They claim only to want an equal voice, particularly in institutions that directly affect their people, and results of a survey of Hispanic organizations support this claim (Solé 1977: 12). A leader in the field of bilingual education (Solís 1979: 7) described Hispanic Americans as having "true love ... for their country, as reflected by their eagerness to defend it during World War II, Korea and the War in Vietnam." Even the most radical Hispanic political organizations, such as La Raza Unida party and the Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA), despite the rhetoric of some of their founders, have promoted reform rather than political separatism. Their conventional tactics can be seen as strengthening the existing political order (Martínez and Vásquez 1974; Muñoz 1974; Santillan 1978). By pushing for "militant integration" (Navarro 1974: 81) into mainstream American society, such organizations may be more genuinely dedicated to "national unity" than

assimilationist organizations that ostracize not yet assimilated minorities. As a Chicano leader said (quoted in Nava 1973: 145),

> Someone asked me recently whether I thought any type of system other than the American political system could work in South Texas. I thought about it for a minute and suggested that the question be reworded because we ought to try the American system first.

The Marxist orientation of some Chicano leaders also inhibits separatism. The Marxist message tends to be that Chicanos must unite with the oppressed among other peoples (Santillan 1978: 14).

Advocates of the right to native-language instruction frequently call for national-level political organizing by educational and ethnic lobbies on its behalf (e.g., Fishman 1970: 47). A session on "organizing," led by two attorneys, was part of the 8th Annual International Bicultural/Bilingual Education Conference in 1979.

The legitimacy of such methods is questioned by those who deny the right to native-language education.

> The present encouragement given to making [Spanish-speaking] enclaves permanent, in the mistaken view that they are an expression of positive pluralism, points the road to cultural, economic and political divisiveness....
>
> Political splinter groups within the Spanish-speaking community, and among educators, are misinterpreting the goals of bilingual education in New York as a means of creating a Spanish-speaking power base ("Bilingual Danger" 1976).

Efforts to create a "power base" are perceived as normal when undertaken by some groups, but as antiregime when undertaken by others. In the United States, political parties were perceived as subversive in the late eighteenth century. Jewish, black, and labor power bases became acceptable in the twentieth century (Cohen 1972; Edwards 1979). Minority-language power bases were once an accepted feature of urban American politics, but today's arguments against native-language education imply a suspicion of such coalitions as inherently disloyal.

The proposed roles of minority languages in instruction vary from total nonuse to exclusive use. Advocates have clustered around certain named models of minority-language use, thus defining a handful of alternatives as the objects of debate. "English as a second language (ESL) programs" teach English intensively to non-English-speaking children, with English being the sole

medium of instruction. "Transitional bilingual education" aims to replace the student's language with the dominant language by teaching in the mother tongue while gradually introducing the dominant language as the medium of instruction. After a two- to three-year "transition period," the dominant language is the sole medium of instruction. "Bilingual maintenance programs" gradually add the dominant language to the mother tongue but never completely replace it, in order to produce competent bilinguals who maintain their mother-tongue proficiency. A subcategory of maintenance programs teaches native speakers of both the dominant and a minority language in both languages.

Advocates of these three models tend to take different positions on two of the questions mentioned above: (1) whether native-language instruction teaches more successfully, and (2) whether it promotes national disunity. Those who answer "no/yes" tend to advocate ESL programs exclusively. Those who answer "yes/yes" tend to advocate transitional programs. And those who answer "yes/no" tend to advocate maintenance programs. Those who answer "no/no" do not seem to have joined the debate. An editorial exemplifying the yes/yes position ("Bilingual Danger" 1976) states, "We fully support the proper use of bilingual teaching as a pedagogically sound means of easing pupils' way toward full mastery of English.... But the purpose of such instruction must be to create English-speaking Americans with the least possible delay."

