

Multilingualism in the United States: A Less Well-Known Source of Vitality in American Culture as an Issue of Social Justice and of Historical Memory

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[The talk takes its point of departure from current signs of multilingualism in American Census 2000 and American culture, examines some “language rights” issues, and ends with an anthology that has collected cultural expression in America from the 17th century to today in languages other than English. I am grateful to Kelsey LeBuffe for her research assistance and to Professors Jun Furuya, Konomi Ara, Eric Muller, and Keiko Sakai for their comments.]

I.

The world now has more than **six and a half billion inhabitants** (on June 17, 2009, the estimate was exactly **6,787,163,241**) who live in **193 countries** and speak **6,912 languages** (<http://www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm>, http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/distribution.asp?by=area). One could indulge in the fantasy that creating more nation states with only one single shared language would make for more harmony (“we have room but for one language,” Theodore Roosevelt famously said)—but from about 200 countries to nearly 7,000 languages is a long way to go. Of course, the vast majority of languages have very few speakers, making the average of 35 languages per country a misleading calculation. Yet the simple fact remains that most countries—even in Europe and America, the continents with the smallest number of languages—have speakers of more than one language. The Linguistic Society of America was right in reminding the public of the fact that “the vast majority of the world’s nations are at least bilingual, and most are multilingual, even if one ignores the impact of modern migrations” (<http://www.lsadc.org/info/lssa-res-rights.cfm>).

The impact of modern migrations is also considerable, and migratory movements have been accelerating in the past decades. According to a 2005 report by the Global Commission on International Migration for the United Nations (downloadable at <http://www.gcim.org/en/>), there were nearly **200 million international migrants around the world**, equivalent to the population of the fifth largest country, Brazil. This was a very dramatic, two-and-a-half-fold, increase from 82 million in 1970. Among those 200 million are 9.2 million

| Area | Living languages | | Number of speakers | | | |
|----------|------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|-------------|----------|
| | Count | Percent | Count | Percent | Mean | Median |
| Africa | 2, 110 | 30.5 | 726, 453, 403 | 12.2 | 344, 291 | 25, 200 |
| Americas | 993 | 14.4 | 50, 496, 321 | 0.8 | 50, 852 | 2, 300 |
| Asia | 2, 322 | 33.6 | 3, 622, 771, 264 | 60.8 | 1, 560, 194 | 11, 100 |
| Europe | 234 | 3.4 | 1, 553, 360, 941 | 26.1 | 6, 638, 295 | 201, 500 |
| Pacific | 1, 250 | 18.1 | 6, 429, 788 | 0.1 | 5, 144 | 980 |
| Totals | 6, 909 | 100.0 | 5, 959, 511, 717 | 100.0 | 862, 572 | 7, 560 |

Fig. 1. Lewis, M. Paul, Ed. "Distribution of languages by area of origin." *Ethnologue*, 16th Edition. SIL International. 2009.
<http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/distribution.asp?by=area>

refugees; almost half of the migrants are women (48.6%); app. 56 million are in Europe, 50 million in Asia, 40 million in North America, 16 million in Africa, 6 million in Latin America, and nearly six million in Australia, where they make up 18.7% of the total population.

Further, the demography in the richest countries is dramatically affected by these movements:

- From 1990 to 2000, international migration accounted for 56% of the population growth in the developed world, compared with 3% in the developing world
- From 1990 to 2000, immigration accounted for 89% of population growth in Europe
- From 1995 to 2000, Europe's population would have declined by 4.4 million without immigration
- From 1995 to 2000 immigration accounted for 75% of population growth in USA
- From 1975 to 2001, the number of foreign workers in Japan increased from 750,000 to 1.8 million.

These large migratory flows create new forms of multilingualism. This is readily apparent in the United States (where about 20% of the world's migrants live). According to the U.S. Census report for year 2000, the number of U.S. residents who speak a language other than English at home has dramatically increased from close to **32 million** in 1990 to nearly **55 million** in 2006 (or about 20% of Americans: for in a total population of around **281 million** in 2000—or exactly **306,691,946** on June 17, 2009—this statistic considers only those **279 million** US residents who were 5 years old and over in 2006).

More than half of these foreign-language speakers say that they also speak English very well. Among these residents in 2006 were 34 million speakers of Spanish (and the Census 2000 figures below give a sense of the growth and decline in six years), nearly two and a half million Chinese [Cantonese and

Table 52. Languages Spoken at Home by language: 2006

[279,013 represents 279,013,000. The American Community Survey universe includes the household population and the population living in institutions, college dormitories, and other group quarters. Based on a sample and subject to sampling variability; see text of this section and Appendix III]

| Language | Number (1,000) | Language | Number (1,000) |
|--|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Total population 5 years old and over | 279,013 | Other Indic languages | 613 |
| Speak only English | 224,154 | Other Indo-European languages | 394 |
| Spanish or Spanish Creole | 34,045 | Chinese | 2,493 |
| French (incl. Patois, Cajun) | 1,396 | Japanese | 475 |
| French Creole | 602 | Korean | 1,061 |
| Italian | 829 | Mon-Khmer, Cambodian | 184 |
| Portuguese or Portuguese Creole | 683 | Hmong | 187 |
| German | 1,136 | Thai | 140 |
| Yiddish | 153 | Laotian | 147 |
| Other West Germanic languages | 255 | Vietnamese | 1,208 |
| Scandinavian languages | 130 | Other Asian languages | 609 |
| Greek | 353 | Tagalog | 1,416 |
| Russian | 823 | Other Pacific Island languages | 356 |
| Polish | 640 | Navajo | 176 |
| Serbo-Croatian | 271 | Other Native North American languages | 205 |
| Other Slavic languages | 312 | Hungarian | 97 |
| Armenian | 217 | Arabic | 733 |
| Persian | 349 | Hebrew | 225 |
| Gujarathi | 299 | African languages | 697 |
| Hindi | 505 | Other and unspecified languages | 122 |
| Urdu | 325 | | |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey; B16001. Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over; using American FactFinder®; <<http://factfinder.census.gov/>>; (accessed: 17 January 2008).

