

Study: Children of Latino immigrants speaking more English, less Spanish

San Jose Mercury News (California)

November 29, 2007 Thursday

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Section: LOCAL; National; News; Education

Length: 478 words

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Body

The nation's Latinos are showing a "dramatic increase" in their English language ability across generations, moving from a Spanish-dominant population for immigrants, to a predominantly English-fluent population for their children, a new report shows.

The study by the Pew Hispanic Center suggests Latinos are following a similar trajectory as the last great wave of immigrants did in the early 20th Century, with the nation's largest immigrant group at the start of the 21st Century steadily assimilating into an English dominant population.

The Pew study found that while only about one in four Latino immigrants is fluent in English, nine in 10 of their children are. By the third generation in the U.S., three-quarters of Latino adults speak mainly or only English at home.

The Pew study provides a new window into the linguistic evolution of the nation's 44 million Hispanics, both native and foreign-born, and includes some data not collected by the U.S. Census Bureau.

It shows how Latino families change across the generations. About 52 percent of Hispanic immigrants speak only Spanish at home, but just 11 percent of their adult children speak only Spanish at home.

Latinos also say language is the biggest source of discrimination against them, rather than skin color, immigration status or their level of income and education.

There are significant differences in English ability based on Latino ethnic groups and education levels, however, the study found. People born in South America or Puerto Rico tend to speak English better than immigrants born in Mexico.

And education is a huge factor in the English ability of Latinos, the Pew study found. Among people with college degrees, 62 percent speak English fluently, compared to just 11 percent of those who did not complete high school.

The Pew study also examined what language Latinos speak at work, a question the Census does not ask. Hispanics are more likely to speak English at work than at home, although more immigrants predominantly speak Spanish than English in the workplace. About one-quarter of immigrants speak English and Spanish equally on the job.

The report's authors were not willing to say whether the findings contradict the fear of some Americans that the nation is becoming a Babel of immigrants who lack a common tongue.

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"We don't want to insert ourselves into the opinion business," said D'Vera Cohn, co-author of the report. "Our job is to put out some facts."

While Latinos are steadily adopting **English**, even later generations are holding onto their ability to **speak Spanish**, at least enough to conduct a conversation.

The Pew report found that 44 percent of **Latino** adults - both **immigrants** and native born - were bilingual, and about two-thirds could carry on a conversation in **English** or **Spanish** "pretty well" or "very well."

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Classification

Language: **ENGLISH**

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (91%); **CHILDREN** (90%); RESEARCH REPORTS (90%); LANGUAGE & LANGUAGES (90%); ADULTS (89%); MULTILINGUALISM (78%); DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS (78%); LINGUISTICS (78%); ETHNIC GROUPS (78%); FAMILY (77%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (74%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (50%)

Organization: US CENSUS BUREAU (82%)

Geographic: UNITED STATES (93%); SOUTH AMERICA (69%)

Load-Date: November 29, 2007