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The United States Children Growing Up Monolingual

Understanding, Identifying, and Examining Bilingualism in the United States: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Why do so many children in the United States grow up monolingual? The United States is regarded as “ a melting pot”, in which people of different cultures, races, and religions are joined together so as to widen a multi-ethnic society. Americans have had various beliefs about whether or not English should be the official language in this country. There have been diverse decisions in English Only acts throughout the United States’ history.

These English Only acts demonstrate some of the reasons why so many of the United States’ children grow up monolingual. It’s no wonder that immigrants to this country are swayed to lose their mother tongue or even their entire customs and traditions. It is difficult to understand the close ties that language has with certain group ethnicities (Gerstle, 2001).

Language is one of the major ingredients of individuals’ identities and ethnicities. The United States should consider a proposal that would include a more enhanced plan for the welfare of certain groups, so that they could fully contribute in our society and encourage a more bilingual or multilingual society that would prepare Americans for a more expanding global society.

The United States should consider itself to be at an advantage when it comes to bilingualism. There is a flood of immigrants coming into this nation every year and every immigrant brings with them a unique idiom. Throughout American history, the typical pattern of language usage among immigrants

has been a rapid shift from non-English monolingualism to bilingualism to English monolingualism in the third generation (Fishman, 1980).

Americans have more of an advantage, because of their high percentage of immigrants, to encourage bilingualism to its citizens. The United States could benefit from the advantage because bilingualism could better prepare the U. S. citizens for an ever-expanding global society (Sheriff, 2007).

Major Reasons for Bilingualism in the U. S.

One significant element to bilingualism in the United States begins with providing better welfare of specific groups of people who cannot, because of language barriers, contribute fully in our social organization. Another reason for bilingualism in the U. S. is the interest of professional second language groups, who find it essential to continue their support for language study development (Roeming, 1971).

In addition to the significant elements to increase bilingualism, native speakers might find it meaningful to continue their mother tongue, traditions, and cultures. One important reason for this is that there have been findings that concluded “ a foreign language facilitates mastering the higher forms of the native language” (Lambert & Tucker, 2007). Bilingualism could better prepare the U. S. citizens for an ever-expanding global society (Sheriff, 2007).

American citizens need to examine outside their borders and learn from the mistakes and successes of other countries, furthermore countries that are thriving with developed citizens with bilingual or multilingual proficiency (Pufahi, 2001). It is essential that the United States’ citizens become a

society with multicultural character and reflect as the “ melting pot” nation, so which as they are regarded (Safty, 1988).

Why an Interdisciplinary Approach

There are many factors that contribute to bilingualism in America. It is important that it be examined for the reasons listed above. The information must be explored from multiple viewpoints, in order to successfully develop a system of improvement. By applying an interdisciplinary approach to the issue, the viewpoints from specific disciplines can be investigated and integrated to provide successful modifications.

While disciplines can blind or sway, they become, when used relevantly, our keenest lenses on the world. The disciplines are the most useful means for illuminating those generative issues that have perennially engaged the curiosity of thoughtful human beings (Gardner and Boix-Mansilla, 1994). The interdisciplinary process involves integrating disciplinary insights into a particular problem and it does not attempt to integrate disciplinary perspectives. However, before one can identify insights, one must first identify the disciplines relevant to the problem (Repko, 2005).

Bilingualism influences many divisions of this nation. It is difficult to apply only one study of discipline to this multifaceted crisis. The issue needs to be analyzed in more areas of disciplines, so that all factors are considered. This complete examination of bilingualism in the United States could help render all major concerns that affect Americans and their legal citizens.

Significant Disciplines

There are several disciplines that could contribute to the concerns of bilingualism in America. The disciplines that are considered to be the most critical are Education, Sociology, and Modern Languages. The goal of this investigation is to consider the most important welfare of the United States' citizens concerning bilingualism.

There are several other disciplines that contain factors involving bilingualism, but these disciplines may only briefly be illustrated in this paper. The disciplines that may be briefly studied are Economics, History, Linguistics, Political Science and Psychology. The investigation concentrates mainly on the most critical disciplines. Education, Sociology, and Modern Languages are the disciplines that will be fully investigated for the purpose of the problem at hand.

Discipline 1: Education

The discipline of Education contains methods that can assist in teaching a system. Teaching techniques can have effective implications to address specific issues. It is important to understand well enough specific structures in order to effectively acknowledge them. The purpose of teaching techniques is to have a sound knowledge base, so that students can build as they are exposed to different life experiences.