Fig. 2. U. S. Census Bureau. “Languages Spoken at Home by Language: 2006.” Population: Ancestry, Language Spoken at Home. The 2009 Statistical Abstract. 2006. <<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/09s0052.pdf>>

Mandarin], 1.4 million French and Haitian Creole, 1.4 million Tagalog, 1.2 million Vietnamese, 1.1 million German, one million Korean, 829,000 Italian, and **475,000 Japanese (nearly 80% of whom speak English very well or well)**. The next most popular languages are Russian, Polish, Arabic, Portuguese, Greek, and Armenian. While Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean all experienced growth rates of at least 10% over the six years from 2000 to 2006—there was a dramatic decline in European languages (French, German, and Italian all down by at least 10%) and a modest decline of the number of Japanese speakers from 478,000 to 475,000. Geographically speaking, more than two thirds of Spanish speakers in the US live in the Southwest and the South and there outnumber speakers of all other languages except English taken together, whereas in the Northeast and the Midwest more people speak other languages.

The uneven distribution of speakers of languages other than English in the United States can be visualized in a map that reveals the many counties,

Table 4. Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over by State: 2000

[Data based on a sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf>]

| State | Population 5 years and over | Speak only English | Speak language other than English at home | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | | | Total | | Spanish | | Other Indo-European languages | | Asian and Pacific Island languages | | Other languages | |
| | | | Total | Speak English less than "very well" | Total | Speak English less than "very well" | Total | Speak English less than "very well" | Total | Speak English less than "very well" | Total | Speak English less than "very well" |
| United States | 262,375,152 | 215,423,557 | 46,951,595 | 21,320,407 | 28,101,052 | 13,751,256 | 10,017,989 | 3,390,301 | 6,960,065 | 3,590,024 | 1,872,489 | 588,826 |
| Alabama | 4,152,278 | 3,989,795 | 162,483 | 63,917 | 89,729 | 40,299 | 43,812 | 11,225 | 22,122 | 10,546 | 6,820 | 1,847 |
| Alaska | 579,740 | 496,982 | 82,758 | 30,842 | 16,674 | 5,801 | 12,851 | 3,667 | 22,186 | 11,659 | 31,047 | 9,715 |
| Arizona | 4,752,724 | 3,523,487 | 1,229,237 | 539,937 | 927,395 | 435,186 | 102,004 | 26,527 | 62,204 | 28,280 | 137,634 | 49,944 |
| Arkansas | 2,492,205 | 2,368,450 | 123,755 | 57,709 | 82,466 | 43,535 | 22,695 | 5,332 | 15,238 | 7,865 | 3,357 | 977 |
| California | 31,416,629 | 19,014,873 | 12,401,756 | 6,277,779 | 8,105,505 | 4,303,949 | 1,335,332 | 453,589 | 2,709,179 | 1,438,588 | 251,740 | 81,653 |
| Colorado | 4,006,285 | 3,402,266 | 604,019 | 267,504 | 421,670 | 202,883 | 100,148 | 26,943 | 63,745 | 32,138 | 18,456 | 5,540 |
| Connecticut | 3,184,514 | 2,600,601 | 583,913 | 234,799 | 268,044 | 116,538 | 251,335 | 90,355 | 47,993 | 23,246 | 16,541 | 4,660 |
| Delaware | 732,378 | 662,845 | 69,533 | 28,380 | 34,690 | 17,116 | 22,584 | 6,411 | 9,359 | 4,201 | 2,900 | 652 |
| District of Columbia | 539,658 | 449,241 | 90,417 | 38,236 | 49,461 | 25,355 | 23,721 | 5,815 | 8,974 | 4,508 | 8,261 | 2,558 |
| Florida | 15,043,603 | 11,569,739 | 3,473,864 | 1,554,865 | 2,476,528 | 1,187,335 | 755,214 | 268,623 | 164,516 | 75,990 | 77,606 | 23,277 |
| Georgia | 7,594,476 | 6,843,038 | 751,438 | 374,251 | 426,115 | 246,269 | 168,629 | 52,754 | 116,456 | 63,320 | 40,238 | 11,908 |
| Hawaii | 1,134,351 | 832,226 | 302,125 | 143,505 | 18,820 | 4,960 | 14,242 | 3,165 | 267,157 | 134,782 | 1,906 | 598 |
| Idaho | 1,196,793 | 1,084,914 | 111,879 | 46,539 | 80,241 | 36,459 | 19,460 | 5,461 | 8,105 | 3,553 | 4,073 | 1,066 |
| Illinois | 11,547,505 | 9,326,786 | 2,220,719 | 1,054,722 | 1,253,676 | 665,995 | 640,237 | 253,352 | 248,800 | 111,065 | 78,006 | 24,310 |
| Indiana | 5,657,818 | 5,295,736 | 362,082 | 143,427 | 185,576 | 84,355 | 126,530 | 37,637 | 36,707 | 17,798 | 13,269 | 3,637 |
| Iowa | 2,738,499 | 2,578,477 | 160,022 | 68,108 | 79,491 | 36,606 | 49,032 | 15,851 | 25,335 | 13,606 | 6,164 | 2,245 |
| Kansas | 2,500,360 | 2,281,705 | 218,655 | 98,207 | 137,247 | 67,973 | 41,207 | 10,778 | 33,203 | 17,412 | 6,998 | 2,044 |
| Kentucky | 3,776,230 | 3,627,757 | 148,473 | 58,871 | 70,061 | 30,842 | 51,025 | 15,307 | 21,031 | 10,794 | 6,356 | 1,928 |
