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Language Shift: Spanish in the United States

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The study of languages and how they emerge and evolve is one that has been scrutinized throughout the years. The English language, for example, took several centuries to even remain in today's dominant state. The dominance of a language in a certain area can shift over time due to various causes. English originated in this way through assimilation and compilation of minority languages. Applying these concepts to the Spanish language in the United States, the theory that it will overtake English is plausible.

As the following article clearly states,

“For years recognition has been given by American public men to the fact that for this country knowledge of Spanish is more essential than that of any other language. The importance of Spanish in the Foreign Service of the United States is shown by the fact that over one-third of the diplomatic posts, and one-fourth of the consular, are in Spanish-speaking countries (Butler).”

There are many explanations that contribute to a language's shift in dominance in its respective country/ area. The simplest can be summed up in a single word: governments. Depending on the time period and the amount of power, governmental decisions have the ability to shape any and every aspect of a nation's life. During the reign of Constantine, his empire was united under one religion; other rulers mandated such things as, language. One is known as population dislocation, that is, a population transfer, continuous or separate, as well as “voluntary or involuntary out-migration (Fisherman, 57).” Causes of these shifts can be attributed to both nature and human kind. Nature provides numerous catastrophes such as floods, earthquakes, major temperature changes, droughts, pestilence of man, beast or crops etc. “We as a species bring about warfare, genocide, scorched earth policies of invasion or

resistance to invasion, slave-hunting expeditions, soil exhaustion, depletion of natural resources, industrialization, etc. (Fisherman, 57).” These changes not only affect those actually dislocated, but the ecosystems to which they migrate. Neocolonialism was another factor that contributed to shifts in languages after the creation of the colonial empires by European powers from the 16th to the 19th century fell into decline. In their place, nations and corporations “aimed to control other nations through indirect means [by employing] economic, financial and trade policies to dominate less powerful countries. This amounts to a *de facto* control over targeted nations (“Neocolonialism”).” Due to the dominance of major countries their languages will be the mainstream.

The English language is the second most spoken language in the world. Its origins lie in the fifth century A.D. in Western Europe. It is comprised mainly of three languages representing Germanic tribes all residing in the present day United Kingdom: the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes or Celts. Originally each tribe spoke a form of Celtic language. With conquests and dislocation many of these people were either assimilated, or “pushed into Wales, Cornwall, [or] Scotland (Katsiavriade, Kryss).” The name ‘England’ was derived by an Anglo word *Engle* which was the land of their origin and their language. *Englisc* gave rise to the term for our language today ‘English’ (Katsiavriade, Kryss). As time progressed, four dialects of this language emerged: Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon, and Kentish, each developing in their own respective land/kingdom (Kent, Mercia etc). The base of what is called Old English is rooted in Anglo Saxon as well as Scandinavian (comprised of Norse and Danish) and Latin influences. Even today there are words from each culture that find their way into everyday usage. During Roman occupancy Latin was the language most commonly

in use. Germanic Tribes created a blend of Celtic languages, including the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes and many other tribes (Katsiavriade, Kryss).

Over the course of the centuries the language in Britain changed, adopted new words, and even switched between dialects. Prior to the Northumbrian domination the Vikings had their share of influence in the 9th century. Later in the 10th century, what became known as 'Old English' emerged as a West Saxon dialect and used the runic alphabet which had Scandinavian roots. The Latin alphabet would follow and be introduced by Christian missionaries from Ireland. This is the alphabet that was eventually permanently adopted in Britain. From here, word combinations started appearing and new vocabulary was formed. Some words started with an Anglo Saxon base, while others were borrowed; or rather, parts of them were borrowed from the Danish and Norse languages (more Scandinavian influence) as well as from Latin and Celtic (Katsiavriade, Kryss). The year 1066 brought the Norman Invasion where French became the most common language used, especially among the Norman aristocracy. Those considered 'English' were now part of the lower class. The English language was not restored to its seat of dominance in Britain till the 14th century with the crowning of King Henry IV in 1399. He was the first king since the Norman Conquest who spoke English as a native tongue. Since the king had absolute power over the land, the language of his kingdom returned to English. Though still changing even today, what became known as 'Modern English' began in the 16th century (Katsiavriade, Kryss).