If a student is well educated, then they are able to interpret good judgment, experience and wisdom (Britannica, 2006). These are the reasons why it is essential that students at an early age be instructed in the issues of foreign languages. Students are able to acquire two languages simultaneously almost " with the same ease [he] learns his first one because he is doing so

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at a stage of mental development which proceeds parallel to the mechanisms of language acquisition.”

The influence of Education has been proven to be an effective way to promote a Bilingual society (Safty, 1988). The discipline of Education would allow students to further understand and comprehend the structures of bilingualism and promote the importance of the issue in America’s society.

Discipline 2: Sociology

The discipline of Sociology contains methods of how and why people are structured in society. Societies are structured as individuals or as part of associations, groups and institutions. Societies are examined to reveal how and why people are structured in specific ways (Britannica, 2006). It is essential to include this discipline’s insights to the issue of bilingualism in the U. S. It should be researched why certain societies do not fully contribute in our society, because of language barriers.

Also, it should be examined why certain members continue to contribute to the support of language study. Professional linguists observed evidence of behavioral function in two languages with enthusiasm without recognizing that the disparate cultural levels of the two languages may cause serious individual socio-psychological problems (Roeming, 1971).

It is essential to understand how or why people are structured in societies, so that there can be a greater awareness of how Americans can gain a higher participation in bilingualism.

Discipline 3: Modern Languages

The discipline of Modern Languages involves the structure of languages, syntax formation of languages, and learning capabilities of second language learners. The structure of languages can in some cases be transformed from one language to another. Positive cognitive gains should be expected from bilingualism if the second language is introduced after the child has achieved a certain threshold level of competence in his first language (Diaz, 1983).

The syntax-formations of languages are sometimes similar in structure. In an intensive investigation it revealed that exposure to French facilitated the comprehension of certain English syntactic structures (Safty, 1988). Also, the learning capabilities of second language learners can sometimes be very diverse from that of native language learners. It is essential to understand the formalities of Modern Languages, so that the proper proposal can be assessed of bilingualism in the United States.

Significant Disciplines

Other disciplines that should be briefly studied are Economics, History, Linguistics, Political Science and Psychology. Economics involves the set of principles and techniques by which a society decides and organizes the ownership and allocation of economic resources. History includes the social structures and the interaction of different group in society rather than affairs of state. Linguistics encompasses semantics, syntax, and phonology.

Synchronic linguistic studies aim to describe a language as it exists at a given time; diachronic studies trace a language[s historical development. “ Political Science contains the nature of states, the functions performed by

governments, voter behaviour, political parties, political culture, political economy and public opinion.

Psychology illustrates the concerns of personalities, attitudes, motivations, and behaviour of an individual or a group" (Political Science, 2008). The disciplines listed above may be briefly included in this investigation for the purpose of the United States' citizens examining the importance of increasing bilingualism or multilingualism.

Purpose of Interdisciplinary Studies

The purpose of this investigation is to understand, identify, and examine bilingualism in the United States. The issue of bilingualism in America is a major concern that needs to be reviewed with more than one aspect of discussion in order for all Americans to agree on the topic at hand. The interests of specific groups of people who are not able, because of language barriers, to contribute fully in our social organization should be reviewed.

Also, it is ethically accurate for native speakers to maintain their mother tongue, traditions, and cultures studies. It also should to be reviewed why beginning foreign language study early supports achievement of higher levels of language proficiency and why bilingualism can enhance certain cognitive skills and intellectual development.

If the issues listed in this paper are understood, identified and examined then the United States could better prepare the U. S. citizens for an ever-expanding global society with specific groups' interest included.

Background

The United States was founded on diverse cultures unifying to establish a new nation of opportunities. The history of America has demonstrated the struggles of diverse cultures trying to create a multicultural nation. One of the major concerns in the United States has been bilingualism.

In the beginning Americans tried to define what the nation stood for and what customs and cultures were considered American. President Theodore Roosevelt once said, " We have one language here, and that is the English language, and we intend to see that the [assimilation] crucible turns our people out as Americans." These events in American history resulted in federal and state laws, judicial decisions and administrative regulations which were largely sympathetic to the idea of language rights.