| Louisiana | 4,153,367 | 3,771,003 | 382,364 | 116,907 | 105,189 | 38,609 | 225,750 | 53,948 | 41,963 | 21,755 | 9,462 | 2,595 |
| Maine | 1,204,164 | 1,110,198 | 93,966 | 24,063 | 9,611 | 2,664 | 76,079 | 18,165 | 5,737 | 2,485 | 2,539 | 749 |
| Maryland | 4,945,043 | 4,322,329 | 622,714 | 246,287 | 230,829 | 108,578 | 198,932 | 58,632 | 135,899 | 65,973 | 57,054 | 13,104 |
| Massachusetts | 5,954,249 | 4,838,679 | 1,115,570 | 459,073 | 370,011 | 162,908 | 529,784 | 194,256 | 171,253 | 89,931 | 44,522 | 11,978 |
| Michigan | 9,268,782 | 8,487,401 | 781,381 | 294,606 | 246,688 | 100,689 | 303,122 | 96,900 | 104,467 | 48,454 | 127,104 | 48,563 |
| Minnesota | 4,591,491 | 4,201,503 | 389,988 | 167,511 | 132,066 | 61,817 | 110,644 | 30,433 | 103,520 | 57,969 | 43,758 | 17,292 |
| Mississippi | 2,641,453 | 2,545,931 | 95,522 | 36,059 | 50,515 | 20,856 | 23,700 | 5,805 | 13,558 | 6,303 | 7,749 | 3,095 |
| Missouri | 5,226,022 | 4,961,741 | 264,281 | 103,019 | 110,752 | 45,990 | 97,816 | 31,383 | 41,970 | 21,210 | 13,743 | 4,436 |
| Montana | 847,362 | 803,031 | 44,331 | 12,663 | 12,953 | 3,411 | 17,978 | 5,065 | 3,066 | 1,323 | 10,334 | 2,864 |
| Nebraska | 1,594,700 | 1,469,046 | 125,654 | 57,772 | 77,655 | 39,825 | 27,905 | 7,862 | 15,014 | 8,142 | 5,080 | 1,943 |
| Nevada | 1,853,720 | 1,425,748 | 427,972 | 207,687 | 299,947 | 162,301 | 47,183 | 12,295 | 68,523 | 29,222 | 12,319 | 3,869 |
| New Hampshire | 1,160,340 | 1,064,252 | 96,088 | 28,073 | 18,647 | 6,907 | 64,067 | 15,607 | 9,891 | 4,618 | 3,483 | 941 |
| New Jersey | 7,856,268 | 5,854,578 | 2,001,690 | 873,088 | 967,741 | 483,069 | 659,248 | 241,627 | 275,832 | 119,581 | 98,869 | 28,811 |
| New Mexico | 1,689,911 | 1,072,947 | 616,964 | 201,055 | 485,681 | 158,629 | 22,032 | 5,121 | 11,517 | 5,034 | 97,734 | 32,271 |
| New York | 17,749,110 | 12,786,189 | 4,962,921 | 2,310,256 | 2,416,126 | 1,182,068 | 1,654,540 | 663,874 | 671,019 | 395,159 | 221,236 | 69,155 |
| North Carolina | 7,513,165 | 6,909,648 | 603,517 | 297,858 | 378,942 | 218,792 | 119,961 | 32,041 | 78,246 | 39,065 | 26,368 | 7,960 |
| North Dakota | 603,106 | 565,130 | 37,976 | 11,003 | 8,263 | 2,762 | 24,191 | 6,670 | 1,933 | 696 | 3,589 | 875 |
| Ohio | 10,599,968 | 9,951,475 | 648,493 | 234,459 | 213,147 | 77,394 | 296,816 | 99,316 | 84,658 | 40,574 | 53,872 | 17,175 |
| Oklahoma | 3,215,719 | 2,977,187 | 238,532 | 98,990 | 141,060 | 65,280 | 36,892 | 9,045 | 34,517 | 18,325 | 26,063 | 6,340 |
| Oregon | 3,199,323 | 2,810,654 | 388,669 | 188,958 | 217,614 | 116,557 | 82,828 | 28,497 | 75,279 | 39,972 | 12,948 | 3,932 |
| Pennsylvania | 11,555,538 | 10,583,054 | 972,484 | 368,257 | 356,754 | 140,502 | 428,122 | 138,542 | 143,955 | 76,183 | 43,653 | 13,030 |
| Rhode Island | 985,184 | 788,560 | 196,624 | 83,624 | 79,443 | 40,403 | 91,449 | 31,517 | 19,926 | 9,991 | 5,806 | 1,713 |
| South Carolina | 3,748,669 | 3,552,240 | 196,429 | 82,279 | 110,030 | 53,604 | 55,116 | 14,485 | 25,534 | 12,489 | 5,749 | 1,701 |
| South Dakota | 703,820 | 658,245 | 45,575 | 16,376 | 10,052 | 3,999 | 19,510 | 7,699 | 3,053 | 1,505 | 12,960 | 3,173 |
| Tennessee | 5,315,920 | 5,059,404 | 256,516 | 108,265 | 133,931 | 64,378 | 68,879 | 19,044 | 39,701 | 20,071 | 14,005 | 4,772 |
| Texas | 19,241,518 | 13,230,765 | 6,010,753 | 2,669,603 | 5,195,182 | 2,369,036 | 358,019 | 92,380 | 374,330 | 186,504 | 83,222 | 21,683 |
| Utah | 2,023,875 | 1,770,626 | 253,249 | 105,691 | 150,244 | 71,405 | 49,865 | 13,156 | 37,805 | 16,310 | 15,335 | 4,820 |
| Vermont | 574,842 | 540,767 | 34,075 | 9,305 | 5,791 | 1,407 | 24,334 | 6,211 | 3,015 | 1,521 | 935 | 166 |
| Virginia | 6,619,266 | 5,884,075 | 735,191 | 303,729 | 316,274 | 151,938 | 195,846 | 53,125 | 170,136 | 82,167 | 52,935 | 16,499 |
| Washington | 5,501,398 | 4,730,512 | 770,886 | 350,914 | 321,490 | 155,374 | 176,722 | 62,281 | 242,836 | 123,088 | 29,838 | 10,171 |
| West Virginia | 1,706,931 | 1,661,036 | 45,895 | 13,550 | 17,652 | 5,728 | 19,491 | 4,970 | 6,038 | 2,249 | 2,714 | 603 |
| Wisconsin | 5,022,073 | 4,653,361 | 368,712 | 148,910 | 168,778 | 76,697 | 124,719 | 36,736 | 61,447 | 31,942 | 13,768 | 3,535 |
| Wyoming | 462,809 | 433,324 | 29,485 | 8,919 | 18,606 | 6,223 | 6,391 | 1,381 | 2,117 | 862 | 2,371 | 453 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P19.
Internet release data: February 25, 2003

Fig. 3. U.S. Census Bureau. "Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over by State." Census 2000.
<www.census.gov/population/cen2000/phc-t20/tab04.pdf>