Those advocating education via the society's dominant language typically claim that their policy benefits not only the society but also the minority child. Thus proponents of both the ESL and transitional bilingualism call them "compensatory" (Fishman 1977*a*: 11–12; Seelye 1977: 101). The minority child is seen as having a "deficit" and needing the "technical" or "survival" skills that these and other extra programs (such as preprimary schooling) provide (Bereiter and Engelmann 1966: 6). This focus on individual benefits gives ESL and transitional bilingual education not only a political, national-unity-oriented grounding, but also a "matter-of-fact," "objective" one. By defining the problem as how to *cope with* the dominant role of English, this line of argument implicitly denies that one task for education might be to *protect against* or *free from* the dominance of English. Implied also is the cultural neutrality of English: all that is being imparted is a skill, not a way of life.

Supporters of the maintenance approach claim that the minority child's distinct linguistic and cultural knowledge is a "difference" but not a "deficit." Anticipating the obvious attack against any such "difference" as a source of political disunity, they try to exploit

nationalism for their own side by arguing that linguistic differences can be tapped as a "national resource." Rejecting the "compensatory" interpretation of instruction via languages other than English, they call for the inclusion of native English-speaking children in maintenance bilingual programs so the dominant and minority language groups can appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity, thus strengthening national unity.

Curiously, similar assumptions coincide with opposing policies in the voting and educational arenas. The "they are poor" assumption supports the recognition of minority language rights in voting, but assimilationist policies in education. The "they are different" assumption is used to support multilingualism in education but unilingualism in voting. One approach to an explanation is the notion that being different is innocent in children, but suspect in adults; thus different children should be accommodated, while different adults need to be kept from doing mischief. Poverty, on the other hand, may be commonly seen as curable in children but terminal in adults. If so, poor children should be transformed, while poor adults need to be accommodated.

Despite their apparently contrary beliefs, supporters of all three educational models share some assumptions. One of these is that the production of minority-language monolinguals is not an acceptable way to deal with the existence of unequal-status languages in a society. (For example, practically nobody advocates a monolingual English-speaking mass, a monolingual Spanish-speaking mass, and a bilingual elite.) Another is that the public schools are "great wellsprings of freedom, equality, and self-government" (Greer 1972: 13–17),[2] and hence suitable instruments for carrying out social (and hence linguistic) change. A third shared assumption is that speaking the right language is, for many, the necessary and sufficient means to economic and civic success.

The version of these assumptions that accompanies the "deficit" assumption is that public schools teaching exclusively in English sufficed to teach the early immigrants the dominant language, the skills for economic success, and political loyalty. Those who adhere to this version find it easy to deny that contemporary

2. The original quotation is from Lawrence Cremin, Educational Policies Commission, "Public Education and the Future of America" (Washington, D.C.: National Educational Association and American Association of School Administrators, 1966).

linguistic minorities have any genuine need for the recognition of their languages in the schools.[3]

The "difference" theorists also place the burden for social change on the schools, demanding different schools rather than more schooling. Schools should, in their view, "be designed to accept polycultural input and to prepare ... children for, hopefully, a full participation in a polycultural society" (Williams 1970: 8). Hispanic and bilingual-education leaders, supporting maintenance programs, also stress the need to learn English (e.g., Pérez 1979). They implicitly deny the possibility that these two goals are incompatible (i.e., that competence in English and opportunities for success in an English-speaking environment would induce permanent monolingualization). Rather, they profess a faith in the schools' ability to create competent bilinguals who retain ethnic minority identity and self-esteem.

Standard English vs. Black English

The notion that every language has value tends to evaporate in the struggle of standard languages against nonstandard varieties. According to Fishman (1977*b*), the layman perceives the term "dialect" as pejorative, implying social and linguistic inferiority. "Standard," however, "is associated with higher social, educational, cultural, and economic statuses" (Fishman 1977*b*: 316). Sensitivity to linguistic standards may be particularly strong in countries, like the United States, whose standard languages have themselves recently emerged from "dialect" status (Brandes and Brewer 1977: 55–56; Marckwardt 1976: 107).

