

# The negative impact of bilingual education

[Education](#)



It is true that, fitting in and adapting to two different linguistic and cultural world can have lasting impacts on individuals, hence, Richard Rodriguez, in his book “ Achievement of Desire”, addresses his struggles as a young boy, trying to adapt to a bilingual education and how that education alienated him from his uneducated Mexican parents. Additionally in the excerpts “ How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Gloria Anzaldua, while she mainly focuses on the language of “ Mexican” people in different aspects, also mentions her strife as a bilingual student.

Although these two stories are different in many ways but they both reflect the negative impact of living in the “ borderlands”. To better understand those cultural conflicts, it is essential to know exactly what the borderlands consist of and who ps there, but most importantly what they represent in this context. The concept of “ the borderlands” informs “ a variety of disciplines at the start of the twenty-first century, with many studies focusing on the boundaries where two or more disparate conceptual, social, or political entities overlap productively”(Ybarra, 1-3).

However, Anzaldua’s idea of the borderlands as an active place where people can form their own identity and political resistance remains the most influential according to multiple respected scholars. Understanding the bioregional and ecological aspect of the US-Mexico borderlands, amplifies our knowledge of how colonization, exploitation, and racism impact the land and mostly the Chicanos. Furthermore, one can attribute the concept of borderlands with bilingual education with both English and Spanish being the two territories in question, as experienced by both Anzaldua and Rodriguez.

In Anzaldua's essay "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" she describes her early childhood struggles in school. One of her memories from elementary school was when she was speaking Spanish with her friends during recess, they would tell her "If you want to be American, speak 'American'. If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong." (Anzaldua 43). In this situation she is forced to be silent and not speak. Growing up, she was constantly told from many of her elders that she needed to speak better English, and sound more American.

Anzaldua's own mother was ashamed of the way that she spoke English, saying it sounded like a Mexican. She reflects on two speech classes that she was required to take with all other Chicano students that had only one purpose, to get rid of their accents. "In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself." (Anzaldua 45-46). Part of language includes culture identity.

It is unfair for people to feel ashamed of their identity due to the way they speak. Your language is what keeps you connected to your homeland and you should not feel guilty for speaking it. One should not have to go through speech classes to correct a native accent; the accent is a part of your identity, it is part of who you are. You should not be ashamed to speak and express yourself, because you should never be judged on how you speak, but by the content of what you're saying. From adolescence the dominants are imposing their degrading views on the subordinates.

Many of the teachers that approached these students, telling them “ if they want to speak Spanish go back to Mexico”, are making assumptions based on prejudice about the individuals. The constant degrading ultimately lowers their self-esteem, making it difficult for them to feel that they can overcome being a part of the subordinate group. Anzaldua however rebels against these comments. She seems hostile to the English language and to a culture that does not honor the Spanish language in general or various Spanish dialects in particular.

Her general response is one of defiance, for example when she says that to attack an individual's form of expression (in her case, speaking her Chicano Spanish dialect at school) with the intent to censor " is a violation of the First Amendment" (40). She makes it very clear that she is determined to be linguistically free despite English oppression " free to write bilingually and to switch linguistic codes without always having to translate" (41). She is determined always to have a " wild tongue. " She proves that it is okay to know more than one language and that by speaking Spanish it does not make her less of a person.

It possible that she wrote her story partly in Spanish so that she could make a point that she was proud of her native language. Rodriguez suffers the same oppressions but reacted differently to them. If Rodriguez is hostile to the same culture, he does not seem to be hostile to either Spanish or English as such. Instead, he realizes that in American culture, where one language only and educational accomplishment are connected to social and material benefit, those who capture the power of language and education are more likely to obtain those benefits.

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But this comes at a price because obtaining those benefits usually force emotional and cultural separation from family members who lack language or educational accomplishments. Rodriguez himself admitted that “[he] cannot afford to admire his parents...He permits himself embarrassment at their lack of education. And to evade nostalgia for the life he has lost, he concentrates on the benefits education will bestow upon him” (Rodriguez, 15). Even Henry Staten, in his essay, remarks “ how his education, which culminated in a Ph. D in English from Berkeley in 1976, gradually alienated him from his uneducated, Mexican-born parents” (Staten 8-10).

In all, from both excerpts, we encounter the negative impact of bilingual education. “ Rodriguez, for whom “ monolingualism” in English becomes a strategy for success in U. S society, brings his personal experience to the political realm by promoting English as the sole language of public education in the U. S...Anzaldua, on the other hand, reflects her linguistic background with a fine toothed comb, un tangling the many strands of English and Spanish that coexist in their multilayered identity. (Ramsdell 12-16) The diversity within America is constantly growing, which in turn means American culture is frequently changing. With all of these new and foreign cultures migrating to the U. S, come many new languages. Generally, many believe that language is power, but yet, people are constantly being silenced because of their “ broken English” and accent. While their politics differ widely, both Rodriguez and Anzaldua lives have been forever altered due to their linguistic affiliations, and most significantly by straddling on the “ borderlands. ”