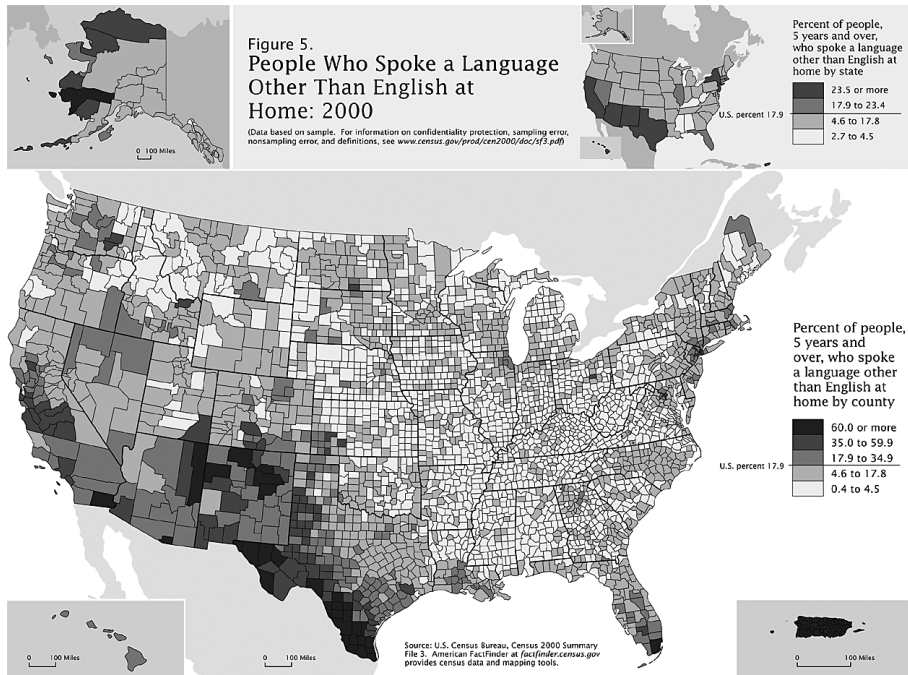


Fig. 4. U.S. Census Bureau. “People who Spoke a Language Other Than English at Home: 2000.” Census 2000. <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-29.pdf>>

especially in the Midwest and the South, in which there are fewer than 4.5% residents who speak a language other than English at home, as opposed to such states as California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, as well as Nevada, Florida, Illinois, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts where between one fifth and a quarter of the residents speak other languages at home. In two American cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (Hialeah, FL and Laredo, TX) more than 90% speak a language other than English at home, and in six more cities that size more than 70% do not speak English at home.

The high figures of annual naturalization in the United States demonstrate a continuous incorporation of nonnative populations, turning a vast stream of migrants steadily into citizens, between half a million and a million each year.

II.

The impressive figures of global migration and local linguistic diversity have supported the growth of various versions of bilingualism or multilingualism. In many countries of the world the learning of languages other than the respective country’s official tongue is considered part of an educational agenda that political conservatives and radicals alike unhesitatingly endorse. The European Union, for

example, which has more official languages (currently 23) than the United Nations (which has six), actively supports language acquisition in educational institutions from grade schools to universities and campaigns for a “second mother tongue.” In Japan, a Prime Minister’s Commission report from the year 2000, entitled “Japan’s Goals in the 21st Century: The Frontier Within: Individual Empowerment and Better Governance in the New Millennium,” reportedly demanded that “all Japanese acquire a working knowledge of English—not as simply a foreign language but as the international lingua franca.” While the report suggested that “[i]n the long term, it may be possible to make English an official second language, but national debate will be needed,” it set up as its immediate goal that “every effort should be made to equip the population with a working knowledge of English” (Hashimoto 2004). Satoshi Hashimoto also noted a current boom in the learning of English in Japan, but a decline “of other modern European languages in Japan” because of the “raised interest in other Asian languages” and “the de-emphasis on learning a second foreign language.”

By contrast the United States is just coming out of a longish decline in foreign-language learning that began with the reduction of language requirements in the 1960s. For example, at a Harvard faculty meeting in 1968 (according to unpublished minutes from forty years ago) the many benefits of language study for students were articulated emphatically, for such study would keep our students from being “confined to their own language.” Among the “more positive values claimed for the language requirement” cited were “the so-called ‘cultural shock’ effect” and the fact that “a wholly monolingual individual is shut off from any awareness of how users of other languages think and react. The effect of monolingualism is to make us more insular than we already are. At a more aesthetic level, access to other literatures is surely of value.” Also, “encountering a foreign language not only enhances one’s comprehension of language in general, but also tends to increase one’s facility in English and understanding of it” (Dean Ford). The participants in the debate mentioned that “the study of foreign languages in America lags ... far behind that of all other nations with well-developed educational systems” and “that there had never been a time when an educated person did not have some command of a language other than his own” (Pappenheimer). And another point was made: “a student’s undergraduate years are in fact the last in which he stands a reasonable chance of learning a foreign language” (CEP minutes 1524). Unfortunately, that debate preceded a vote that lowered the then existing language requirement, because the professors were convinced that students would continue studying languages on a voluntary basis. Yet this was not to be the case, and with this vote, Harvard became part of a trend that also dominated about thirty years of American higher education, during which fewer and fewer students learned foreign languages in high schools and colleges.