The fact that it is a battle between the "dialect" of Black English and "standard" English implictly states the winner for most Americans. Whites who use the term "dialect" only for Black English implicitly deny the deviance of their own speech from the standard. Yet "all native speakers speak dialects which are in some ways 'non-standard'" (Schmidt and McCreary 1977: 428). In fact, the existence of a national standard may be a myth, used only

3. Greer (1970, 1972) claims this is an erroneous belief: the drop-out rate among the early immigrants was quite high. It was by virtue of a large job market for unskilled labor (greatly diminished in size today) that they succeeded. The job market acted as the unaccredited social change (here, assimilating) agent. This argument and the similar one put forward by Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest that both advocates and opponents of linguistic rights in public education overestimate the social effects that their proposals, if implemented, would have, because they ignore the relative weakness of the schools in comparison with the institutions of work in affecting linguistic choices and capabilities.

when convenient. As Fishman (1977b: 320) puts it, "whereas dialect-standard problems in American bilingual education are viewed as a shameful fall from grace, the absence of a politywide standard for American school-English is interpretable as fully in accord with America's democratic traditions and local control of education" (cf. Tocqueville 1969: 478–481).

Even those who see Black English as intrinsically worthy typically imply that discrimination against Black English devalues it. The possibility that Black English has an inalienable value as the sole authentic medium of expression of a culture or a people is denied. Those who abandon it for standard English are thus presumed to benefit. While many advocates of Spanish language maintenance can be found, few publicly advocate the use and maintenance of Black English. At the most, programs of "biloquialism" or bidialectalism are proposed, but these involve a transition to standard English as the sole language of instruction. Black-English speakers are not seen as a national resource to be tapped. A dialectally egalitarian society is not envisioned, so schools are not asked to prepare children to live in such a society.

Many black leaders advocate the "eradication" of Black English as improper, bad, uneducated speech. "Eradicationists" often deny that Black English is a language, dialect, or peculiarly black variety of English, stating instead that it is a "provincial patois," a regional, corrupted, lazy, illiterate, or uneducated variety (shared with or originally learned from whites) without "grammar," "word structure," or "formal expression" ("Black Nonsense" 1971; Thomas 1978; Willis 1979). In this view, those advocating the recognition and use of Black English in schools would deny blacks a necessary tool of career competition (standard English) and must think that blacks, unlike "white immigrants," are "mentally inferior to whites" (Black 1971: 176) and "cannot be absorbed into the mainstream of American society" (Mellan 1970: 16).

An alternative understanding could have been that blacks and whites differ in speech and whites use their greater numbers and power to discriminate against the speech of blacks. What makes the major organizations that battle for black economic, social, and political rights, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP),[4] deny linguistic discrimination? The NAACP's members, and particularly its leaders, have long been exceptionally high-status, highly educated (Myrdal 1944), and therefore standard-English speaking. They

4. Its official organ is the source of most of the above quotations and almost never publishes counterarguments.

perhaps believe that standard English got them to where they are today. To allege that speakers of standard English discriminate against speakers of Black English would imply that black leaders themselves are discriminators. Legitimizing standard English also helps to restrict the pool of "qualified" competitors for their leadership positions. This pattern of minority leadership assimilation is often called "cooptation" (cf. Galtung 1979: 22).

An important assumption underlying these positions is that blacks who master standard English thereby substantially improve their life chances. DeStefano (1971: 25) found that even those blacks who disagreed about the extent to which Black English should be used in the classroom and the positive and negative aspects of Black English said "that job opportunities were definitely hampered for young blacks if they could speak only Black English. Standard English was needed for 'getting ahead,' for upward mobility." This opinion denies two plausible propositions about the careers of blacks in the United States. One is that blacks are excluded from success by racial discrimination that makes any dialectal discrimination pale by comparison. The other is that the dialectal discrimination that does occur is due precisely to the high correlation between speaking nonstandard English and having a different physical appearance from whites. The more acceptable linguistic discrimination is a substitute for discrimination based on physical appearance, but other bases for such discrimination are readily available for use when blacks become linguistically indistinguishable from whites. While the evidence on these propositions is far from complete, it is known that blacks earn less than whites at comparable levels of education (Kochman 1974: 41).

