

Spanish language in the united states



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Introduction

Despite the bilingual policy in the USA, Spanish speakers are still reporting numerous incidences of discrimination against their language (Fuller, 2013). Employed Latinos have reported that their bosses continuously warn them against speaking in their language. Similarly, students and young children state that their colleagues are always scolding them for speaking in an ugly language. Furthermore, adult citizens are terrified of speaking Spanish because of the harassments heaped at them by law enforcement officers and white supremacists (Fuller, 2013). In one incident, a lawyer was caught shouting at a waiter and his customers simply because they were not speaking in his English. In another scenario, two women reported harassments by police officers in Montana who demanded to see their identification documents having heard them speaking Spanish. One grocery chain called Albertsons has also been under investigation for enforcing a 'No Spanish Policy' in its stores. Clearly, these reported incidences together with other undocumented or unreported cases justify that language discrimination in the USA is still imminent. In this paper, a discussion is presented based on the argument that stripping one's language is stripping a person's identity.

Origins of Spanish Language from Early Settlements in the USA

Historical accounts of Spanish early settlement in the USA date back to 1513 when the first group of Spanish colonizers arrived in Virginia (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). Spanish soldiers were considering Virginia as part of Florida. As such they wanted to expand the territory and establish a colony in the

region. Even though Spanish soldiers did not succeed in colonizing the USA, the population remained in America and multiplied over the years to become the second largest ethnic group in the country (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). As the USA gained political and economic stability in the reconstruction era, various European immigrants moved to settle here hence causing an instant increase in population. Among them were the Spanish families who migrated to Virginia and Florida before spreading to other parts of the USA. Accordingly, Latinos started moving to the USA during this period in which many people migrated from Cuba, Mexico, South and North America.

Statistics of Spanish Speakers in the USA

The population of Spanish speakers in the USA is estimated at 52 million. This figure represents 16.7% of the national population hence becoming the second-largest ethnic group in the country (Fuller, 2013). It is believed that Hispanics and Latinos have greatly contributed to the population growth of minority groups in the USA. Between 2000 and 2007, the population growth rate of Hispanics was 28.7%, a figure higher than the national population growth rate which was 7.2% at that time (Fuller, 2013). Accordingly, the growth rate of Hispanics was recorded at 3.4% between 2005 and 2006, while the national population growth rate was only 1.0%. Apparently, it is due to such a higher rate of growth which has facilitated a rapid increment in the population of Hispanics and Latinos in the USA. From the results of the 2010 census, it was revealed that Hispanics population remains the highest recorded value ever of minority groups in 191 out of 366 metropolitan regions which are recognized in the USA (Fuller, 2013). It is also projected

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that such higher rates of growth will maintain in the next 30 years hence bringing the population of Hispanics to a total of 132.8 million in 2050 in the USA. When expressed as a percentage, the value equals to 30.2% of the national population as projected in the same year.

According to the geographic distribution of Hispanics and Latinos in the USA, East Los Angeles has the highest number, with a total of 97% of the region's population were Hispanics or Latinos. Closely following is Laredo, Texas with a total of 94%, Brownsville, Texas with a total of 91%, and Hialeah, Florida with a total of 90%. Other regions with notably high populations of Hispanics and Latinos are; McAllen, Texas with 80%, El Paso, Texas with a total number of 77%, Santa Clara, California totalling 76%, El Monte, California registering 72%, Oxnard, California with a total of 66%, and Miami closing the top list with a total of 66% (Fuller, 2013). According to the 2010 census, these are the most populous regions in the USA dominated by Hispanic majorities. Statistics also indicate that over 60% of the Hispanic and Latino population in the USA migrated from Mexico. The dominance of Hispanics of Mexican ancestry might have been influenced by the Mexican-American culture. On the other hand, the remaining 40% of Latinos are said to have originated from the Caribbean, South America, and North America.

The Debate over Immigration and Language

Due to restrictive immigration policies in the USA, Hispanics and Latinos have become subjects of threats and intimidation against deportation. The US administration has been vocal toward the deportation of undocumented immigration but the message seems to squarely target Hispanics and Latinos

because they are the most population group among the minority communities (Fuller, 2013). In order to regulate immigration, the US government constituted various principles under which a person can be legally allowed to the country. These principles include; family-based immigration which applies for immediate relatives or individuals whose certifications suit the requirements of the family preference system (Valdés, 2006). Secondly, there exists employment-based immigration which permits foreigners who are deemed beneficial to the growth of the US economy. Thirdly, there are regulations such as; per country ceilings, diversity visa program, and protection of refugees.

In most instances, these laws have been successfully enforced against immigrants from far countries and continents. However, the regulations often fail against immigrants from neighboring countries like Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Citizens from these countries simply cross the borders into the USA without following a proper documentation program (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). That is one of the reasons why law enforcement officers are always on the search for illegal Hispanics and Latinos in the USA. In a bid to restrict the illegal migration of these populations, Congress has established the DREAM Act as well as the DACA policy (Valdés, 2006). These regulations protect children and adults who have proved that they were brought to the USA as minors but are now in the process of obtaining legal documentation. DACA protects any individual with unlawful presence in the USA from deportation and facilitates eligibility for work permit renewable every two years. This policy does not guarantee citizenship rights and its temporary protection only benefits

individuals with no criminal records. On the other hand, the DREAM Act grants permanent residency to qualifying aliens who reportedly entered the USA as minors (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015).