You will notice on the chart that the figures of language course enrollment in

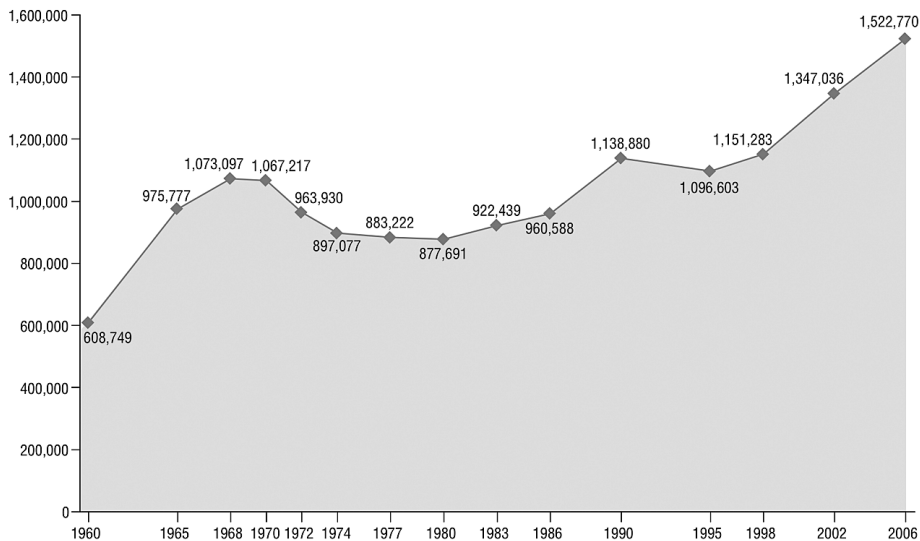


Fig. 6. Nelly Furman, David Goldberg and Natalia Lusin. “Language Course Enrollments by Year, Excluding Latin and Ancient Greek.” Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2006. <http://www.mla.org/2006_flenrollmentsurvey>

1995 are roughly identical with those of 1968 though the student population increased in those years.

In the past decade or so, the tide has been turning in American higher education. In 1999, for example, Harvard University started a language citation program that confers a special honor upon non-majoring students who do work in a foreign language up to the level of proficiency (measured by certain standards). In the ten years since its creation, it has become wildly popular among students, and nearly a third of our undergraduates now participate in the language citation program, a sign of the changing climate. (By 2007, a total of 76 students had taken the citation in Japanese, an impressive figure since the citation is not available to students who major in East Asian Languages and Literatures.) The portal of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages website now includes a downloadable Modern Language Association brochure, “Knowing Other Languages Brings Opportunities” which describes the many advantages that students have who study foreign languages in college: improved skills and grades, better performance on standardized tests, greater job opportunities in the global economy, and experiencing the fun one has in learning another culture, a new community from the inside out. (http://www.adfl.org/resources/knowing_other_languages.htm.)

In the past, teaching American students to be fluent in other languages was concentrated in the most important living European languages (French and German) and of Latin, the acquisition of which was a sign of being educated. The

newer forms of bilingualism are directly related to migratory flows of people and cultural products, have stimulated the study of heritage and minority languages, have made Spanish also by far the most popular foreign language taken by students in the United States, and have led to the establishment of courses like “Beginning Chinese for Native Speakers,” while enrollment in Arabic has increased very noticeably.

The last Modern Language Association survey shows that, between 2002 and 2006, American college enrollment in foreign language courses had risen overall by 12.9%, and Arabic (127%) and Chinese (51%) registered the most dramatic increases but that all other modern languages also benefited from the upward trend. **The growth rate for learning Japanese in American colleges was 27.5% from 2002 to 2006, from 55,238 up to 66,605** (http://www.mla.org/2006_flenrollmentsurvey). (This is quite a dramatic transformation from the small beginnings of Japanese language instruction that Teruko Kumei has delineated.) Harvard’s figures are similar in many respects: The general enrollment in language courses is growing, most spectacularly, at Harvard like in the rest of the country, in Arabic and Chinese. In studying Japanese, there was a growth in Harvard enrollment from 258 in 2003 to 326 in 2007. Spanish, however, remains the most popular language, but in a lesser proportion at Harvard. The MLA survey found a 31.2% increase in the number of less commonly taught languages being offered for study. The recent creation of Catalan, Gikuyu, Swahili, Twi, and Yoruba courses at Harvard reflects this interest and development.

What are called “heritage languages” are then not only spoken in many homes inhabited by migrants and their children but also taught in more and more university classrooms today, as well as in nontraditional venues. The technological revolution has undoubtedly helped this process, for now pretty good translation machines (like google-translate), dictionaries, automatic correction programs (like MS Word’s), hundreds of type fonts (like those at the University of Oregon’s Yamada Language Center <http://babel.uoregon.edu/YLC/guides.html>—which would have been the dream of an eighteenth-century printer), and other multilingual websites and hypertexts are readily available and tools for non-boring language acquisition are in place (like the YLC’s “virtual language lab” for more than a dozen languages at <http://babel.uoregon.edu/YLC-AV/index.lasso>).

Non-English languages are also present in numerous recent American movies such as Spanish, Italian, Nahuatl, Maya, Tzotzil, as well as Kuna in John Sayles’s *Men With Guns/Hombres Armados* (1997), Mandarin in Ang Lee’s *Wo hu cang long/Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), or Japanese, German, and French in Sofia Coppola’s *Lost in Translation* (2003). American-produced films may now contend for—and win—Academy awards for “foreign-language” movies. It has also become quite common in American television shows from *The Sopranos* to *Law & Order* and *CSI New York* to include untranslated stretches of dialogue in