A few critics challenge the consensus by arguing for the value of preserving Black English. They note that, among many urban blacks, Black English is the accepted in-group language; a symbol of ethnic identity, solidarity, liberation, and separatism (Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 202–209); and a medium of skilled verbal performances ("playing the dozens," etc.) that ostracize whites because only blacks can understand them (Kochman 1972). Blacks often reject standard English used among blacks as "uppity" or "phony" while rejecting Black English used formally or with whites as uneducated or unintelligent (Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 202). Those who envision a time when the consensus among blacks will reject integration with whites treat Black English as a national-language-in-waiting (see Dillard 1972: 294).

One critic asserts that white Americans have used the specter of Black-English inferiority to turn blacks into a "monstrous and vicious animal of self-hate" (Wiggens 1976: 251–252). "Blacks

need to gain the realization that Black communication is as distinctly Afro-American as Black skin, that respect for one's speech, whatever it is, is also respect for oneself, and that to veto that fact yields nothing less than an adverse response to one's view of oneself, a syndrome that has too long haunted the Black community" (Wiggens 1976: 253). Evidence of the negative impact on the black individual of such feelings of inferiority was the basis of the decision in *Martin Luther King Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District Board* (1979).[5] The opinion agreed with expert testimony that

> efforts to instruct the children in standard English by teachers who failed to appreciate that the children speak a dialect which is acceptable in the home and peer community can result in the children becoming ashamed of their language, and thus impede the learning process.

The consensus that standard English is a means to success is also attacked by a few critics. Wiggens (1976: 250) claims that an effort to master standard English will not "relieve Blacks of the burden of racism and of economic and political deprivation," but will only distract their attention from discrimination based purely on color. O'Neil (1972: 437) asserts that influencing blacks to learn to imitate the speech of whites is "educational emptiness that helps maintain the present distribution of power...." And Sledd (1972: 455) denies that a mastery of standard English will be very helpful, since, "in job-hunting in America, pigmentation is more important than pronunciation." These critics advocate respect for Black English. They suggest (Sledd 1972: 456) that whites can and should acquire a receptive knowledge of Black English, as blacks have of white English. They also contend that where a job requires competency in "standard English" the criterion is applied only to nonwhites. The widespread tolerance of white nonstandard varieties in the labor market and in politics is evidence that discrimination against Black English has racial rather than performance motives (Hymes 1972: xii; Sledd 1972: 454–455; Wiggens 1976: 251).

Eradicationists claim schools help black children "get ahead," have "equal opportunity," and "compete" with whites. Although the critics deny that public schools have reduced social inequality, they typically have an implicit belief (shared with their adversaries) in

5. Glazer (1981) questions the evidence that Black English, and especially attitudes toward Black English, were the cause of the plaintiffs' low scholastic achievement. Impacts of attitudes are indeed difficult to prove—and to disprove.

the potential of the school system as an organ of social change. Sledd implies this when he states, "In teaching our students to read and write, our aim should be to educate them, to open and enrich their minds, not to make them into usefully interchangeable parts in the materialists' insane machine" (Sledd 1972: 456).

Comparing Ideologies of Language and Dialect

Black English and Spanish are both powerful in-group symbols and both regarded as inappropriate in most intergroup settings (see Rodriguez 1981: 32–37). Negative attitudes toward both exist among their speakers, attributable to societal discrimination. These negative attitudes among Hispanics are a major reason given for maintenance bilingual education: to dispel such attitudes toward Spanish and toward self, Spanish must assume a permanent and prestigious place in the curriculum. Black leaders rarely, however, react to the negative attitudes toward Black English by calling for parallel curricular reforms.

One difference between the black dialectal and Hispanic linguistic situations is the fear that recognition of Spanish could disrupt national unity; nobody seems to fear that biloquialism in the classroom will lead to divisiveness, or that blacks will misuse bidialectal programs as a power base, as Hispanics are accused of using bilingual programs. One reason may be the impression of "dialect" as inferior to "language." Black English, a "dialect," will not challenge the status of English as Spanish, a "language," might. Also, Spanish has official and national status in many other countries; Black English is only the language of a subculture within the United States that, because it has suffered cultural genocide, does not usually identify with any foreign people.