Official English Movement

In the nineteenth century of the United States there were languages other than English that were widely spoken, a strong " English only" struggle developed at the turn of the century as a flood of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe increased xenophobic feelings in Americans. The " Americanization" movement that grew between 1900 and 1920 demanded national unity upon cultural homogeneity and a common language (Citrin, Reingold, Walters, & Green, 1990).

The planned drive for " official English" in the 1980s was what started change in America. Senator Hayakawa (Republican, California) feared that if the United States failed to promote a common language then they would create instability and polarization similar to Canada, Belgium, and other linguistically divided countries. Hayakawa first proposed an amendment to <https://assignbuster.com/education-essays-bilingualism-united-states/>

the Constitution to declare English the official language to the United States in 1981.

Hayakawa established the " U. S. English," the organization which quickly became the leading advocacy group of the " official English" movement. Today there are 44 states and numerous countries and municipalities that have considered laws or initiatives that declare English to be their sole official language (Citrin, Reingold, Walters, & Green, 1990).

There are organizations that fight to make English the official language of the United States. ProEnglish is a member-supported, national, non-profit organization founded in 1994. ProEnglish is one of the organizations dedicated to making English the official language of the United States.

They disapprove of such orders such as the Executive Order 13166, which states that any entity which receives federal funds must provide whatever services it offers in any foreign language spoken by anyone likely to receive those services. It says failure to do so is likely to constitute " discrimination on the basis of national origin" as prohibited by Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights law (ProEnglish Activism, 2008). The " English only" movement and the immigrants struggling to thrive in American societies demonstrates the diverse viewpoints that their citizens hold about bilingualism.

Bilingual Education

The United States has had bilingual education since the 1840's. It was believed that a form of bilingual schooling originated in Cincinnati in 1840. Cincinnati was one of the many communities in which the majority or a large minority of the population was German-speaking. German immigrants were

coming to America in huge numbers during the latter decades of the 19th century.

There were private and parochial German schools established, furthermore German parents had to pay tuition and school taxes. As a result of the German schools the native-born Americans became concerned that speakers of other languages would be assimilated into their speech and way of life. They decided to unite the German schools with the public schools and swayed the students to aspire to learn the German language. This resulted in students learning German and English languages together (Andersson, 1971)."

The 20's, 30's, and 40's were a low period for foreign languages in general, which almost disappeared from the elementary-school curriculum. On January 17, 1967, a historic bill was introduced in the Senate of the U. S. by the senior senator from Texas together with seven other senators as co-sponsors. The bill was to ensure that students whose native tongue was not English would be better assisted in school.

On January 2, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Bilingual Education Act, with the words, " Thousands of children of Latin descent, young Indians, and others will get a better start- a better chance in school (Andersson, 1971)". Federal policy in bilingual education since 1960 has been made to ensure equal educational opportunity for minority-language children of limited English proficiency (LEP). They began because of court decisions enforcing civil rights legislation such as the Civil Rights Act

of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974 (Secada, 1990).

There is a debate for Bilingual Education in which there are those who believe that the goal of the program should be to assimilate LEP students into the mainstream as quickly as possible. Then there are those that believe that the program should help develop dual language competence and literacy, multicultural awareness, and enhanced self concept which could lead to other desirable goals (Secada, 1990).

In the 1960s the concept of a federal bilingual education program revealed to be politically popular, and there were more than three dozen bilingual education bills introduced into the House of Representatives. On January 17, 1967, Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough and six cosponsors introduced S. 428, the American Bilingual Education Act (BEA), an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

This amendment was to ensure a better education to “ the special educational needs of the large numbers of students in the United States whose mother tongue is Spanish and to whom English is a foreign language (Lyons, 1990)”.

The 1974 amendments lengthened the formation and operation of the BEA, they also supported the law’s focus on English-language development and neglect of native-language development. The amendments also excluded federal support for two-way bilingual-education programs like the Coral Way model. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in federally aided programs and

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activities and entailed on grant-making agencies accountability for guaranteeing compliance.

In 1974 the United States Supreme Court delivered its first and only response to the legal responsibilities of schools serving LRP students. The case was *Lau v. Nichols*, a class-action suit by the parents of nearly 3000 Chinese pupils in the 16, 500 students San Francisco public school system. There were only a small percentage of students that received special instruction and the remainder received none. The plaintiffs alleged that the school district's conduct violated both the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The plaintiffs requested that the laws be improved and the school districts policies ensure quality instruction for bilingual students. Multilingual-multicultural programs were even more determined in providing instruction in and development of English and at least two other languages (Lyons, 1990).