Humanities Language Enrollments 2003–07

| Department | Language | Total Enrollment | | | |
|---|--------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | 03-04 | 04-05 | 05-06 | 06-07 |
| Afr and Afr Am Studies | Gikuyu | | | 7 | 4 |
| Afr and Afr Am Studies | Swahili | | | 27 | 60 |
| Afr and Afr Am Studies | Twi | | | 17 | 10 |
| Afr and Afr Am Studies | Yoruba | | | 9 | 24 |
| Afr and Afr Am Studies Total | | 0 | 0 | 60 | 98 |
| Celtic Languages and Literatures | Celtic | 115 | 98 | 112 | 86 |
| Celtic Languages and Literatures Total | | 115 | 98 | 112 | 86 |
| The Classics | Greek | 79 | 64 | 57 | 88 |
| The Classics | Latin | 164 | 127 | 162 | 93 |
| The Classics | Modern Greek | 17 | 11 | 15 | 25 |
| The Classics Total | | 260 | 202 | 234 | 206 |
| East Asian Languages | Chinese | 651 | 635 | 691 | 817 |
| East Asian Languages | Japanese | 258 | 277 | 238 | 326 |
| East Asian Languages | Korean | 107 | 91 | 87 | 96 |
| East Asian Languages | Vietnamese | 27 | 20 | 38 | 36 |
| East Asian Languages Total | | 1043 | 1023 | 1054 | 1275 |
| German | Dutch | 11 | 10 | | 8 |
| German | German | 313 | 339 | 302 | 262 |
| German | Swedish | 21 | 27 | 22 | 20 |
| German Total | | 345 | 376 | 324 | 290 |
| Near Eastern Languages | Arabic | 289 | 300 | 356 | 379 |
| Near Eastern Languages | Modern Hebrew | 149 | 133 | 132 | 102 |
| Near Eastern Languages | Persian | 55 | 70 | 68 | 63 |
| Near Eastern Languages | Swahili | 25 | | | |
| Near Eastern Languages | Turkish | 28 | 45 | 38 | 51 |
| Near Eastern Languages | Yiddish | 22 | 17 | 11 | 23 |
| Near Eastern Languages Total | | 568 | 565 | 605 | 618 |
| Romance Languages | Catalan | 9 | 7 | 4 | 4 |
| Romance Languages | French | 934 | 867 | 904 | 767 |
| Romance Languages | Italian | 298 | 335 | 328 | 286 |
| Romance Languages | Portuguese | 201 | 216 | 204 | 270 |
| Romance Languages | Spanish | 1638 | 1709 | 1658 | 1570 |
| Romance Languages Total | | 3080 | 3134 | 3098 | 2897 |
| Sanskrit | Sanskrit | 56 | 67 | 85 | 89 |
| Sanskrit | Tibetan | 29 | 12 | 14 | 21 |
| Sanskrit | Urdu | 91 | 109 | 79 | 126 |
| Sanskrit Total | | 176 | 188 | 178 | 236 |
| Slavic Languages | Slavic (CBS) | 12 | 10 | 15 | 10 |
| Slavic Languages | Slavic (Czech) | 18 | 13 | 22 | 6 |
| Slavic Languages | Slavic (Polish) | 17 | 25 | 30 | 18 |
| Slavic Languages | Slavic (Russian) | 169 | 177 | 224 | 191 |
| Slavic Languages | Slavic (Ukrainian) | 7 | 9 | 9 | 7 |
| Slavic Languages Total | | 223 | 234 | 300 | 232 |
| Grand Total | | 5810 | 5820 | 5965 | 5938 |

Fig. 7. Ad Hoc Committee to Advise the Dean on Language Across the Curriculum. “Humanities Language Enrollments 2003–2007.” *The Language Requirement and Teaching of Foreign Languages at Harvard College*. November 2008.

Italian, Chinese, Spanish, or Hebrew, something that would have been hard to imagine in earlier years. (Surprisingly lagging behind much of the world are American cable and digital TV providers, who include no foreign channels at all in their packages, rendering even nearby Canadian or Mexican channels inaccessible to most Americans.) American writers, in contrast, have authored numerous books written in other languages. Thus in 2007 Jonathan Littell, born in New York and raised in both France and the United States, wrote and published in French *Les Bienveillantes*, a massive and much talked-about novel about the Holocaust from a perpetrator's point of view, while the English translation came only out earlier this year. Ilan Stavans has done much to circulate greater awareness about a new mixed language, Spanglish, in which he has written some pieces and into which he translated excerpts from literary works. Spanglish is in the company of such other mixed languages as Jinglish, Germerican, and FrAnglais that have been used by American writers and noted by observers at least since H. L. Mencken's *The American Language*.

In short, there are signs everywhere for multilingual and foreign-language cultural activity in the United States, and I would imagine that such activity will, if anything, increase in the years and decades to come. (Somebody who would find a way to give Americans access to truly global satellite TV could probably become rich very fast.)

III.

Yet such multilingualism also raises issues of language preservation and protection, of language rights, and of human rights insofar as they are affected by language barriers and language bans. Language barriers keep citizens from knowing their rights and from participating fully in the political arena. Hence the question is whether such barriers can best be overcome by bilingual and multilingual educational and political procedures or by viewing the continued use of foreign languages as an obstacle to full English immersion and competency? These issues may also give a political dimension to questions of translation. While some of the debates over multilingualism have their roots in the ideal of a nation state with "room but for one language," and while such issues began to come to the fore in the colonies with the banning of Indian and African drumming and also appeared during World War I with the prohibition of speaking foreign languages in certain areas of the country and the censorship of publishing foreign-language newspapers in the whole country, the modern English-only movement materialized in 1983, when Republican Senator S. I. Hayakawa of California, a Canadian-born linguist whose work focuses on semantics, and Dr. John Tanton, an ophthalmologist and population control activist from Michigan, founded US English. This lobbyist group initiated a successful "Official English" offensive in Congress, as well as several ballot campaigns and state legislatures, aiming for the route of total English immersion (Crawford, 22).

Such legislative efforts have coincided with growing problems of language rights for speakers of other languages that have become manifest in litigation. Should states offer driver's license tests in English only? Does a California employer have the right to prohibit the use of Spanish at the workplace, even during lunch breaks, though two thirds of the employees are Spanish speaking (*Garcia v. Spun Steak*)? Are companies that produce children's aspirin or an insecticide and market their products to Spanish-speaking communities obliged to include bilingual warnings to prevent injuries from improper use of such products (*Ramirez v. Plough, Inc.* and *Hubbard-Hall Chemical Co. v. Silverman*)? Does a Vietnamese immigrant to Florida or North Carolina who speaks English "not well or not at all" have the right to a court translator when charged with a crime? If a court translator mistranslates, does a bilingual juror have the right to correct the error or does the judge have the right to remove the bilingual juror from the jury, thus making sure that all jurors act on the basis of the same information, even if it is a faulty translation?

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has monitored such developments in excellent reports: In the past decades "English Only" laws have indeed been passed in several states, and for the first time in American history, an English Language Amendment to the Constitution has been proposed, aiming to make English the official language of the United States. Sixteen states now have "English Only" laws: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia (<http://www.lectlaw.com/files/con09.htm>).

The ACLU also noted that the "passage of an "English Only" ordinance by Florida's Dade County in 1980, barring public funding of activities that involved the use of languages other than English, resulted in the cancellation of all multicultural events and bilingual services, ranging from directional signs in the public transit system to medical services at the county hospital." Instructions on how to use pharmaceutical products and those attached to various medical procedures may be affected by similar ordinances. The ACLU calls attention to the importance of bilingualism in the medical setting, citing a *Washington Times* report from 1987 in which "a 911 emergency dispatcher was able to save the life of a Salvadoran woman's baby son, who had stopped breathing, by coaching the mother in Spanish over the telephone to administer mouth-to-mouth and cardiopulmonary resuscitation until the paramedics arrived." Though "naturalization for U.S. citizenship does not require English literacy for people over 50, and/or who have been in the U.S. for 20 years or more," the rights of citizens and residents who do not speak English are embattled and in some cases in peril.

