

## **Bilingualism in the United States**

### **A Historical Perspective**

- 1664 Settlement of New Netherland.  
as 18 languages were spoken on Manhattan Island as well  
Indian languages.  
Bilingualism was common among the working classes and the educated.
- 1694 German-speaking Americans were operating schools in German in Philadelphia.  
Other European immigrants established schools and students were taught in English and other European languages. Immigrants wanted to keep their languages and cultures.
- 1750 Bilingualism was an accepted fact of life. The Continental Congress published many official documents in German and French.  
Newspaper advertisements for runaway servants made frequent reference to their bilingual or trilingual proficiencies.
- 1776 The American Revolution aroused anti-British sentiment, so there were some proposals to discard English in favor of German, French, Greek, or Hebrew as the national language.  
The U.S.A. did not adopt an official language. Language choices should be left up to the individual.  
In an attempt to promote the assimilation of Pennsylvania Germans, a federally funded German College was established.
- 1790-1818 No immigration. The use of English in schools continued to expand. Ethnic schools increased their use of English as a class or a medium of instruction. No uniform language policy prevailed.
- 1800's Linguistic assimilation was the ultimate goal for

	immigrant students.
1839	Ohio law authorized instruction in English, German, or both.
1847	Louisiana law authorized instruction in English, French, or both.
1850	Public and parochial German-English schools were operating in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and ST. Louis
	New Mexico authorized Spanish-English bilingual education.
languages	Pennsylvania, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oregon authorized instruction in other than English.
1870	Schools must "Americanize" language-minority children.
1880	Language legislation was used as a weapon against Catholic parochial schools (German).
1900	600,000 American children (4 percent of the elementary school population) were instructed partially or totally in German.
	Local officials often bent the law to permit native-language classes as a way to ensure immigrant parents' support of the public schools.
	Whenever immigrant groups were politically powerful, foreign languages were introduced as separate subjects or languages of instruction.
After 1900	Italian, Jewish, and Slavic immigrants began to outnumber the Irish, German, and Scandinavian immigrants.
	Poverty was attacked with the "Americanization" campaign. Large-scale adult English instruction was available for the first time.
	Proficiency in English was increasingly equated with political loyalty.

- 1917 World War I. Anti-German sentiment caused language restrictionism. State laws were passed which banned German in the classroom, on the street, in church, in public meetings, and on the telephone.
- 1918 The educational goal was to replace immigrant languages and cultures with those of the United States. "Our task is to break up immigrant groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American race, and to implant in their children, as far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and our popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth." Ellwood P. Cubberly, dean of the Stanford University School of Education.
- 1919 Public schools stopped using the German language. Mobs raided schools and burned German textbooks. In Columbus, Ohio, the school board sold its German books to a waste paper company for fifty cents per hundredweight.
- 1921 18,000 people were charged with breaking the law forbidding the use of the German language.
- 1923 Meyer v. Nebraska: A parochial school teacher was charged with the crime of reading a Bible story in German to a ten year old child. The conviction was reversed.
- Learning in languages other than English seemed less than patriotic. European immigrant groups felt strong pressures to assimilate. Enthusiasm waned for preserving old-country ways. Minority tongues were devalued in the eyes of the younger generation.
- 1924 The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 drastically curtailed immigration from Europe and barred Asians. The national origins system was established. This was the strictest immigration policy in our history.
- 1930 Bilingual education was eradicated throughout the United States. Interest in the study of foreign languages declined dramatically.

