

# Language Policy Issues Reported in the U.S. Press

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## 1. Introduction

Language issues have been a source of contention and debate since the earliest days of American history (Kloss, 1998; Leibowitz, 1969, 1971, 1974, 1976; Wiley, 1998, 2002; Wiley & Wright, in-press), and language continues to be a major issue in American society, as evidenced by the attention given to various language issues and policies in major newspapers across the United States. The media, as an important form of discourse, both reflect and help shape the public's opinions on various societal issues. Bell (1995) argues:

The Media are important social institutions. They are crucial presenters of culture, politics, and social life, shaping as well as reflecting how these are formed and expressed. Media "discourse" is important both for what it reveals about a society and for what it contributes to the character of society" (p. 23).

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the coverage of language policy issues in major U.S. newspapers, exploring how these issues are portrayed and how they both reflect and shape societal views of language diversity and issues.

This analysis is based in a framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is concerned with (a) discovering and bearing witness to unequal relations of power which underlie ways of talking in a society, and (b) reveal the role of discourse in reproducing or challenging sociopolitical dominance. Van Dijk (1987, 1988, 1991) is one of the first to critically analyze news media, and established a framework which focused on the discourse structure of news stories. Bell (1991) built on Van Dijk's framework, adding analysis of how news stories are created to begin with, how headlines and lead paragraphs are structured, and who acts/speaks in the news and how they are described. Fowler (1991) applied the tools of functional linguistics to analyze the discourse of text articles, and reveal underlying ideologies inherent in them, and Fairclough utilized Foucault's social theory in his media analysis. More recently, Santa Ana (2002) analyzed the use of metaphors in news reporting, and what these metaphors reveal about underlying ideologies.

## 2. Background and methodology

The Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU) of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University ([www.language-policy.org](http://www.language-policy.org)), maintains an on-line archive of press articles on language issues from around the world. I have had direct responsibility for the archives since its inception at the beginning of 2002. Newspaper articles are collected from local Arizona newspapers, language-related listservs (Linguistlist, Biling, AZBLE, and LEP-Advocacy), and from systematic searches of major national and international (English-language) newspapers using Lexis-Nexis (keywords: Language and Education). Relevant articles are then reformatted and archived on the LPRU website. To date, over 1,500 articles have been archived. Newspaper articles are listed by month and year in reverse chronological order (most recent first). A recently added search engine makes it possible to quickly locate articles of interest on specific languages, regions, or topics.

For this study, I focused on language issues covered in the U.S. press at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003. Thus, utilizing the LPRU Press Archives, I extracted over 100 articles from U.S.

newspapers from December 2002 and January 2003. I then carefully read each article, identified the general areas of language policy the articles addressed, sorted the articles according to these areas identified, and then conducted further and deeper analyses. The majority of articles were typical news reports, however, there were also a number of editorials, opinion columns, guest commentaries, and letters to the editor.

### 3. Findings and discussion

Geographically, the articles addressed issues at the national level, and issues specific to the states in which the newspapers were located. Between December 2002 and January 2003, language-related articles appeared in major newspapers in 29 states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Thus it is clear that language policy issues are not just limited to those states which have traditionally been home to the majority of new immigrants. Eleven languages were specifically mentioned in 45 of the headlines, with English and Spanish appearing the most frequently (see Table 1). This suggests that much of the press coverage centers on the importance of English and that the Spanish language, as the next most frequently-spoken language in the United States, is at the center of language policy concerns. The presence of the other 9 languages in headlines, however, demonstrates the multilingual nature of the United States, and that language issues in this country are not exclusively about Spanish and English. Many other languages besides these were specifically mentioned within the text of the newspaper articles.

Table 1. *Language Specific Headlines*

# of Headlines	Language(s)
19	English
18	Spanish
4	French
3	Japanese, Hmong
1	Arabic, Chinese, German, Hawaiian, Italian, Somali

Table 2 lists the specific areas of language issues that appeared in newspaper articles. The overwhelming majority (85 articles) addressed issues of language education programs. The next largest area (19 articles) addressed issues related to the language needs of agencies and businesses. Six articles focused on individuals who were bilingual. The others areas only had one or two articles each. In this paper, I will focus first on the Agency/Business Language Needs, followed by the articles on individual bilingualism, and finally on the articles dealing with language education programs. Often times media discourse analysis focuses on just a few articles, probing each article in depth. Due to the large number of articles and short amount of space, I will mostly focus on headlines and portions of text from selected articles. My aim is to view more broadly how these language policy issues are presented in the press, and how this both reflects and shapes societal attitudes.