English has a very long history and has extended its reach to the United States. Because of the nature of the United States, other languages, particularly Spanish, have entered the scene and have become part of its history. Although not the official language of the United States, English is the most commonly spoken language followed closely by Spanish. The

“United States is home to more than 40 million Hispanics; the fifth largest Spanish-speaking community in the world, after Mexico, Colombia, Spain and Argentina (“Spanish in the United States”).” In fact, “according to the 2000 United States Census, Spanish is spoken most frequently at home by about 28.1 million people aged 5 or over (“Spanish in the United States”).”

The Spanish language was introduced to the North American region over time by Spanish explorers. It was sparked by Christopher Columbus who set out to find alternate trade routes to the Indies in 1492. Instead he stumbled across the New World under a charter from the Spanish King and Queen, Ferdinand and Isabella. Up until that time many explorers and traders hesitated to venture westward because of the conceived notion that the world was indeed flat and that any movement in that direction would cause them and their vessels to be cast off the edge of the earth. They instead took a long, roundabout route that extended east, down around the tip of Africa. Because of Columbus’s success in not sailing off the edge of the world, and ‘discovering’ new lands, other men decided to try their chances and see what they could find (Pickering, Keith). In 1513, Juan Ponce de León, a sailor on Columbus’s second voyage to the Americas, was the first European to arrive in what is known today as Florida in search of the Fountain of Youth (“Juan Ponce de León: Explorer”). He named this peninsula “Pascua de Flores” which means feast of flowers and claimed it for his homeland, Spain. He and his men interacted with the Native Americans, most of the time engaging in combat. However, the connection was already set in motion. Hernando De Soto, after spending his first expedition years in South America, also ventured into Florida in 1539 in search of gold and treasure. From there he traveled north into the Appalachians, and later in

1541, crossed the Mississippi and continued his travels westwards through modern-day Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas (“Hernando De Soto: Explorer”).

On the western front, Spanish influence came from the southern bordering country of Mexico. Before setting foot in America, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado had spent two years in Mexico, marrying well and becoming governor of some of the well-known Mexican provinces. This was not enough for him, and he sent out parties that ranged all the way to the Colorado River on the present border between California and Arizona, exploring the Grand Canyon and much of what is now New Mexico in search of the ‘seven cities of gold’ . Coronado himself led a party in search of the city of Quivira and its mythic riches, into what is now Kansas, but found only a small village of what were the Wichita Indians (“Francisco Vázquez de Coronado”). After this surge of Spanish exploration, the next major source of Spanish influence in the United States comes from our immigrant population, mainly from the country of Mexico and islands such as Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean. Because of these influences in our history there are concentrations of Hispanic population in the south and southwest, especially California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Florida. These are not the only states in the country with a substantial Hispanic population, but they are the most highly concentrated areas. The U.S. Hispanic population ranked the fifth largest in the world only a decade ago, behind Mexico, Spain, Colombia, and Argentina. Since 1980 the number of Hispanics has grown five times faster than the rest of the population, making the United States now the third-largest Spanish speaking country in the world (“Spanish in the United States”).

Because the United States is a ‘melting pot’ with a plethora of languages, each one has a history of how it arrived and eventually took root in the country. The Spanish language had

many different avenues of entry into the country over the centuries including the aforementioned history of the conquistadors, military involvement through warfare, as well as immigration. The Hispanic population that at one time was only equal to a few handfuls along the southern coastal states, has exploded into thousands and thousands of people who have left their home country to come here with their families and hopes for a better life. They, in turn, have brought their culture and their language which have greatly influenced bilingual education. Mexico, Cuba, and other Latin American countries have been the source of the United States' Hispanic immigrants for the same variety of reasons including bettering their quality of life. However, Puerto Rico's situation is slightly different.

By the 19th century, after becoming an economic powerhouse, with major production in sugar, coffee and tobacco, political drama started to surface in Puerto Rico residents. The Africans, (both slaves and free men), and especially descendants of Spanish colonists were growing tired of Spanish rule and were strongly toying with the idea of independence ("Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban"). By 1898, in the midst of the Spanish-American war, the United States began influencing Puerto Rico's fate by inviting its people to become a part of the United States. It would become a commonwealth of the United States in 1917 and its people eventually became United States citizens. Because of this status, the people of Puerto Rico have the right to move among the 50 states legally just as any other American, a term known as internal migration. The exception is that since Puerto Rico remains a commonwealth and not a state, they lack the right to vote ('Immigration: Puerto Rican/Cuban'). Despite the fact that internal immigration is not considered true immigration, when Puerto Ricans choose to move to the mainland, they experience the same types of cultural conflicts as those from other countries. They leave behind what they know and come

to a place where they must adjust to a new way of life. It was not until post World War II that migration of Puerto Ricans greatly increased. From 1945 to 1946, in a matter of a year, the number of Puerto Ricans in New York City rose from 13,000 to nearly 50,000. By the mid-60's more than a million had arrived. Eager for a fresh start, the main drive behind this massive influx in the population was based on the fact that the economic situation in Puerto Rico was not improving. Still suffering from a depression, many decided to try their luck in America, especially since many factories and employment agencies were starting to heavily recruit workers. Also, thousands of Puerto Ricans had joined the service during the war and found that this gave them the opportunity to see the world. They were eager to move to the states as American veterans ('Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban').

