# Module 6: Multilingualism and Globalization

## Before you Read

At some point, you may have heard someone say, “This is America. Speak English!” For more than a decade, groups in the United States have come coalesced around the idea that “one country equals one language” and have lobbied for the passing of “English-only” legislation. However, how common is it for societies to be bi-lingual or multi-lingual? Is the speaking of one “official” language important for maintaining group cohesiveness? What is the relationship between power and language? Why is “protecting the English language” so important to many Americans?

In this module, we must set personal politics aside and consider these questions from an anthropological perspective. While multilingualism is prevalent around the world, understanding the relationship between language ideologies and the speakers of various languages –and recognizing that in many multilingual societies not all languages are considered equal—is key to understanding the multiple meanings of language in societies.

The online component of this week’s module will focus on supplementing materials related to globalization, specifically **heteroglossia** and **transidiomatic practices,** concepts associated with globalization, and the ethnographic case of the English-only movement in the United States. Please note that we will be discussing ALL the material in our f2f class. This online module is simply meant to *supplement* your reading.

Remember, items that have been **bolded** are especially important and are likely to appear in tests or quizzes, and should be mentioned in discussion posts. Also, this module is meant to be read *alongside* your assigned reading in order to guide and supplement the book, but is not meant to *substitute* your reading the book.

## Focus Points

As you read your book and this module, pay special attention to the following concept.

* **Code-switching, code-mixing,** and **diglossia.**
* Linguistic **registers** and the linguistic anthropological position on **languages** and **dialects.**
* The **English-only movement, language ideologies** and common misconceptions about language acquisition and immigration in the United States.
* **heteroglossia** and **transidiomatic practices**

## Globalization

### The English-Only Movement in the United States

The English-only movement in the United States gained a reputation for prejudice, intolerance, and racism in the first decade of the 21st century. Today, people who believe that one nation equals have formed non-profit organizations such as [Official English](http://www.us-english.org/), [Proenglish](http://www.proenglish.org/), and [English First](http://englishfirst.org/). These organizations advocate for the official recognition of English in federal and state law. Many of these websites claim to be the “leading defenders of English” and present highly critical views of multilingualism in the United States.

The English-only movement is a highly emotional topic for many people because it closely linked to the hotly contested immigration debate. Our aim in this module is not to debate immigration policy or to criticize the opinion that immigrants should learn English. Rather, our aim is to look at this movement and the debates linked to it as anthropologists and ask not whether one side is “right” and the other “wrong,” but rather “why is this such an emotionally charged and important issue for so many?”

The anxiety felt by many supporters of the English-only movement can be related to any one of the following reasons (this list is not exhaustive).

* A cultural preference for homogeneity.
* Xenophobia
* A fear of societal change.
* Ignorance of:

1) languages other than English,

2) the long-term patterns of language acquisition in the United States,

3) the highly beneficial nature of multilingualism.

4) the prevalence of multilingualism in other societies

While the some of these motivations may be legitimately grounded in personal opinion and experience, there are also many misconceptions about English and the need to maintain one language in order to promote national unity. These are some common misconceptions about shifting demographics, language acquisition, and the need to “protect” English:

**misconception:** other immigrant groups were more eager to assimilate in the past. New immigrants are not willing to learn English and their children aren’t learning English either.

**Reality:** With some limited regional exceptions (e.g. the Pennsylvania Dutch in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, other Amish and Mennonite communities in the United States, and the Hasidic Jewish community in New York City), by the third generation descendants of immigrants will be predominantly monolingual English speakers. This remains as true of immigrant communities today as it was in the past. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of people who immigrate to the United States and their children **will** learn Englishbecause it indispensible to financial and social success. What is more, the children and grandchildren of immigrants are very likely to **not** know any other languages except English.

**Misconception:** English is in danger of being overtaken by other languages if it is not protected by law.

**Reality: (**Monolingual) English remains the *lingua franca* of the United States. Not only are most Americans born in the US English speakers, they are also **monolingual**: that is, regardless of their cultural or ethnic backgrounds, the vast majority of American children speak *only* English. Despite large numbers of immigrants to the United States, there is no evidence that the English language is at all “endangered.”

**Misconception:** A nation needs one language to hold its people together. Without an officially recognized language, American society could descend into chaos, anarchy, and a loss of all that we hold dear.

**Reality:** Monolingual preference of one language as a national lingua franca is not a cultural universal. Many nations do not recognize an official language, or recognize several official languages. Recognition of an official language does not inherently promote national unity. Many nations that have recognized an official language remain highly divided.

### Heteroglossia

As you’ve read in your text, **diglossia** refers to the compartmentalized use of two different **codes** (languages) that are **hierarchically related** to one another. Russian literary critic **Mikhail Bakhtin** proposed that language use in everyday life is *always* stratified in multiple ways. The idea behind **heteroglossia** is that there are two opposing forces in language: a **centralizing/centripetal** force used by authoritative entities such as governments that want to make a unitary, standard way of speaking; and a **decentralizing/centrifugal** force that leads to greater stratification and more variation. While these concepts are useful in any society, Globalization has brought these forces into sharp relief: as we have become more and more interconnected English has assumed an important role as an international *lingua franca* and is spoken by an increasing number of people around the world. By the same token, another characteristic of globalization, migration, has resulted in greater decentralization and linguistic diversity in more communities than ever before.

### Transidiomatic Practices

According to globalization theorist Marco Jacquemet, **transidiomatic practices** are the kinds of communications that exist only because of the phenomenon of globalization: the interactions of transnational groups using languages and codes that are present in a range of “communicative channels” both local and distant.

I have found that students often find this term quite confusing. This short [film](http://youtu.be/2g0XMx1sFEA) will hopefully give you a concrete (and very funny!) example.

How is *Call Center* an example of transidiomatic practices? The main characters in the film are communicating across vast physical and cultural distances with one another, but at the same time are joined in a single globalized system of **economies** and **technology** that makes this communication possible. Not only are their multiple languages present in their interactions (American English, Indian English, and Hindi all make an appearance), but the cultural subtexts brought to the table by each character (the call-center operator, the supervisor, the angry college student, the suburban housewife, the depressed teenage girl…) are all vastly different from one another and simultaneously unified in the form of phones in an operator’s cubicle. What’s more, these communicative practices, a hallmark of the increased movement of technology, money, and culture characteristic of globalization, all take place without a single one of the characters moving anywhere.

## Disclaimer

The material presented in this module is not exhaustive; it is meant to function as a guide to our course materials. Concepts, key terms, and ethnographic examples that appear in our readings or that are discussed in future f2f classes can and will be used in assessments even if they are not specifically mentioned in this course module.