

### **Language Standardization is beneficial**

Throughout The History of American Language Policy, Dr. Natalie Schilling rightfully reminds us of the inherently personal relationship that there is between language and identity. To lose language is to feel the loss of part of yourself. Although this is undoubtedly the case, I would argue that within the United States—a country established on gigantic cultural and linguistic heterogeneity—language standardization has done more for the good than the ill. The good caused by U.S. language policy has far outweighed the ill inflicted by it, and to a large extent, the English spread was a prerequisite of national cohesion, effective government, and economic growth.

Since the beginning of the United States, the nation has grappled with how to put people from innumerable different backgrounds under one roof. At certain points in American life, immigrants came here speaking German, Italian, Yiddish, Spanish, Chinese, and dozens more. Without any common thread of language, communication between groups would have been scattered, keeping social integration as well as economic expansion at bay. Promoting a single language—English—helped immigrants access the economy, the school system, and civic society. Dr. Schilling describes how to speak English has long been a badge of national pride and mobility. Symbolic only--practical.

The public schools were important in standardizing American English. By educating children of various linguistic backgrounds in a single common language, schools enabled generations of Americans to overcome poverty, share something with fellows, and assist in the development of an integrated society. Although it is true that it was achieved at the expense of other languages, such as Native American languages, the reality is that the government did not have infrastructure or a desire to embrace bilingualism during that period. It was not with malice but out of needs. A shattered language system might have given rise to further division, and not to union.

Some argue that safeguarding linguistic diversity would have been compatible with encouraging English. Ideally, they have a point—but practically speaking, accommodating hundreds of languages in education, law, and government would have been terrifyingly cumbersome. It is simpler nowadays to accommodate bilingualism because we possess technology and social sensitivities to accommodate it. But in the days of the 18th and 19th centuries, unity had to come first.

I grew up with immigrant parents, and I know the value of having two languages. But I also know that if we didn't have English, my family would not have been able to work, access healthcare, or assist me at school. English was a bridge—not a barrier—to belonging.

Overall, American language policies, flawed and sometimes brutal as they were, were a requirement for the unification of one nation. They enabled individuals of diverse backgrounds

to be a people, to become complete participants in democracy, and to thrive. Yes, we need to do better at preserving minority languages today, but we need to understand that English promotion was not an evil to be — it was a requirement for the nation we enjoy today.