Puerto Rican communities stretched from New York into Newark, Philadelphia and even as far as Chicago. Because of the sheer numbers of the community in New York, their neighborhood became known as 'Spanish Harlem,' and they started taking more active roles in the city's political and cultural life. Puerto Rican citizens decided that they wanted more civil rights in America, yet, at the same time, they wanted to maintain some aspects of their culture. Artists and performers such as Rita Moreno, Tito Puente, and even athletes like Robert Clemente promoted their Puerto Rican heritage and encouraged their people to take on more leadership roles in society as well as in the government and to take pride in their ethnicity ("Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban"). Along with their heritage comes the celebration of their Spanish language. Because this group has become so populous in the United States, it is understandable why there are places in our cities where people speak in Spanish as often as they do English.

Cuba, although very near Puerto Rico in location, had quite the opposite experience with the United States. They too attempted to free themselves from the rule of Spain and actually acquired their independence before Puerto Rico. Things began quite peacefully between Cuba and the United States, with workers passing between Florida and the island. The cigar industry was booming in parts of southern Florida such as Key West and Ybor city. Thousands of Cuban workers shuttled across the Straits of Florida to work in the factories. By the dawn of the 20th century, anywhere between 50,000 to 100,000 Cubans were going between Havana, Tampa and Key West annually. (“Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban”) Political persecution was another factor that led to many Cubans fleeing their homeland. One such refugee was Jose Martí, considered the father of Cuban independence, who worked as a writer in New York City and organized many liberation forces. United States interest in Cuban business and affairs did not cease after the Spanish-American war; if anything it increased which led to a high investment in Cuban enterprises. At the same time however, Cuba in the 1950’s under the rule of Fulgencio Batista continuously imposed repressive policies. Many opposition leaders sought refuge in the United States until 1959 when political resistance reached an all time boiling point. (“Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban”) It was then that Fidel Castro, with his revolutionary army, marched into Havana and launched Cuba into a new era. This period also marked another massive wave of immigrants to the United States as over the next few decades, more than one million Cubans sought opportunity and refuge, while thousands more attempted and failed. Relations between the two countries grew sour when the Soviet Union became a Cuban ally, and international politics made it difficult for emigrants to escape.

Those first waves of immigrants were well received: they were the “wealthiest, [most] affluent professionals and members of Batista’s regime who feared reprisals from the new government (“Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban”).” More than 200,000 of these “golden exiles” fled Cuba by 1962 hoping to escape detection by Castro. These waves of immigration during the Cold War were encouraged by Americans, and the people were welcomed as refugees fleeing from a harsh regime. Congress even passed the Cuban American Adjustment Act in 1966 which allowed any Cuban who had been residing in the United States for at least a year to become a permanent resident, something that had never been done for any other immigrant group in the U.S.’s history. (“Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban”)

The next waves were not as lucky with their reception. They arrived in the ‘80s when Cuba finally opened some of its port cities such as Mariel due to much international pressure. In only six short months, ships and boats carried more than 125,000 Cubans to the United States. These people were known as the Marielitos, and were quite substantially lower in wealth and class than the previous groups. Some had even served prison sentences while in Cuba. This background labeled the group as undesirable. Many ended up in shelters and even federal prisons. (“Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban”) Still more Cubans made many dangerous and desperate attempts to flee their country involving contraptions and homemade vessels consisting of inner tubes, converted cars, and plywood rafts. Many drowned or perished from exposure during the 90 mile crossing. Eventually both countries made efforts to stop the flow of immigration. Towards the end of the ‘90s the United States agreed to send any boats that not yet arrived on its shores back to Cuba. Those who had already made it to the United States essentially were stuck there until relations between the two countries improved. Many who made it successfully to America thought that Castro’s new government

would be short lived and that they would soon return to their homeland and pick up where they left off. (“Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban”) Concentrated in Florida, essentially in Miami, Cuban immigrants began to settle and sought employment in the surrounding area. In a matter of 20 years, from 1960 to 1980, the population of Cubans in Miami alone rose from 50,000 to 580,000. The transition into American life was not without its struggles. Many Cubans, especially the Marielitos faced language discrimination and religious intolerance, all too familiar to other immigrant groups before them. (“Immigration...Puerto Rican/Cuban”)