Table 2. *General Areas of Language Policy Addressed in the Newspaper Articles.*

<p>Agency/Business Language Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Politics (Hispanic Vote)</li> <li>▪ Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Medical</li> <li>▪ Legal</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Access</li> </ul> <p>Individual Bilingualism Societal Bilingualism Dialects</p>	<p>Language Education Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adult ESL</li> <li>▪ Foreign Language Instruction</li> <li>▪ Education of Language Minority Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– ESL/Immersion</li> <li>– Bilingual Education</li> <li>– Dual Language Immersion</li> <li>– Indigenous Languages</li> <li>– Heritage Languages</li> <li>– Testing</li> <li>– Parental Involvement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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### 3.1 Agency/business language needs

A national pattern is evident that agencies and businesses need bilingual employees, in order to conduct business more effectively in the U.S. or overseas, to better meet the needs of their customers or clients, or even to better communicate with their own non-English speaking employees. A total of 19 articles appeared between December 2002 and January 2003 addressing these topics, but what is more telling is that they appeared in newspapers in 15 different states: Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Massachusetts, Michigan, South Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah. While states such as California and Massachusetts may be expected, the presence of these articles in Southern and Midwest states not known for their diversity (e.g., South Carolina, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri, and Utah) demonstrates that there are a growing number of language minorities in these states, and these changing demographics are having an effect on agencies and businesses in these areas.

The following headlines demonstrate the need in the business and industry sectors:

Schools and Industry Join to Meet the Demand for **Spanish** Language Training  
*Business and Management Practices*

**Spanish** Course Helps **Managers** and Workers Communicate  
*Associated Press*

**Bosses** Learn **Español** to Boost Effectiveness  
*Baltimore Sun*

Language of Choice as U.S. Changes, Many Trying to Learn **Spanish**  
*Boston Globe*

OSHA Class Graduates Hispanic Students; BCC Responds to Spanish-Resident's Needs  
*Morning Star (North Carolina)*

Hablando **Español** in a Pinch; UVSC Classes Teach the Basics to **Professionals**  
*Deseret News (Utah)*

Note that all of the articles make specific reference to Spanish. Clearly, business and industry are not ignoring the fact that Spanish is a major language in the United States. Also note that five of the six

articles describe the trend of English-speakers learning Spanish. The description of *which* employees are learning Spanish is also significant: “managers,” “bosses,” and “professionals.” Thus, it appears that many businesses are more interested in training their leaders in Spanish, rather than hire, recruit, or even promote individuals who are already bilingual. Two of the articles specifically address the need for employers to communicate with their own workforce. A manager quoted in the article *Spanish Courses Help Managers and Workers Communicate* stated:

"We have a significant part of our work force who are Hispanic," Stone said. "Many of them do not have a good grasp of English and I have several supervisors who do not have a good grasp of Spanish. So I think this program will help us grow as a company." (Associated Press, January 17, 2003)

The *Bosses Learn Español to Boost Effectiveness* articles echoes this concern:

Companies are now realizing it's not just enough to hire these workers. Being able to talk with Spanish-speaking employees creates a more efficient and safer work environment, supervisors and managers said. (Baltimore Sun, January 5, 2003)

Only one article “OSHA class graduates Hispanic Students” focuses on Spanish-speaking employees. This article describes how the construction industry has found that they have less accidents and problems meeting building codes by providing training to their mostly Spanish-speaking construction workers—in Spanish—on OSHA safety and building code requirements.

The education field is also looking for bilingual employees, as evidenced by the following headlines:

Alameda County Looking for Spanish-Speaking Teachers  
*San Francisco Chronicle*

Immigration Creating Demand for Bilingual Assistance  
*Associated Press*

Hablas Español? Es Muy Importante  
*South Bend Tribute (Michigan)*

Board OKs Pay for Bilingual Teachers  
*Albuquerque Journal*

Students who Speak Other Languages will Benefit from Federal Grant Given to Partnerships  
*Morning Call (Pennsylvania)*

The continuing need for bilingual teachers, even in California where bilingual education has been limited by Proposition 227, is still apparent as evidenced by three of these articles. The first article attributes the need to a “growing Latino student population.” The last article *Students who speak . . .* refers to a grant which seeks to recruit future bilingual teachers among high school students who are already bilingual. The *Immigration Creating Demand for Bilingual Assistance* article addresses the need for school liaisons who speak different languages to help schools communicate with the parents of language minority students. However, not all are happy about these changes in demographics, and the fact that bilingual assistance is needed. In this article, the comments of a school board member are described, which are particularly hostile towards the students and families the schools have a responsibility to serve:

Board member Connie Morris, a St. Francis Republican, contended that if families were living legally in the United States, the parents would have a working knowledge of English.