The Official Language of the US

On the concept of languages in the USA, English is recognized as the official language and it is used in the government, national institutions, and schools (Cobas & Feagin, 2008). Additionally, English is the most dominant language in the USA used in public communications, convenience stores, sports, hotels, and residential areas. However, the depiction of English as a formal language should not disqualify the use of minority languages in private conversations. Sadly, the situation in the USA is becoming unbearable day by day as many Hispanics and Latinos continue to lament about their discriminative experiences.

Discussions

The hardships faced when moving to a new country

Racism in the U. S.

A survey conducted among Hispanics and Latinos has indicated that members of these minority groups have been anxious and weary owing to the building threats of deportation (Valdés, 2006). In fact, some of the undocumented Latinos are no longer at ease of seeking public services like medication or travel passports. They fear that such services may prompt their legal identifications hence raising serious concerns about their legality of residence in the USA. Accordingly, even the documented parents in a

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constant state of tension because they fear the instantaneous twists in laws which might be interpreted erroneously to intensify their calls for deportation (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). Hispanics and Latinos say that the government of the day has failed to give them assurance about their safety in the USA.

There are many emerging issues which are clearly indicating that Hispanics and Latinos are the main targets of the government's restrictive actions. To start with, the government has deliberately lowered the bar for deportations to extreme points which generally threaten the lives of two-thirds of Hispanics and Latinos (Valdés, 2006). These minority groups have claimed that the regulations are punitive and only meant at discriminating them due to their high population as compared to any other group of color. Minority families in the USA have expressed their worries against the administration which is being accused of revitalizing white supremacy (Cobas & Feagin, 2008). Students, workers, and the elderly from Hispanic and Latino groups are no longer assured of their safety in the USA.

Another incidence of targeted racism against Hispanics and Latinos is the emerging issue of family separations at the border. Law enforcement officers and authorities from U. S Customs and Border Protection maintain are implanting laws separating children and their parents at the US-Mexico border (Cobas & Feagin, 2008). It had become a matter of concern as to why Hispanics and Latino children should be denied rights of protection by their parents when the government clearly understands the significance of parental guidance in a child's development. However, the administration has been silent and reluctant in solving these issues thereby confirming the fears

of targeted racism against minority groups. Accordingly, Hispanics and Latinos have decried the declining protections for children as well as the reversal of the Affordable Care Act (Valdés, 2006). On a critical evaluation, these adjustments were primarily focused on scaring Hispanics and Latinos. It is unfortunate that a country which once embraced diversity is slowly its patience and appears to be forcefully sending immigrants to their native countries.

Lack of Assimilation

When migrating to another a country, one constant fear which keeps roaming in an individual's mind is lack of assimilation. For an immigrant to be fully accepted in a new society, he or she needs to be assimilated in the new community (Cobas & Feagin, 2008). However, there are some differences which cannot be assimilated hence causing an outright identification of immigrants when they settle in another region. Now, in the case of Hispanics and Latinos, it has become difficult for these populations to be assimilated and legally accepted in the USA due to some outstanding reasons.

To start with, Hispanics and Latinos make up the second largest ethnic group in the USA. As a result, these people are fighting for their autonomy and recognition as a majority community in the USA (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). In addition, the populations are spread across the nation hence making them confident of their position in the country. However, this struggle to uphold diversity and cultural values has also worked against Hispanics and Latinos in very extreme ways. The communities have

remained on the government's radar for their increasing population and prevalence of Spanish speakers in the streets and convenience stores. These people even use their language in formal situations like in the workplace hence attracting the attention of law enforcement officers.

Lack of assimilation has also made Hispanics and Latinos be targeted by the government more than any other minority group. These people have a distinct accent, culture, and beliefs which they practice across the USA. Instead of embracing the USA culture, Hispanics and Latinos are trying to compete against the majority population hence making them be followed closely by the government (Valdés, 2006). Unlike other black Americans living in the USA, Hispanics and Latinos are very slow at acquiring assimilation hence causing regular wrangles with law enforcement officers. In addition, they are perceived as a threat to the majority population which has been assimilated to the USA culture and also uses English as the official language.

Backlash for speaking Spanish

Even though Hispanics and Latinos are regarded as minority groups in the USA, their populations are restricted from using the languages in public places. The U. S Customs and Border Protection officials together with other law enforcement officers are constantly looking for individuals speaking Spanish to verify their legality of staying in the USA (Valdés, 2006). These high levels of concern arise from the fact that many Hispanics are Latinos are crossing the US-Mexico border without legal documentation. In addition, these minority groups have become notorious in the USA due to their

increasing population thereby making it necessary for the government to impose strict regulations on them.