The largest Hispanic population in the United States stems from parts of what is now the southwest with its close proximity of the Mexican border. Before the southwest was a part of the United States, Mexicans inhabited what is today known as California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. It is said that “the first Mexicans to become part of the United States never crossed any border; [rather] the border crossed them (“Immigration...Mexican”).” From the time Mexicans starting colonizing the southwest in the 16th century up until the time of the Mexican American War in 1846, those sections of land north of the Rio Grande were lightly populated with small settlements and missions which remained, for the most part, undisturbed even after Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821 (“Immigration...Mexican”).

The annexing of Texas was the fuel for the fire between the United States and Mexico. The territory was populated by a wide mix of Mestizos and Americans both of whom did not want to follow Mexican law but were unsure whether they wanted to join the United States or become their own nation. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo settled everything in 1848 with the victorious United States acquiring lands that would eventually become parts of Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and much of the southwest. The only stipulation was that the United States pay a token of \$15,000,000 to ease some of the ill feelings. For another \$10,000,000, the rest of

southern Arizona and New Mexico were bought six years later in what was known as the Gadsden Purchase. This allowed plans for western expansion and important railroad routes to be completed (“Immigration...Mexican”). With the exchanging of these lands, the Mexican citizens living in these parts were now residents of the United States.

Although the treaty acknowledged these Mexicans as U.S. citizens with guarantees of safety and property rights, in practice, these policies were not properly enforced. Hostility was at an all-time high into the 20th century and many Mexican Americans were deprived of their land and were subject to much discrimination (“Immigration...Mexican”). Immigrants crossing the border also faced more risks as the number of attacks by bandits rose and political and social instability increased. The eyes and ears of the government were too far away to deal with these problems first hand. As a result justice was usually immediate and carried out on scene by the people of the community. During these hard times, music and song became extremely important to the Hispanic culture. It was their way of telling the stories of their lives, passing legends and histories across regions, and, transcending generations. Some of these survive to the present day. Their music held and continues to hold many of their cultural values, including the use of their native language which also survived the test of time (“Immigration: Land Loss in Trying Times”).

Looking at the immigrant movement across the borders as described above, the 20th century saw three major surges, the first beginning in the early 1900s. Not only was there revolution going on in Mexico, but the booming American economy greatly affected the immigrant flow. Numbers from a census taken over a twenty-year period (between 1910 and 1920) showed that the population of Mexican immigrants nearly tripled with El Paso, Texas acting as the gateway, or southern ‘Ellis Island’ into the United States. The trouble was,

especially since the distance between the countries was so close, people were not staying put. They were constantly going back and forth and even deciding to return permanently to Mexico. Because of this, it was very difficult to get an accurate count of just how many immigrants there were in the United States over the years. Another issue was the fact that many immigrants were undocumented and went outside legal channels to gain entry into the United States. (“Immigration...Mexican”). Like the other groups of Hispanics, Mexican Americans gradually began to become more active in the public life and did not remain in their close knit communities.

The history of these countries is crucial to understanding first, how the Spanish language arrived in the United States, and second, how it has managed to take root. The continuous spurts of immigrants gave rise to the increasing number and size of Hispanic communities. Also, when many Hispanic immigrants began to realize that they would not be returning to their homelands as soon as they had expected, they began thinking about their long term plans in the United States. They had to find a way to maintain their own culture and language while simultaneously adapting and blending in with the American culture. Many of the first generation waves were reluctant to assimilate or shed some of their old ways, and clung to their language and to their communities.

For years the United States has “traditionally been referred to as a ‘melting pot,’ welcoming people from many different countries, races and religions, all hoping to find freedom and opportunity (Millet, Joyce).” The term ‘melting pot’ is a “metaphor for the way people of different cultures and religions are combined so as to lose their discrete identities and yield a final product of uniform consistency, which is quite different from the original inputs (Millet, Joyce).” More specifically, it is another word for assimilation. Assimilationists

feel that by coming together as one, there will be a stronger sense of unification and nationalism. Multiculturalism, in contrast, is described as the salad bowl theory or cultural mosaic. Each ingredient retains its integrity or flavor, while contributing to a successful final product. Their main argument against the latter theory is that with more emphasis on assimilation, there is the fear that people of other cultures will eventually lose ties with their roots in order to blend in better with the overall population.