"Meeting these parents' needs crosses the line, in my opinion, of educating their children, particularly when it jeopardizes the quality of education for other students and comes at an added price to the taxpayer," Morris said. (Associated Press, January 20, 2003)

Notice the assumptions of the board member that "non-English speaking" is synonymous with "illegal immigration," and that parents of non-English speaking students do not pay taxes. This suggests that concerns about language may only be symbolic of deeper concerns, such as immigration. An interesting contrast here is that in the education field, the focus appears to be on recruiting individuals who are already bilingual, rather than trying to train existing monolingual teachers and paraprofessionals in the minority languages.

Within the service sector, newspaper articles noted the need for bilingual individuals in the fields of health, law enforcement, social work, cosmetology, and social work, as the following headlines indicate:

Medical Field

Language Linked to Medical Mistakes  
*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Demand Rising for Advanced Spanish  
*Herald-Sun (North Carolina)*

Law Enforcement

Police Lauded for Hispanic Program  
*St. Petersburg Times (Florida)*

Officers Will Immerse Themselves in Mexico  
*The Oregonian*

Social Work

Language is a Barrier for Foster Families  
*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*

Illinois-Spanish (Hispanics) Crisis in Social Services for Illinois Hispanics  
*Global News Wire, EFE News Services*

Cosmetology

Shabazz's First Latino Student Fills Dual Roles—Stylist, Interpreter  
*The Herald (South Carolina)*

In the medical field, doctor offices, clinics, and hospitals are faced with an increasing number of non-English speaking patients, where accurate communication can literally mean life or death. The two articles in this area discuss the need for both trained interpreters and for medical personnel to receive training in Spanish. The articles on law enforcement focused on Spanish language training for current officers, including a week-long immersion program in Mexico. Notice a similar pattern here as seen in business and industry. Rather than actively recruit medical personnel and police officers who are already bilingual, these agencies are more inclined to try and make their existing personnel proficient in Spanish. But it is doubtful that a week in Mexico is going to make monolingual police officers into proficient bilinguals. In the area of social work, besides a lack of bilingual social workers, an even more critical shortage is the lack of bilingual foster families. This can lead to traumatic experiences for

children who are removed from their own homes, and placed with families with whom they cannot communicate, as reported in the article, *Language is a Barrier for Foster Families*:

The girl cried out and one of the county's most experienced and trusted foster parents rushed to comfort her, but something got in the way. The child, who is Hispanic, doesn't speak English, and the foster parent doesn't speak Spanish.

"The foster parent tried to comfort her as much as possible but felt the child needed so much more," said Cyndi Darley, who supervises resource development and adoptions for the Gwinnett Department of Family and Children Services.

Thirty-seven out of 370 children in state custody are Hispanic, but there are only three bilingual families ready to serve as foster parents. (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, January 29, 2003)

The social work agencies recognize the need for more bilingual families and are actively trying to recruit more. This seems like a better strategy than trying to make their existing foster families become bilingual. The last article is interesting as it shows there is a need for bilingual hair stylists, even in South Carolina. *Shabazz's First Latino Student Fills Dual Roles—Stylist, Interpreter* describes the potential of a beauty school's new graduate who is bilingual in Spanish and English. This is a generally positive article about bilingualism as an asset to a business, but the wording of some of the text in this article merits close scrutiny:

The **explosion** of Latino immigrants into York County has led to niche grocery stores, bakeries and restaurants. Jeanette Arellano hopes a barbershop pops up next.

"There is a definite need for Spanish speakers," Shabazz said. "Many times there has to be someone who speaks both Spanish and English to act as an interpreter, to let the stylist know what the customer wants. Jeanette can handle it all herself." (*The Herald* [South Carolina], January 31, 2003; emphasis added)

One of the earlier articles above described a "growing Latino" population, but notice the choice of words here—"**explosion** of Latino immigrants." Usually in an explosion, something gets destroyed or someone gets hurt. Also, explosions are loud and shocking. Thus, what is being implied by using this metaphor to describe demographic shift and an increase in the Latino population?

Finally, loosely affiliated with the area of business/agency language needs, are the desire of political parties to attract voters and the language needs of espionage. Politicians who create policies which restrict languages on the one hand, are happy to use these same languages to try and win political support, especially from the ever-increasingly important Latino voters. Note the comments of a Bush official regarding the launch of a government Spanish language website in the article *Commerce Department Website Latest Bush Outreach to Hispanics*, "The Hispanic community has an ally in President Bush," Commerce Secretary Don Evans said Friday" (*Associated Press*, January 3, 2003). The tragic events of September 11 made our government aware of the lack of linguistic talent. Nearly two years later, the following headline appeared in the Washington Times—"Help Still Wanted: Arabic Linguists."