In the 1980s the Regan administration cut funding to the bilingual education programs and at the time there was an increase in the number of LEP children needing BEA-funding services. There were at least 3. 6 million LEP students that were attending schools in the Unites States. The LEP school-age population was expected to increase, through the year 2000, two and one half times as fast as the general school-age population (Lyons, 1990). During Regan's term in office he appointed William J. Bennett to be his successor. Secretary Bennett announced to his citizens:

Early study of foreign languages makes sense. The imitative capacities of young children give them natural advantages as language students. And language study is good for them. It allows children a taste of the size and diversity of human experience and helps them to distinguish similarities and differences between their own and other cultures and peoples. It may even have a positive effect on their command of English (Lyons, 1990).

Integrated Disciplines

The disciplines discussed in this investigation are Education, Sociology and Modern Languages. They are essential for the complete investigation of bilingualism in America. Education contains the major aspects of bilingualism in America. Education is the major reason for bilingual studies. Education is the primary reason that American citizens gain comprehensive understanding of a second language.

This is the reason that Education is reviewed first in this intense study. Sociology is the next discipline viewed. It is essential to the issue of bilingualism because societies determine what kind of community they desire to exist in. They vote and protest the issues that concern their communities, furthermore determine the idioms used in their societies. The last discipline that is viewed is Modern Languages because of the importance of language structures and facets. These disciplines are viewed in this order due to their importance in the issues concerning bilingualism in America.

Other Bilingualism Historical Events

Beginning in the 1990s there was a clear presence of xenophobic culture in the California citizens. The California Proposition 277 in 1998 was designed to dismantle bilingual education. Also the Proposition 187 was created to
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make English the official language of the state. Governor Pete Wilson and other politicians made speeches using a kind of language that demonized the so-called “ illegal” immigrants (Macedo, 2000).

These events lead to other states trying to mimic California’s actions. The presence of xenophobic culture was seen much earlier in American history. It can’t be forgotten the English re-education camps designed primarily to yank Native Americans mother tongues. Native American children were taken from their parents and sent to boarding schools with the main objective of cutting them off from their “ primitive” languages and “ savage” cultures (Macedo, 2000).

The historical events that have taken place in the Unites States history have brought us to the nation you see today. Bilingualism is still a major issue among American citizens. The issue is still a major debate among our new electing party's nomination for presidency. The recent debate among the two running Democratic Party's nomination, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama, were asked about bilingualism in the United States. Their responses to the question are below.

Clinton's comments: I think it's important for as many Americans as possible to do what I have never been able to do, and that is learn another language and try to be bilingual because that connects us to the rest of the world. ... I represent New York. We have 170 languages in New York City alone. And I do not think that we should be, in any way, discriminating against people who do not speak English, who use facilities like hospitals or have to go to court to enforce their rights. But I do think that English does remain an

important part of the American experience. So I encourage people to become bilingual. But I also want to see English remain the common, unifying language of our country (Clinton, 2008).

And Obama's: Well, I think it is important that everyone learns English and that we have that process of binding ourselves together as a country. I think that's very important. I also think that every student should be learning a second language. ... I want to make sure that children who are coming out of Spanish-speaking households had the opportunity to learn and are not falling behind. If bilingual education helps them do that, I want to give them the opportunity.

But I also want to make sure that English-speaking children are getting foreign languages because this world is becoming more interdependent and part of the process of America's continued leadership in the world is going to be our capacity to communicate across boundaries, across borders, and that's something frankly where we've fallen behind (Obama, 2008).

The controversy between these two Democratic presidential candidates about bilingualism reveals the major importance of bilingualism in America today. The problem requires a full investigation with the most comprehensive understanding of the issue. The issue should be viewed by all aspects of the problem. The disciplines of Education, Sociology and Modern Languages could give a full investigation on many facets of bilingualism in America.

The concerns of bilingualism need an interdisciplinary approach due to the many aspects of the issue. The interdisciplinary approach would allow many

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viewpoints to be examined and ideas to be fully understood (Repko, 2005). A look back of the history of bilingualism in America is an important aspect to viewing the problems that we see today. It is essential to acknowledge the events that have taken place in America history in order to fully understand the elements of bilingualism in this nation.

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