The multi- or bilingual education of children is another controversial issue on a state level. In 1998 California voters passed Proposition 227, known as the English for Children initiative (English Language in Public Schools), which

prohibits most uses of bilingual or native-language instruction for students and mandates an English-only curriculum. How schools should teach recent immigrants, including those who are new to English, has become both a highly technical and a political issue nationwide (Crawford, 96). Some laws have also attempted to curtail the language rights of private business: “several Southern California cities have passed ordinances that forbid or restrict the use of foreign languages on private business signs” (<http://www.lectlaw.com/files/con09.htm>). While the primary target of this legislative activism is the Spanish-speaking community, in fact, all foreign-language speakers and multilingual expression more generally can be affected by it.

Though the English-only movement still aims for the passage of a federal constitutional amendment (a campaign spearheaded by U.S. English), some of the lawsuits against English-only legislation have been successful and have helped repeal, for example, the provisions that California employees may not speak Spanish at the workplace or that North Carolina defendants do not have a right to a court translator. In 1991, the US Supreme Court decided—with only a plurality of votes—in the complex *Hernandez v. New York* case that exclusion of a Latino juror from a jury was permissible. “Equal protection held not shown violated by New York prosecutor’s peremptory challenges excluding allegedly Latino potential jurors due to claimed uncertainty whether they would accept interpreter’s translation” (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/89-7645.ZS.html>). As Martha Minow showed, the case focused on the rights of defendants as well as jurors, for the defendant “could argue that the exclusion of Latino jurors violated both his right to equal protection of the laws ..., and the rights of the potential jurors to have an equal opportunity to serve on a jury” (Minow, 634). Though the ruling may not be precedent-setting, a similar case from the Fifth Circuit (*US v. Munoz*, 1994) relied upon *Hernandez* to decide that “striking a Latino juror because he understood Spanish was not discriminatory” (Del Valle, 196).

A dialogue from an earlier case (*U.S. v. Perez*) was cited in the *Hernandez* deliberations, a dialogue that illustrates the problem:

“DOROTHY KIM (JUROR NO. 8): Your Honor, is it proper to ask the interpreter a question? I’m uncertain about the word La Vado [sic]. You say that is a bar.

“THE COURT: The Court cannot permit jurors to ask questions directly. If you want to phrase your question to me—

“DOROTHY KIM: I understood it to be a restroom. I could better believe they would meet in a restroom rather than a public bar if he is undercover.

“THE COURT: These are matters for you to consider. If you have any misunderstanding of what the witness testified to, tell the Court now what you didn’t understand and we’ll place the—

“DOROTHY KIM: I understand the word La Vado [sic]—I thought it meant restroom. She translates it as bar.

“MS. IANZITI [the court translator]: In the first place, the jurors are not to

listen to the Spanish but to the English. I am a certified court interpreter.
“DOROTHY KIM: You’re an idiot.”

(<http://bulk.resource.org/courts.gov/c/F2/658/658.F2d.654.80-1320.html>)

The juror later explained that she had said “it’s an idiom” rather than “you’re an idiot,” but she was nevertheless dismissed from the jury. Though the Court was divided, Minow highlighted the not completely unquestionable presuppositions shared by the judges in this ruling:

- (1) that the normal juror would not know Spanish, and the official English translation is the evidence that should count in the jury’s deliberations;
- (2) that a pretextual rationale can be distinguished from illicit discrimination;
- (3) that people who do not speak Spanish can adequately, and fairly judge people who do;
- (4) that language proficiency is separable from ethnic or racial identity so significantly that language can supply a permissible basis for distinguishing people (while race or ethnicity may not) or that it can meaningfully be used in a comparison between intent and impact;
- (5) that there is no need to consider or evaluate the Latino community’s perceptions of a jury excluding all Latinos and yet sitting in judgment on a case involving a Latino defendant and Latino victims. (Minow, 640-641)

If the divided Supreme Court in *Hernandez* could be perceived to move subtly into the direction of an English-only position, in 1999 it also “refused to revive an English-only initiative passed by Arizona’s voters declaring English Arizona’s official language.” However, US Courts (with California as an example) have not yet established the constitutional right to receive communication in a language other than English; this lack of bilingual protection applies to such areas as Social Security notices (*Soberal-Perez v. Heckler*, 1983), civil service examinations (*Frontera v. Sindell*, 1975) and welfare-termination notices (*Guerrero v. Carleson*, 1973) (Miner, 180). And while the California Supreme Court mandates the presence of court interpreters in criminal cases (*U.S. ex rel. Negron v. New York*, 1970), the same principle does not extend to civil litigation (*Jara v. Municipal Court*, 1978; Miner, 180). Further, in 1975, the Massachusetts Supreme Court was asked to overturn the conviction of Puerto Rican defendants who, although speaking very little English, were served eviction papers in English only and failed to comply. The defendants challenged their convictions as unconstitutional under laws of Due Process and Equal Protection, but were denied an overturning on the principle that burden should be placed on the recipients of the note to translate it rather than the organization delivering it. In its decision, the Court incorrectly referred to English as the nation’s “official language,” thereby suggesting no need for multilingual protection (Del Valle, 301-302).

Glenda Labadie-Jackson has persuasively characterized the complexities of the present-day situation surrounding product warnings in languages other than English: “In the public sector, the declaration of English as the official language

is limited by the need to provide government services to non-English-speaking people. However, it is not clear if an English-only law can be applied in the private sector to justify the prohibition of warnings in other languages. It could be argued that a judicial decision establishing that warnings should be communicated in a language other than English would contradict an express political policy of preserving the role of English in the state” (Labadie-Jackson). It may well be that countries with long-established official languages are less nervous about having multilingual signs, product instructions, conversations at the work place, and “second mother tongues” than the United States, in which the struggle about an official language is still ongoing. Indeed, the question of language rights is a disputed one at this point in American history, and it is not clear in which direction the US will ultimately be moving.