### 3.2 Individual bilinguals

Similar to the article on the bilingual hairstylist, were a series of other newspaper articles that focussed on individuals whose bilingualism was portrayed as somewhat heroic:

Bilingual Help; Hmong Tutor Lowers Barriers for Mountain View Students  
*Anchorage Daily News, Jan. 26, 2003*

A Healthy Concern: Medical Student Stella Lii's Ability to Speak Chinese Allowed her to Help  
Workers Hit with Disease in Israel  
*The Press-Enterprise (Riverside, Ca.), Jan. 3, 2003*

Tualatin Elementary Teacher Valued for Fluency; Diane Yamamoto Helps Kids in a School Where  
Spanish is the First Language of Many First-Graders  
*The Oregonian, Jan. 16, 2003*

Columbian Woman Strives to Learn English While Living in Attleboro  
*Associated Press (Massachusetts), Jan. 18, 2003*

Korean Native Adjusts to Life as a Hastings High School Student  
*Associated Press, Jan. 22, 2003*

In the first three articles above, the heroism of these individuals involves their use of their bilingual abilities to solve problems: A Hmong paraprofessional helping Hmong students in Alaska, a Chinese American medical student utilizing her Chinese language skills to help sick Chinese workers in Israel, and a Japanese American teacher who is fluent in Spanish meeting the needs of the young ELL students in her first grade classroom. In the last two articles, the heroism is of a different kind—overcoming language barriers to learn English. With the high focus on Spanish speakers in the other articles, its interesting to note that of these bilingual “heroes,” only two of them are Spanish-speakers, and one of those is not even a native speaker of Spanish. The Spanish speaking woman, from Columbia, is heroic only because she is learning English. A question that comes to my mind is, out of tens of thousands and bilingual Americans, why were these people singled out? Why the focus on a Korean high school student learning English when there are thousands of other ELL students learning English everyday in American high schools? Of all the thousands of native Spanish-speaking bilingual teachers, why choose to focus on an Asian American teacher who speaks Spanish? While these are nice articles that generally portray bilingualism as an asset, or at least highlight the hard work and struggles of individuals to learn a new language, what is the underlying message of these articles. In terms of the last two, it might be that these two are singled out to suggest that they are the exception rather than the rule, feeding into the stereotype that most immigrants refuse to learn English.

### 3.3 Language education programs

The majority of newspaper articles were on issues related to language education programs, specifically, adult ESL programs, foreign language programs, and educational programs for K-12 language minority students. Of these three categories, 57 (67%) focused on the programs for language minority students (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Number of articles on types of language education programs.*

Type of Language Education Program	# of Articles
Language Minority Student Education	57
Foreign Language Programs	23
Adult ESL Programs	5

There is an interesting contrast between articles on foreign language programs and adult ESL programs. While both are essentially about the same issue—learning a second language—the portrayal

of the programs and the people in them differ significantly. Let us first consider the articles about adult ESL programs:

Free Classes Help Immigrants Learn **the Language**; Courses Have Been Offered for Over a Quarter Century  
*San Diego Union Tribune, Jan. 28, 2003*

**Language** Services Offered Through Church  
*Tulsa World, Jan. 8, 2003*

Tasty Incentives; Carpentersville Eatery Offers **Free Pizzas** to **Motivate** Local ESL Students  
*Chicago Daily Herald, Jan. 6, 2003*

1,500 in Area Learning English as 2nd Language; Metro Library Exhibit to Feature Pictures, Stories of Their Struggle  
*Dayton Daily News, Jan. 16, 2003*

Note that the first two articles refer to English generically as simply “language” or “the language.” It is as if English is the only language of significance in the United States, and thus doesn’t even need to be referred to by name. The third article is somewhat amusing. The owners of a local pizzeria, inspired by some of their own employees who were ESL students, offered coupons for free pizzas that adult ESL teachers could use to motivate their students to learn English. While not intending to mock the kind hearts and good intentions of the donors, I do not believe free pizza is what motivates most immigrants to learn English. This report reminds me an article by Alfie Kohn (1998), who critiques Pizza Hut’s national *Book It!* program, which provides school teachers with free pizza coupons to reward students for reading. The title of Kohn’s article is *A Lot of Fat Kids Who Don’t Like to Read*. Kohn’s point is that extrinsic rewards, such as free pizza, should not be a part of reading instruction, as reading should be rewarding in and of itself. Learning a 2<sup>nd</sup> language, particularly the language of the dominant society, is not only intrinsically rewarding, but there many societal pressures to do so, free pizza or not. And why free pizzas for adult ESL students is newsworthy is another question. Does the article suggest that the adults in ESL classes lack motivation? Or that immigrants in general lack motivation to learn English?