In the process of enforcing restrictions on Hispanics and Latinos, the government has also triggered fear and tension among these minority groups (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). At some points, Spanish speakers have even staged protests aimed at restoring equality and fairness before the law. However, it is the government's reluctance in addressing their concerns which have resulted in a backlash for speaking Spanish. There are many sampled cases in which Spanish speakers have been harassed or discriminated by law enforcement but no further action is being taken to rectify the situation. For instance, students from South and Central America have accused their classmates of ridiculing them for speaking Spanish. Sadly, the administration appears not to be overly concerned with these issues because schools are promoting English as the official language.

Accordingly, immigrant employees from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Cuba, and Colombia claim that their bosses are regularly warning them against speaking Latino because other white customers might be scared. Even if a customer is served at the moment is a Spanish speaker, employees are not allowed to deviate from English because such acts can create a negative reputation for a restaurant or any other convenience store. Fears of speaking Spanish have continued to increase in the past few years following an incident in which two women were apprehended by border officials for speaking Spanish. They were released after displaying their identification documents which confirmed their legality of residence in the USA. In another incidence, a lawyer shouted a customer for speaking Spanish at a

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convenience store. From these scenarios, it is clear that Spanish speakers are threatened in the USA and that might be the major cause of backlash.

Fear of losing their roots

Statistics of the new generation with immigrant backgrounds not speaking the native language

Due to rising fears of discrimination among Hispanics and Latinos, new findings indicate that native Spanish speakers are abandoning their languages and learning English (Cobas & Feagin, 2008). This trend is perceived as one step toward attaining assimilation and cohesion in the US communities. Results from Census statistics and Pew Research Center indicate that 16.7% of the national population had been speaking Spanish in the past decades (Valdés, 2006). However, this figure has been declining because Hispanic and Latino's populations are becoming bilingual while others are completely abandoning their native languages. English is increasingly becoming dominant in the country thus making it difficult for Spanish speakers to survive in the public space. Accordingly, the percentage of Hispanics who use English in their residential homes is expected to increase as these people are bowing to societal pressure and restrictions from the government (Saenz, 2004). For instance, results from the Pew Research Center indicated that only 25% of Latinos were using English in their homes in 2010. However, the figure is expected to increase to 34% hence indicating that many Spanish families will be using English in the future (Fuller, 2013).

Afraid to confirm stereotypes

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The position of Hispanics and Latinos in the USA has been threatened by stereotypes which associated the population with illegal immigration. The US Customs and Border officials are convinced that most of the Latinos in the USA are not legally documented to reside in the country (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). That is why law enforcement officers are persistently seeking to interrogate anyone who is reported to have spoken Spanish. It is stereotyped that immigrants who are fluently speaking languages associated with South and Central America are people who have not stayed in the US long enough to learn English. Accordingly, these people are associated with illegal activities like smuggling of goods and drug business. Therefore, Latinos are shying away from their languages in order to avoid being linked to an outlawed activity. Worse still, speaking Spanish can only attract the attention of law enforcement officers who can file a false case hence complicating issues (Saenz, 2004). Therefore, as a way of staying completely safe from such stereotypes, many Hispanics and Latinos are learning English.

Insecurities tied with background

While Hispanics and Latinos are considering the need for adopting English, there are increasing worries tied with their cultural backgrounds (Saenz, 2004). In essence, abandoning one's culture and traditions is not an informed decision even if the discussions of assimilations are concerned. Hispanics and Latinos need to strike a balance between their fears of being stereotyped and their allegiance to traditional practices. Of course, the decisions are highly associated with undesirable consequences but the government also needs to recognize that Latinos are part of the diverse USA culture. The dilemma which exists here is that Latinos have become wary of

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the threats deportation and continued discrimination whenever they use their language (Cobas, Duany & Feagin, 2015). On the other hand, they fear to embrace another English language because this decision will ruin their culture and identity. For many years, this stalemate has been difficult to solve even though findings are indicating that Hispanics and Latinos are adopting the English language in their daily use.

Conclusion

From the arguments discussed in this paper, it can be confirmed that stripping one's language is stripping a person's identity. The justification for this statement has been revealed in the essay which discussed how Hispanics and Latinos are threatened to be deported if they cannot be fully assimilated in the US culture. It has been observed that Hispanics and Latinos make 16.7% of the US national population, hence making them the second largest group in the country. However, their identity is threatened by the strict regulations being imposed by the government thereby limiting the use of Spanish in communications. Law enforcement officers and border officials are stricter on the issue of Hispanics and Latinos to the extent that they interrogate anyone who is heard speaking in those languages.

Accordingly, Hispanics and Latino employees are facing similar predicaments in their daily lives because they face discrimination for speaking in native languages. Similar problems have been faced by students and children who risk being separated from their parents at the border. Considering the discussions contained in this paper, it can be stated that the main solution can be mass documentation for all Hispanics and Latinos in the USA so that

the government can embrace diversity while also regulating illegal migration.

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