- 1930's English as a Second Language (ESL) methodology was recommended for language-minority children.
- 1950 Cultural deprivation theory explained the school failure of minority students on environmental factors. Parents failed to stress educational attainment, lower-class values favored "living in the present" rather than planning for the future, and English language skills were inadequate. The job of the schools were to overcome the handicaps of the students' ethnic backgrounds and enable them to assimilate.
- 1959 Cubans fled to Miami after the Cuban Revolution. They were well educated and had job skills. They were proud of their language and culture. ESL instruction was provided in public schools. Coral Way Elementary School offered two-way bilingual education in Spanish and English, which was successful.
- 1960's I.Q. Tests were administered in English, so disproportionate numbers of language-minority students were labeled and placed in special classes for the educationally handicapped.
- 1965 Congress repealed the national origins quotas and restrictions against Asians. A preference system was enacted which was based upon family unification, occupations, and refugee status.
- 1968 The Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESE), was signed by President Johnson. The focus of the law was compensatory, aimed at children who were both poor and educationally disadvantaged because of their inability to speak English.
- 1969 Congress appropriated \$7.5 million, enough to finance 76 projects serving 27,000 children.
- 1970 Lau v. Nichols, San Francisco. The suit was filed on behalf of 1,789 Chinese students who were failing in school because they could not understand English.
- Diana v. California State Board of Education. Nine Mexican American students were placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded (EMR) on the basis of IQ

scores in English. California enacted legislation to prevent reliance on IQ scores for EMR placement.

- 1971 Massachusetts became the first state to enact a law promoting bilingual education.
- Larry P. v. Riles in California. Black children were inappropriately placed in EMR classes. IQ tests could not be used to classify ethnic minority children. A numerical score on an IQ test did not define intelligence.
- 1972 Enrollment in bilingual classrooms was 112,000 out of the estimated 5 million language-minority students in the U.S.A..
- 1973-74 Title VII's budget of \$45 million sponsored 211 school projects in 26 languages. The program served about 6 percent of the eligible children.
- 1974 The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Chinese speaking children were entitled to special assistance to enable them to participate equally in the school program. San Francisco officials signed a consent decree agreeing to provide bilingual education for the Chinese, Filipino, and Hispanic students.
- The poverty criterion was dropped from the bilingual education law.
- 1975 The Lau Remedies were announced. Guidelines told school districts how to identify and evaluate students with limited English skills, what instructional treatments would be appropriate, when children were ready for mainstream classrooms, and what professional standards teachers should meet. There were timetables for meeting these goals.
- 1977-78 The American Institutes for Research (AIR) released the first large-scale, comparative evaluation of bilingual education in the U.S.A. It could find no evidence for the overall effectiveness of bilingual education. However, it was criticized for its methodology.
- 1977 Alhambra School District had no bilingual education and minimal ESL instruction.

- 1978 Congress amended the Bilingual Education Act to clarify that the native language would be used to the extent necessary to allow a child to achieve competence in the English language. So, Title VII funds became strictly transitional, not maintenance.
- The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) continued to monitor school districts performance in serving language-minority children.
- By the end of the 1970s, the majority of immigrants came from Third World countries.
- 1980 President Carter's administration proposed additional Lau Restrictions which mandated bilingual education in schools where at least 25 LEP children of the same minority language group were enrolled in two consecutive grades, K through 8th. There were many negative reactions.
- The OCR approved the first Lau plan in the Fairfax County, Virginia school district, which featured an ESL-only approach.
- The bilingual education budget was \$167 million.
- 1981 The Lau Regulations were withdrawn by Terrel Bell, the incoming Secretary of Education.
- 1982 Bell asked Congress to eliminate the native-language requirement for districts receiving Title VII grants.
- 1984 Title VII was reauthorized with a compromise that permitted funds for special alternative instructional programs.
- 1986 School districts were less likely to be monitored for Lau compliance than in previous years.
- The English Only lobby was strong and well organized.
- The bilingual education budget declined to \$133 million.
- November election, Proposition 63 passed which declared that English is the official language of California.

AB 2813, a bill to extend the bilingual education law was vetoed by Governor Deukmejian.

1987 Alhambra School District had 120 bilingual classrooms with instruction in Spanish Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

The bilingual education budget increased to \$146 million.

1987-88 Most school districts announced plans to continue with bilingual education, however, there was not a state mandate to do so.

39 states passed official-English" language laws.

Arizona passed an English only law.

Historically, Americans have been ambivalent about immigrants: desirous of their labor, but fearful of their social impact.

Sources:

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