In general, the text of the articles discuss the *need* for adult immigrants to learn English, and the *importance* of them learning English. There is an overriding tone of expectation for these immigrants to learn English, and the sooner the better. The articles also hint at the Americanization aspects of the adult ESL courses. In the *Free Classes Help Immigrants Learn the Language* article, the reporter states:

The entry-level classes begin with reviewing the alphabet, learning to say one's name, and some utilitarian phrases, such as, "Don't wash your feet in the sink." (San Diego Tribune, Jan. 28, 2003)

Its interesting to note that the same article describes one of the participants in the beginning level class—a 65-year old Vietnamese American woman who had lived in the U.S. for nearly 25 years who felt the need to learn English to be able to communicate with her grandchildren. I assume that she already knew not to wash her feet in the sink, and suspect this “utilitarian phrase” will not make for lively conversation with her grandchildren. Besides, why is that her Vietnamese American grandchildren cannot speak Vietnamese? This question is never asked nor answered.

Now, let us look at the headlines describing foreign language programs. These specifically refer to programs for monolingual-English speakers (pre-K to adults) to learn a second or “foreign” language:

Tales of the Tape: College Administrator Fernando Salcedo is a Pacesetter in Teaching People to  
**Quickly** Grasp a Foreign Language  
*The Press Enterprise, Jan. 24, 2003*

Francais made **Fun**  
*St. Petersburg Times, January 14, 2003*

Fantastique! Tots' School Makes French **de Rigueur**  
*Kennebec Journal (Augusta, ME), January 13, 2003*

Graysville Elementary gets Pupils into Spanish **Early**  
*Chattanooga Times/Chattanooga Free Press, January 5, 2003*

French Lessons **Inspire** Students, Budding Teacher  
*The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, Va.), January 2, 2003*

Notice the adjectives used in these headlines to describe foreign language learning: “quickly,” “fun” “de rigueur,” “early,” and “inspire.” Thus, while immigrant adults are struggling to meet their obligation to learn English (and may even need free pizza to motivate them), monolingual English-speaking children adults are have a great time learning second languages, which is quick, easy, fun, and inspiring. Add to that “beneficial”:

The Benefits of Learning a Foreign Language are Many (Column)  
*Chapel Hill Herald, Jan. 23, 2003*

Learning Languages Broadens Horizons (Column)  
*Chapel Hill Herald, Jan. 8, 2003*

These two articles were written by a columnist, who focused mainly on the benefits of learning foreign languages for travel purposes, rather than to communicate with people in one’s own community. The columnist received so many letters regarding her first column, she wrote the second one noting, “I have had many wonderful stories in response to my columns on learning foreign languages.” She did not mention any negative responses, thus suggesting that there is little controversy about native English speakers trying to become bilingual.

One particular language, Japanese, is quickly becoming one of the more popular foreign languages to study:

King's Grant Youths Learn Japanese Language, Culture  
*The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, Va.), January 16, 2003*

Japan's Language, Comics Lure High School Students  
*Capitol Times (Madison, Wisconsin), January 28, 2003*

Lost in the Translation; He Tried to Learn Japanese, But Ended up Having to Bow to his own  
Ignorance  
San Diego Union Tribune, January 12, 2003

The articles describe the lure of Japanese Animation and other pop-culture Japanese artifacts which are becoming more and more popular among American youth, and thus making it “hip” to learn Japanese. The last article *Lost in Translation* however, is a bit different, and is somewhat revealing of the true nature of foreign language study in the United States. Perhaps the reasons why foreign language programs are portrayed as easy, fun, and quick, is the expectations of students to become proficient in

these languages are quite low. Even in the programs for the younger children, they are viewed as successful if they learn to say a few words and phrases in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language. In the *Lost in Translation* article, an American Fulbright scholar heading to Japan to conduct research writes a humorous article about how poorly he did in learning Japanese in several different foreign language programs. Thus it is acknowledged that learning a second language is really hard, even for a really intelligent person such as a Fulbright scholar. When a smart American fails to learn a second language, it is funny. When immigrants fail to learn English quickly, we question their intelligence and motivation, or attack their education programs and teachers.

The newspaper articles on the language education programs for language minority students also differ dramatically from the reports on foreign language programs. These articles refer specifically to issues regarding the education of English language learning students in K-12 education. Table 4 shows the distribution of topics within this area. While a number of topics are covered, it is clear that majority of articles in this area focused on the debate over bilingual education programs.