Language and language education are highly influential factors when dealing with assimilation and integration. Bilingualism in the United States is currently a hot topic: it has been and is affecting our government, education, and even the culture of the country. The assumption was made at one time, that “bilingualism [was simply] a transitional state- if not for an individual, then across generations (Linton, 3).” However, it has had a very difficult journey throughout history. At times there have been attempts to wipe it out completely and unify the country under one common language, but bilingualism has managed to stay alive. “The conditions producing today’s official English movement have been present in the United States since before the country’s founding two centuries ago, and the arguments both for and against official English have been repeated, with slight variations and little concrete effect since that time (Ovando, 3).” The American government has been attempting to restrict and unify the nation under language since the colonial period.

The idea that America was ever a land of unified culture or language is a misnomer. Before the influence of European settlers, the North American continent was inhabited by the indigenous tribes of Native Americans. All totaled, there were anywhere from 250 to 1,000 different languages throughout the tribes, not to mention the civilizations in nearby Mexico, Central and South America. Despite these peoples’ existence, Europeans continued to believe

in and strive to create a “monolingual culture dominated by the English language and White Anglo-Saxon traditions (Ovando, 1).” Their vision was one of a country with a “unified history with unified traditions and with a common language (Ovando, 2).” Given this mindset, the settlers would set the stage for creating models of the American identity and herein laid the groundwork for controversy over language policies from the beginning. The founding fathers left the official language of the country open-ended and did not institute a government structure to regulate it.

Once the settlers started arriving, it was clear what would become the more dominant languages. European language in general commands respect because of its wide acceptance and use in schooling, politics, etc. whereas to the colonists, the indigenous languages of the natives were seen as beneath them. Therefore, even though the United States has tried to incorporate a more libertarian linguistic tradition, assimilation and pluralistic policies began to serve as surrogates for concepts such as racist, classist and religious prejudices (Ovando, 2). This paper examines the question of whether or not there is an explicit tradition that encompasses the language diversity of the United States, and if there is, what is it? Language ideology in the United States has never had a clearly stable path, but rather was affected greatly by changes throughout history.

All through our history the United States government has been reluctant to change its stance on bilingualism. Eventually some states would pass legislation authorizing it, while others still maintained an English-only policy which left the country split between the two. In the 18th and 19th centuries, language diversity in the country was shaped not by thoughts or theories on the languages themselves, but by “changing localized political, social and economic forces (Ovando, 4).”

The early years of our nation's history are known as the Permissive Period (1700-1880s) where the general view about languages was either fairly tolerant or simply just not a focus. Over time the push for expansion westward meant more space between neighbors and led to more isolated areas where people and their families, especially new immigrants, had to cling to their little communities, and the language they shared permeated daily activities such as church, schooling, newspapers etc. These communities remained very closely connected to their ancestry and attempted what was called Defensive Pluralism where they believed "it was feasible to maintain their ancestral ways of life while concurrently participating in the civil life of a nation (Ovando, 4)." In other words, they wanted to be able to partake in American culture, but hold onto their roots. During the 19th century, no one was actively promoting bilingualism, but rather applying policies of "non-coercive linguistic assimilation, curriculums of some sort for bilingual education in Spanish, French, Polish, Swedish, German, in both private and public schools were scattered across the country (Ovando, 4)."

Plans began to change in the late 1880s which brought about the Restrictive period (1880s-1960s) and many policies appeared. A kind of 'cultural genocide' was underway, especially regarding the 'civilizing' of Native Americans to try to restrict the country to one language. The American Protective Association started promoting English-only school laws and, in turn, schools began halting their bilingual programs. The Immigrant Restriction League was founded in the 1890s and literacy tests were being developed that would allow immigrants to settle in the United States, if and only if, they could read 40 words in any language. (Ovando, 5)