Earlier, I mentioned the Linguistic Society of America, which, in order to remedy American “policies toward the languages of Native Americans and to encourage acquisition or retention of languages other than English by all Americans,” urged the United States “to protect and promote the linguistic rights of its people.” It articulated the following minimal language rights that all residents of the United States should be guaranteed (1996):

- A. To be allowed to express themselves, publicly or privately, in the language of their choice.
- B. To maintain their native language and, should they so desire, to pass it on to their children.
- C. When their facility in English is inadequate, to be provided a qualified interpreter in any proceeding in which the government endeavors to deprive them of life, liberty, or property. Moreover, where there is a substantial linguistic minority in a community, interpretation ought to be provided by courts and other state agencies in any matter that significantly affects the public. [One could add product warnings and pharmaceutical instructions from the private sector to this list of demands for the public realm.]
- D. To have their children educated in a manner that affirmatively acknowledges their native language abilities as well as ensures their acquisition of English. Children can learn only when they understand their teachers. As a consequence, some use of children’s native language in the classroom is often desirable if they are to be educated successfully.
- E. To conduct business in the language of their choice.
- F. To use their preferred language for private conversation in the workplace.
- G. To have the opportunity to learn to speak, read, and write English.
(<http://www.lsadc.org/info/lsa-res-rights.cfm>)

It is telling that both the Linguistic Society and the ACLU made reference to America’s multilingual past in their arguments. “The territory that now constitutes the United States was home to hundreds of languages before the advent of European settlers,” writes the LSA, and an ACLU briefing paper from

which I have already quoted begins programmatically:

From its inception, the United States has been a multilingual nation.

At the time of the nation's founding, it was commonplace to hear as many as 20 languages spoken in daily life, including Dutch, French, German and numerous Native American languages. Even the Articles of Confederation were printed in German, as well as English. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the nation's linguistic diversity grew as successive waves of Europeans immigrated to these shores and U.S. territory expanded to include Puerto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines. (<http://www.lectlaw.com/files/con09.htm>)

In short, both LSA and ACLU brought up the issue of **historical memory** in the hope that a greater awareness of the American multilingual past would deepen our understanding of the de facto multilingual present.

IV.

This project of calling attention to America's multilingual past was also something that my colleague Marc Shell and I began to undertake 15 years ago when we founded the Longfellow Institute (<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~lowinus/>), devoted to identifying, analyzing and interpreting, reprinting, and translating works written in the United States in languages other than English. We found, among many other surprises, that in the age of multiculturalism after about 1980 an "English-only" approach to American literature had come to prevail, yet when American literature was being established as a field of study around 1900, there was still a sense in the scholarship that "language and literature of the United States" was not limited to English. The old *Cambridge History of American Literature* of 1919ff. may have stressed that the "language of the people of the United States has been English even more prevailingly than their institutions and their culture"—giving credence to the belief that American literature was a branch of English literature. Yet that book did include many pages on what it called "Non-English Writings." These specialized sections focused on German, French, Yiddish, and "Aboriginal" texts. The *History* covered non-English authors from Mozart's librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte (who wrote poems in English and Italian in the last years of his life in New York) to playwright Victor Séjour (who emigrated from New Orleans to Paris) and texts from the German-American Francis Daniel Pastorius's multilingual "Bee-Hive" to the pictographic Lenape (or "Delaware") Indian epic *Walam Olum*—all of which had to be introduced afresh to the contemporary reader, since they were no longer known as part of "American literature." In several seminars with colleagues, students and scholars from many different countries, we started with these works and authors and searched for others in a multi-year project of recuperating American works excluded from an English-language literary tradition.

The project culminated in selecting the most interesting works (“aesthetically outstanding, historically significant, or culturally fascinating”) for publication of *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations* (New York: NYU Press, 2000; see http://www.nyupress.org/books/The_Multilingual_Anthology_of_American_Literature-products_id-2044.html). Included were, for example, a bilingual prayer in English and Algonquin; a multilingual book collecting wisdom in seven languages; an Italian poetic lament; an Arabic slave narrative; the first African American short story—written in French; a nineteenth-century novel chapter about lesbian love and an environmentalist poem in German; a Spanish nineteenth-century comic novella from New Mexico; Navajo songs; a Yiddish life of Columbus and a Hebrew sermon; Angel Island poetry and a California sweatshop story in Chinese; tales of immigrant adjustment in Norwegian, Swedish, and Polish; Greek, Hungarian, and Spanish poems; a chapter from a Welsh novel.

On 750 pages a great number of works written in dozens of languages are presented, typically in facing-page format, with the non-English originals on the even-numbered pages, and the English translation on the odd-numbered ones. Selections include poetry (epic, lyrical, and narrative), short fiction, novel chapters, novellas, essays, sketches, recorded dreams, a sermon, a joke, a political petition and a military announcement, representing the wide range of genres in which multilingual American literature has been written. Some texts had never before been printed or reprinted, and most had never been translated into English. Brief prefatory remarks introduce most works, and necessary notes accompany some of the texts that are included. In addition to complementing other anthologies of American literature, the *Multilingual Anthology of American Literature* has helped to complicate our understanding of what exactly “American literature” is while deepening the memory of America’s multilingual past. Perhaps there will be sequels to it that would focus on Japanese-language writing in the United States; in fact, I would be truly happy if I learned at the NASSS 2009 conference that a bilingual anthology of Japanese-American writing is in the works somewhere, or has already appeared. Perhaps other books might include Gaelic, Gikuyu, Hindi, Korean, Portuguese, and Urdu texts written in the United States. Perhaps books like it will stimulate a better understanding of America’s multilingual present in light of the past. Perhaps they will inspire scholars and students in other countries (this has already started to happen) to explore multilingual creativity there, past and present. Perhaps such efforts will inspire more students to take up the study of a new language or to support the struggle for language rights of others.

Whatever the results and offshoots may turn out to be, though editing the *Multilingual Anthology* kept its contributors and translators busy for a long time and presented the editors, typesetters, proofreaders, and the publisher with many very unusual problems, it is merely a small and quite modest beginning of a vast

undertaking that will require much international cooperation, linguistic boundary-crossing, and much, much work.

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