Table 4. *Number of articles on different topics of language minority students (K-12)*

<b>Topic</b>	<b># of Articles</b>
Debate over bilingual education	25
Issues of including ELL students in testing	7
ESL/Immersion program descriptions	7
Bilingual Education program descriptions	4
Need for bilingual teachers	4
Indigenous language programs	3
Other	3

The sentiment in many of these articles is similar to the following editorial which appeared January 24, 2003 in the *North Carolina News and Records*:

Latinos, Our Largest Minority, Must Learn English

Within the text of the editorial, it stated, “That’s all the more reason to push English, knowing that it will help Latinos flourish economically and socially. Plus one more reason: A nation not bound together by a common language tends to be a divided nation.” Here two common themes in debates over language diversity are echoed: (a) forcing immigrants to learn English is for their own good, and (b) English is the glue that holds our nation together. The very existence of this headline and editorial suggests that the opposite is happening, that is, Latinos are refusing to learn English, and Spanish is dividing our country.

The following headlines regarding ESL/Immersion for students carry a sense of urgency for language minority students to learn English:

New **Immigrant Kids Taught** English in Hall County Schools  
*Associated Press (Georgia), Jan. 10, 2003*

2nd Language **1st Priority**; Oswego Schools Program **Helps Non-English-Speaking** Pupils  
*The Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY), Jan. 11, 2003*

CV Schools Develop Advanced ESL Course; Educators **Respond** to 46 **Foreign** Languages Being Spoken in Community  
*Intelligencer Reporter (Pennsylvania), Jan. 29, 2003*

**First Comes** the Language; **Hispanics Learn** English to Succeed In School  
*Richmond Times Dispatch, Jan. 7, 2003*

Verona Sees **Huge Swell** In ESL Students  
*Capital Times (Wisconsin), Jan. 22, 2003*

The bolded words in these titles note a much different tone than the articles about English-speakers learning a foreign language. Nothing here about learning English being quick, easy or fun. Learning English for these children is expected, so the headlines describe it in a straightforward manner. English is clearly the “1<sup>st</sup> priority” and English must “come first” in order for students to “succeed.” “Immigrant kids,” “Hispanics,” or “non-English-speaking pupils” are “taught,” “helped” or simply “responded” to, and then the students will “learn.” The 3<sup>rd</sup> article is interesting in that the object of the headline is not the students, but “46 foreign languages” that are being “responded” to. How is “respond” to be interpreted here? Eliminate? In the last headline, we don’t have an explosion as we did early, but we do have a “huge swell” of ESL students. Swelling is when the sea gets rough, or when I hit my thumb with a hammer. Neither conjures up a positive image.

The articles which simply discuss or describe bilingual education programs are fewer in number. Here are three of the headlines:

Vote Set on Immersion Waiver; Many in Amherst Want Bilingual Ed  
*Associated Press, The Boston Globe, Dec. 9, 2002*

DPS to Request Second Dual-Language School  
*Denver Post, Jan. 13, 2003*

St. Paul School to Begin Hmong Curriculum  
*Associated Press (Minnesota) Jan. 20, 2003*

The first is simply stating a matter of fact—despite the passage of Question 2 in Massachusetts, many parents still want their children to be in bilingual education programs. The article describes the political battle over whether or not these parents requests for the children’s education will be granted. Ron Unz pushed his “English for the Children” initiative as empowering language minority parents and giving them more choice. Now their legislature is debating over whether or not they will be allowed to choose any options other than English Immersion. The second article, from Colorado where one of Unz’s initiatives to end bilingual education was defeated, describes the Denver Public Schools expanding their popular dual-immersion program to another school to meet the demand of parents and students who want it. The third article is also interesting in terms of revealing the desires of language minority students and parents. St. Paul schools had resisted meeting the language and cultural interests and needs of its Hmong American students for years. A group of Hmong educators decided to create their own charter school which focused on Hmong language and culture. Out of fear over losing a large number of students, the school district is now developing its own “Hmong Curriculum” to curb the loss. These articles make it clear that language minority communities do want bilingual education programs for their children.

The fourth article about bilingual education programs is not so much of a description of a program, but rather, a description of the elimination of one:

Star Innovator Topples Language Barrier  
*New York Post, Jan. 22, 2003*

Part of the text reads:

PS 172 Principal Jack Spatola has made his Brooklyn elementary school one of the city’s best—and he says one big reason is because he abolished the bilingual-education program.

Spatola said he discovered that students were mastering English faster in English-as-a-Second Language immersion programs rather than bilingual-education classes.

"The parents didn't want the bilingual-education program when it was available. They wanted their kids mainstreamed," said ESL teacher Hazel Fershleiser.