Dillard (1972) and others assert that Black English is not a dialect of English but a separate (creole) language, similar to languages (e.g., the creoles of the West Indies) that enjoy national status. Should such an understanding gain popular acceptance, demands for use of Black English as a medium of instruction would presumably become more widespread and be accorded more legitimacy,[6] although the same fear of divisiveness and separatism

6. For example, the opinion in *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor* (1979) recognized Black English as distinct from standard English but not a separate language. The court did not suggest teaching Black English in the classroom. Rather teachers should be made aware of Black English so that they can better help black children read standard English.

as inevitable or intentional outcomes of linguistic diversity that is now applied to Spanish might then be directed to Black English.

Language under the Law: Denying a Human Right

Civil rights have always been prominent in American ideology. The Bill of Rights, protecting freedom of religion, speech, and so forth, was added to the Constitution to ensure its acceptance by the thirteen original states. Since then, the list of characteristics of an individual to be protected has been extended through constitutional amendment, statute, and judicial interpretation.

Is language akin to race, religion, sex, and national origin as a right to be protected? Troike (1977) claimed that such a trend was clear in American law during the 1970s: "through court decisions and congressional legislation, as well as through executive action, the right to use and to understand in one's native language is becoming increasingly recognized as a basic principle." Jimmy Carter, in his acceptance speech for the 1980 Democratic presidential nomination, called for equal opportunity "regardless of race, language, or religion" (Carter 1980).

Others, however, have noted opposite trends. Teitelbaum and Hiller (1977) assert that certain court decisions have restricted previously viable claims to the right to bilingual education. And six months after Carter's nomination speech, the Reagan administration stopped the issuance of regulations that would have required increased bilingual education. Until now, the right to develop, maintain, or be educated in one's native language has not been commonly vocalized in the United States. Rather, proposed uses of minority languages in instruction are defended on the basis of the predicted outcomes: increased self-esteem and pride, educational and cognitive improvement in the children, a useful national resource of foreign-language-speaking Americans.

Given the tentative and recent status of language as a category protected from discrimination, the standard strategy followed by those pursuing language rights in the American courts is to link linguistic discrimination to a more clearly prohibited kind of discrimination. They "must premise their language discrimination claim on the preservation of established rights, and not naked demands of bilingualism" (Teitelbaum and Hiller 1977: 34). National origin and race are the two protected categories to which the attempt is usually made to make this link. The notion of a "racial language barrier" is used in the courts by those seeking school recognition of Black English (Glazer 1981: 44–45).

However, "courts have not been consistent in correlating language and national origin" (Teitelbaum and Hiller 1977: 4). In *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), the Supreme Court found national-origin discrimination in schools' neglect of their pupils who spoke only Chinese. But in *Commonwealth v. Olivo* (1975), which involved an English-written housing notice given to a non-English-speaking citizen, the court rejected the equal protection argument because "the court defined the class not in terms of national origin, but language only" (Teitelbaum and Hiller 1977: 39). A circuit court used similar reasoning in *Frontera v. Sindell* (1975), involving an English-only civil service examination administered to a non-English speaker (Teitelbaum and Hiller 1977: 19).

Even when language is considered a characteristic of national origin, a pro-language-rights decision is not ensured. The court determines whether the "national origin" differentiation is arbitrary and unreasonable and whether it satisfies a "compelling state interest." "Classifications made on the basis of national origin cannot satisfy the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment unless there is a compelling governmental interest, and not merely some rational basis" (Teitelbaum and Hiller 1977: 4). If such a compelling interest is found, however, unequal treatment of different language groups is held compatible with the Constitutional requirement of equal protection of the law. In *Guadelupe* (1978: 4156), the court found that "the decision ... to provide a predominantly monocultural and monolingual educational system was a rational response to a quintessentially 'legitimate' state interest."

Why is it a "legitimate state interest" to make someone join the dominant speech community, but not, for example, the dominant religious community? Traditions rather than principle seem necessary to explain the weaker protection given by American courts to language rights than to racial, ethnic, religious, and certain political rights. The distinction is not between ascriptive and achieved, innate and learned, optional and obligatory, or changeable and immutable characteristics. Nor is it a basic American credo that language is "neutral" as a medium of thought, expression, and identity. Americans and their leaders often ascribe a democratizing power to the English language and advocate its imposition (e.g., on the peoples of Puerto Rico and the Philippines, as well as domestically) for that very reason (Leibowitz 1971: 90–97), without concluding that its imposition thereby impairs civil liberties.