Fear is another tool, and one of the most effective, used by the government to coerce its citizens into favoring policies of assimilation. By turning the people's attention to the

possibilities of foreign ideologies penetrating the United States, they began to call for change. The Naturalization Act of 1906 stated that to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, immigrants had to be able to speak English. When the U.S. entered World War I in the 20th century, fear struck again as anti-German hostility rose and the teaching of this language in any school was eliminated. During this time pro-melting pot ideologies were deemed un-American and a huge push to teach English to everyone was launched. Some states went as far as to have students take an oath of language loyalty (Linton, 6). Both the Bureau of Naturalization and Education from 1918 to 1920 sponsored bills that provided for substantial federal aid to states on a dollar-matching basis to finance the teaching of English to aliens and native illiterates (Ovando, 5).” Close to 34 states had adopted English-only curriculums in all of their public and private schools by 1923. This standardization and bureaucratization of urban schools marked a major push for the assimilation of foreign speakers and an overall homogeneity in the United States. Many large schools created what were known as “Americanization classes” which had many ethnocentric stances, presenting U.S. cultural patterns as being more desirable than the immigrants’ ancestral cultures and languages. The way of thinking at this point was geared towards a sink-or-swim method, or submersion, where it was the responsibility of the immigrants to take up learning English. It would be their fault if they could not master the language. During that period, “blaming language-minority students for their academic failure became fashionable among social scientists (Ovando, 6).”

The United States finally came around in the 60s during what was known as the Opportunist Period. At this time, mathematics, science, and language skills were becoming a high priority for national defense concerning areas like military, commercial and diplomatic endeavors. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 was created “to raise the level of

foreign-language education in the United States (Ovando, 7).” Although the plan was set in motion, the system did not go about it the right way and the programs in existence were financially draining and not very efficient. The Naturalization Act of 1906 was finally revoked with the passing the 1965 Immigration Act and, as a result, the country started to experience a demographic shift as more and more immigrants were arriving and language-minority classrooms were filling up (Ovando, 7). The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was established to help “disenfranchised language-minority students, especially Hispanics (Ovando, 8).” Although the provisions of the act were ambiguous, it was a step in the right direction. It seemed as if the country was taking an active role in assisting those coming into the country instead of watching and waiting for them to fail and give up. In the Southwest especially, some secondary bilingual and ESL, or English as a Second Language programs were implemented that, driven by overall goodwill, sought to “address the academic, linguistic, sociocultural, and emotional needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Ovando, 8).”

The 80s brought more controversy back into the mix of things when the Office for Civil Rights revealed that guidelines for effective bilingual education programs were never published as official regulations. This was known as the Dismissive Period, when there were those who thought it was “absolutely wrong and against American concepts to have a bilingual education program that [was] now openly, admittedly dedicated to preserving their native language and never getting [those] to adequate in English so they can go out into the job market and participate (Ovando, 12).”

Although there have been many obstacles, bilingualism, especially dealing with the Spanish language, is still holding its own in the United States. From personal experience I

have observed that curriculums in the schools are continuing with bilingual education and are implementing these courses and programs starting with younger and younger children. First instruction in foreign language in the early 90s was not seen until as late as the middle school and high school years. As time progressed, however, language education became more and more important, and its instruction was starting as early as the elementary years.

The changing of foreign trade policies in the United States has also affected the attitude toward Spanish in this country. The North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, is an agreement that was struck between Canada, the United States, and Mexico in January of 1994. This agreement was actually an expansion of an earlier one between the United States and Canada in 1988. It called for the elimination of duties on trading goods in categories such as agriculture, motor vehicles, textiles, etc. between countries. It was made very clear that this treaty would not create any type of supranational governing bodies or law superior to the national laws, but would remain strictly an international law. Supplemental agreements to this treaty dealt with the environmental and labor aspects (“NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement”).

Because the United States had now eliminated duties and tariffs on products between itself and Canada and Mexico, industry began to expand. Recognizing that both Canadian and Mexican citizens had a preference for American products, manufacturers decided to accommodate their needs and produce multilingual labels for their products. Now consumers are able to find products with English/Spanish and English/French labels, and even labels with all three languages present. This subtle but distinct change further cemented the groundwork and necessity for bilingual and multilingual programs as well as the existence of other languages such as Spanish, in the United States.

The historical background of both the English and Spanish languages helps to depict what is going on today. The very nature of a language to evolve and to shift is a phenomenon that occurs throughout the centuries. This introductory information that I have presented in this paper focuses on the Spanish language in the United States. To prove this thesis, I have used historical information concerning important events and key people, as well as cultural linguistic research. Special attention has been paid to the concentrated populations in the United States and how and why any language shifts are indeed occurring. The information presented in this paper sets the stage as a background to how a language can shift its dominance and how a new language or culture is introduced into an area.

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