The description of the principal in the headline is telling—a “star innovator.” Thus, to abolish a bilingual program is “innovative” and to do so makes one a “star.” As in some of the other articles, English is not specifically mentioned in the headline, but “language barrier” is commonly understood as “barrier” to “English.” The text of the article makes it clear that bilingual education was the “barrier” that was preventing the students from learning English, and thus required a “star innovator” to “topple” it. But even the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph above suggests students were learning English in their bilingual programs, but just not as fast. The use of the phrase “mastering English” is also interesting, especially since the article does not describe what “mastering English” looks like, nor how it is measured. Thus, we just have to take the word of the reporter. Another important characteristic of this article is whose voices are heard in it. We hear from the principal, and we also hear from an ESL teacher who claims the parents never really wanted bilingual education. Absent from this article are the views of the bilingual teachers, and the parents themselves.

State testing requirements, with new requirements as part of President Bush’s *No Child Left Behind*, require that English language learners be fully included in state-wide tests, and schools and districts are held accountable for “adequate yearly progress” and “annual measurable achievement objectives” for ELL students as a subgroup (Wiley & Wright, in-press). The panic that these stringent requirements are creating is evident in the following headlines:

Law Raises Bar for Pupils Just Learning English;  
Teachers in Bilingual Classes Worry About Standardized Tests  
*Milwaukee Journal sentinel, Jan. 25, 2003*

English Skills Necessary to Succeed on PSSA Tests  
*Morning Call (Pennsylvania), Jan. 15, 2003*

Chasing Math's Magic Number: 220; Bilingual Students Face MCAS Deadline  
*Brenda J. Buote, The Boston Globe, Dec. 12, 2002*

Board Says Schools Can Exempt non-English Speakers from Tests  
*Associated Press (Michigan), Jan. 24, 2003*

State Will Lower Bar for Disadvantaged Students  
*The Oregonian, Jan. 24, 2003*

An article on this same topic appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, but with a completely different twist:

New Testing Adds Urgency to Bilingual Ed Battle; Voters Passed the Language Prohibition in 1998,  
But Parental Waivers are a Big Loophole. And That Can Make it Harder to Meet New Federal  
Standards  
*Los Angeles Times, Jan. 4, 2003*

Rather than simply state the basic facts, this article places the issue of testing within the context of the bilingual education debate, which has not gone away since Proposition 227 passed five years earlier. In fact, the article makes it sound as if the few remaining bilingual programs are to blame for the problem. Notice the “federal standards” are not the problem; it is the loopholes allowing bilingual education that makes meeting those standards difficult. This article generated five letters to the editor under the following headlines:

Teaching English Is Key (2 Letters, both anti-Bilingual ed)  
*Los Angeles Times, January 11, 2003*

Bilingual Programs Are Really for Latinos Only (2 letters, both anti-bilingual ed)  
*Los Angeles Times, January 12, 2003*

Re: "Bilingual Programs Are Really for Latinos Only," (letter debunking other letter)  
*Los Angeles Times, January 26, 2003*

Here are some quotes from the first four letters, which are written by individuals opposed to bilingual education:

*Letter #1*

“There is no more insidious threat to the education of Latino children than bilingual education. It is destructive to their future”

*Letter #2*

“Many new schools must be built as our population grows out of control. ... —all despite existing laws specifically limiting immigration. When is someone going to address this type of oppression?”

*Letter #3*

“Why is the education system seeking to address only the Spanish speakers?”

*Letter #4*

Why is it even called bilingual education? Why not be honest and call it "Bi-Latino" or "Bi-Spanish"?

Bilingual education programs came out of the civil rights movement out of recognition that schools were failing to meet the needs of language minority students. However, the author of letter number one has turned this basic principle of bilingual education on its head, calling it a “threat” to their education and “destructive” of their future. The second letter is not reacting to anything in the article at all, but simply uses this discussion about “language” and turns it into a discussion about the need to restrict immigration. Note how the author suggests that it is the English monolingual speaking Americans who are “oppressed” because the population is growing “out of control.” Letters 3 and 4 directly address issues also embedded in previous two letters. Bilingual education is synonymous with Spanish-speaking or Latino. All four letters suggest that the debate over bilingual education has little to do with the language of instruction, and more to do with animosity towards the Latino population. The 5<sup>th</sup> letter, written by California State University, Fay Shin, attempts to address some of the misperceptions about bilingual education only being for Spanish-speakers:

False. California has provided bilingual programs and bilingual assistance for speakers of Korean, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hmong, Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese.