Conclusion

One prominent difference between the United States and many countries is the exclusion of language in mainstream American culture and law from the status of a protected category. Speakers of minority languages and dialects are expected to conform to the language of the majority. This conformity is assumed to be feasible, and those who need to conform are assumed to be outsiders who, before they entered American society, were on notice that they would need to transact all their public business in standard English. This obligation is assumed to be beneficial to those on whom it is imposed, because the English language is assumed to be a key to opportunities that all of them are assumed to want.

Meanwhile, other forms of intergroup inequality (e.g., racial, ethnic, and to some extent sex discrimination) have been delegitimized and made illegal. Since attitudes do not change overnight, there is a "demand" for discrimination that can, in many cases, still be satisfied indirectly but legitimately through the unequal treatment of languages and language varieties. In this sense, language may be said to provide a medium for the covert institutionalization of racism (Wellman 1977). Links between language and other, protected, categories are, however, obvious. Thus it takes effort to rationalize linguistic differentiation while condemning racial and ethnic discrimination. These efforts take the form of denials. Denials under siege are explicitly defended. Denials accepted by all are typically implicit. As we have seen, many of the denials in American discussions of language policy are implicit: they must be extracted by inference. This fact suggests that full-fledged and overt competition between languages or language varieties is not yet foreseeable in the United States.

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SUMARIO

La negación y la auto-negación lingüística: Las ideologías del lenguaje en Estados Unidos

El norteamericano demuestra múltiples y altercantes percepciones, creencias, actitudes y maneras de razonar en cuanto a argumentos concernientes a la política del idioma. Sin embargo, las principales ideologías norteamericanas relativas al idioma son semejantes en cuanto a su negación de inigualdad lingüística: su existencia, sus consecuencias y la posibilidad de sobrellevarla.

Aquellos que luchan por los derechos de las minorías lingüísticas aceptan algunas de las suposiciones principales de sus adversarios. Estas suposiciones incluyen el desunificante impacto político de diversidad lingüística dentro de la población, la validez de competencia lingüística como un índice de lealtad nacional, la neutralidad étnica del idioma inglés común, la inferioridad intrínsica de los dialectos, la suficiencia de la fuerza de voluntad para dominar el idioma principal de la sociedad, la suficiencia de este dominio para progresar económicamente, y la exclusión por derecho del idioma en las categorías protegidas por ley contra la discriminación.

Estas generalizaciones surgen principalmente de debates políticos y opiniones judiciales acerca del reconocimiento oficial, en las elecciones y en las escuelas públicas, del idioma español y del inglés empleado por la población negra.

RESUMO

Malagnoskoj pri malegaleco: La lingvaj opiniaroj en Usono

Inter usonanoj oni trovas diversajn kaj konfliktajn perceptojn, kredojn, emojn kaj rezonadojn pri la lingva politiko. La ĉefaj usonaj lingvaj ideologioj tamen similas pro tio, ke ili neas la lingvan malegalecon. Ili neas ĝian ekziston, ĝiajn konsekvencojn kaj ĝian venkeblecon.

Batalantoj por la rajtoj de lingvaj malplimultoj akceptas iujn ĉefajn supozojn de siaj kontraŭuloj. Inter tiuj estas supozoj ke: lingva diverseco en la ŝtatanaro kaŭzas politikan malunuecon, lingvoscio valide indikas nacian lojalecon, la norma angla lingvo estas etne neŭtrala, dialektoj estas nature malindaj, oni povas mastri la ĉefan lingvon de sia socio se oni tion nur volas, tia mastreco sufiĉas por ekonomia sukceso, oni juste ne aplikas al lingvaj grupoj la jurajn protektojn kontraŭ diskriminado.

Tiujn ĝeneraligojn apogas ĉefe debatoj kaj juĝistaj decidoj pri la oficialeco de la hispana kaj la nigrangla lingvoj ĉe la balotprocezo kaj en la publikaj lernejoj.

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