The connection between bilingual education and the Latino population, however, is a strong image in the minds of many Americans. Efforts to recall a school board member of the medium-sized Santa Ana school district drew several headlines:

Santa Ana Recall Vote to Proceed, Judge Says  
*Los Angeles Times, Jan. 7, 2003*

Recall Appeal  
*City News Service, Jan. 24, 2003*

Just What's Behind the Santa Ana Recall? (2 Letters opposed to recall)  
Los Angeles Times, Jan. 26, 2003

Bilingual Education, Race to Collide in California Recall  
*Washington Times, Jan. 28, 2003*

The recall was centered on Nativo Lopez, described in the articles as a Latino activist and a strong supporter of bilingual education. There were several allegations about him above and beyond his support for bilingual education and his efforts to provide parents with their legal rights to apply for waivers, but the articles made it clear that most viewed this as a battle in the war on bilingual education. Some strong evidence for this is in the last article. Note the newspaper in which the article appeared—the *Washington Times*. Why would a newspaper on the opposite side of the country publish an article about a school-board recall election, when folks in the Washington DC area were not even eligible to vote in the election? As the headline suggests, the recall was more about race and bilingual education than anything else. Opponents of Lopez argued that Latino parents did not really want their children in bilingual education, but Lopez was making it difficult for them to remove their children from the program. One of the letter writers described a woman who called her during the recall campaign. The caller spoke with a heavy Spanish accent and asked the woman to vote to recall Lopez. When the woman commented that she opposed the recall election and felt it was a waste of money, the caller's accent disappeared as she made some nasty comments and hung up.

#### 4. Conclusion

A citizen unfamiliar with issues of language in society would likely draw the following conclusions after reading these newspaper articles:

- Individual bilinguals are heroic.
- We desperately need bilinguals in business and public sectors.
  - So many of our clients or those workers we hired don't speak English—Let's train our monolingual employees to be speak Spanish!
- Foreign language programs for English-only kids and adults are great!
  - Earlier we start them, the better! So much fun! So beneficial! They're so smart!
  - We'll forgive (monolingual-English-speaking) adults if they can't learn a new language. It's really hard to learn a second language.
- Adult ESL programs are great!
  - Look at all those languages they come in speaking! Neato!
  - Why aren't more Latinos learning English? (Maybe pizza will motivate them!)
- Those immigrant kids are a problem.
  - So many! We don't have enough teachers or ESL classes!
  - Bad immigration policies!
  - We have to help them learn English as quickly as possible
  - And what about the state test?
    - But don't lower those standards!
- Bilingual Education = Spanish Education = No English = School Failure = No Job = No Success = No Future

Given this type of coverage, it is understandable as to why the general public is so misinformed about language and language policy issues. As a reflection of U.S. society's beliefs and values about language issues, the contradictions and double standards are apparent. Individually, people with bilingual skills are admired. And it is clear that bilinguals are desperately needed in the business,

industry and service sectors. Yet the articles on language minority instruction make it clear that there is a great deal of animosity towards programs for ELL students that make any use of their native language while teaching students English—programs that may produce the bilingual individuals society obviously needs. The double standard on language learning is very apparent. The business and service sectors appear to prefer to train their own (English-speaking) staff to learn enough of a second language to get business done. Why not recruit, hire, or promote individuals who are already bilingual? In the case of businesses training staff to learn a second language to work with non-English speaking employees, why not do it the other way around? Why not provide ESL instruction for the workers? Are business leaders concerned that their lowest-paid employees would leave and find a better job if they learn English? Another double standard is the portrayal of second language learning. Members of the dominant group believe that immigrant adults and their children are failing to learn English as quickly as possible. There are big debates over educational programs for English language learning students, and programs labeled “bilingual” are viewed as Spanish-only. This spills into debates about why these kids and their families are here at all, leading to debates about immigration, or even debates over who is serving on the school board. In contrast, second language learning for monolingual-English speaking children adults is not controversial at all. These programs are seen as fun and rewarding. Children and adults in these programs are not expected to attain the same level of fluency in their second language, as is expected of immigrant children and adults learning English. Thus foreign language programs are viewed as successful if participants learn a few words or phrases in the second language, while language minority programs, especially ones under the “bilingual” label as viewed as failures if students do not become fluent in English in a short amount of time.

Efforts to better inform the public about issues of language and to promote more equitable language policies that will be beneficial to language minority communities and society as whole, must involve the press. While the press reflects the dominant society’s views, it also helps to shape them. Absent from the newspapers during this two month time period were any descriptions of effective bilingual programs. The voices of bilingual educators, bilingual students, and parents of students in bilingual programs were rarely heard. There were too few letters to the editors from those who understand the situation, to debunk false or misleading claims in articles or in other letters. Perhaps those in the field can more become more actively engaged in writing letters to newspapers, writing opinion columns, and inviting reporters to cover programs, events, incidents, or even individuals, in order to help create more balanced and informed coverage of language policy issues in the U.S. Press.

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