

December 13, 2012

Post-Colonial English Speaking States in North America

Both the United States and Canada are two English-speaking countries that have very different political cultures, historical backgrounds, and linguistic policies. In addition, both states are similar in so far that they both have federalist structures of government, similar foreign policies, a common historical root as British colonies, and continue to have English as a majority language. Yet, Canada is a state that has a large French-speaking population and the United States has a growing Spanish-speaking population; both are considered as minority groups and have shaped language policy in different ways. In fact, the Spanish-speaking regions of the United States developed autonomy and representation in a different manner than that of the French-speaking population of their counterparts in Canada, but nonetheless both nations created an institution within their respective states that allowed them representation and a voice that allowed them preservation of their national identity. This paper aims to suggest (1) that North America is similar on the whole, regardless of language, for any language speaker in that a speaker can integrate their culture with a foundation of English-speaking post-colonialists, and also (2) that the difference between Canada and the United States is not great when looked at through the lens of a linguistic anthropologist.

To briefly describe the context of the environment that currently exists, one would need to first understand the basic contexts of a worldwide lexicon, and especially the manner that widespread communication has in a global and local context. First, the idea of a Lingua Franca

must be examined. In other words, English is a universal language that many people speak as a common language, and it is also one that is a common lexicon and that any immigrant can utilize to integrate with the respective culture of either Canada or the United States. In both countries, not only is English the Lingua Franca of each state, but also English is the Lingua Franca of the world. Globalization is this phenomenon that allows for peaceful integration to occur, and in fact in a way that “seeks to reduce the potentially destructive effects of national regulations on the forces of integration” (Hoffman, 513). Second with regard to the amount of conflict in the world, globalization inherently reduces the size of communities and allows members of these smaller communities to notice the similarities between groups relatively more than the differences. Perhaps, this is due in part to the role that language has in developing progress, innovation, and a more prosperous future. As Nicholas Ostler states in page 532 of chapter thirteen in *The Current Top Twenty and Looking Ahead*, “as that wealth grows, there appears to be an increasing demand to learn and use these languages, for they are now seen less as symbols of colonial domination and more as crucial keys for access to the global system.”

The United States has often been deemed as a melting pot to describe the integration that exists between members of different language communities, but this paper does not aim to refute or support that claim. Instead, the startling contrast between the number of non-English speakers and the American English-speaking population is of greater importance. Especially in describing the relationship between Spanish-speaking people in America and those that do not speak Spanish as their second language, Spanish speakers are a larger group of people than the next 24 language groups combined. In a more numerical sense, 17,339,172 people over the age of five speak Spanish (Johnson, 12). In the logic of a vast number of people being otherwise alienated, it

is very obvious to see why the United States has developed speaking programs that are focused on integrating the Spanish-speaking community into the American majority. In addition, it is a clear observation that if this population were alienated, then the desire for an independent Spanish-speaking state would be of greater concern. One possible counter-argument with validity is that “language reveals cultural foundations and is organized differently by different groups of people” (Johnson, 22). Yet, even though the judgment of a Spanish-speaking population not desiring independence from the United States may be slightly valid, the United States could have also been extremely insightful in creating an environment that is response to individual changes. The latter argument is more likely the actual reason due to the comparison that the United States and Canada have with their respective minority language populations.

Unlike the United States, Canada almost realized one of their provinces’ seceding. Quebec nationalism was extreme to the level that their French-speaking population no longer desired the integration it received with the greater whole of Canada. In fact, the French-speaking community described its circumstances as uncomfortable. Possibly, this is due to the vastly different political culture that the French-speakers in Canada experienced when compared to the Spanish-speakers in the United States. “The Act of 1791, while confirming the Quebec Act of 1774 and therefore the rights of the French to much of their distinctive way of life, nevertheless subordinated the French legislature of Lower Canada (Quebec) to & English executive and established a separate Upper Canada (Ontario) for the English,” and these historical events limited the French-speaking population; thus, their sub-national identity was solidified in a much more local manner when compared to the Spanish-speaking population in the United States (Schmid, 102). In the United States, a singular Spanish-speaking state did not form, even though

New Mexico – containing a large Spanish-speaking population – was not granted statehood into the United States' Union until 1912 when English-speakers finally outranked the number of Spanish-speakers (Schmid, 103).

The United States has a much larger population, in addition to the historical formation of the states and provinces in the United States and Canada, respectively. The United States has over 313 million people, whereas Canada has over 33 million people; and with 9.2 times more people, the United States has a higher likelihood of heterogeneous communities and groups (United North America). This means that the overall ability to form counter-cultures to the culture defined by the state is less likely, and it also depicts the difficulty to form collective groups.

The populations of the United States and Canada compared to the historical cultures shows that after each country developed independence they had very different trajectories as states. Different nations formed in vastly variant manners, and each country handled their circumstances in ways that created their current ways of integrating that exist to this day. The United States and Canada; however, are still similar in that they both have intact unions and federalist structures that function to represent a similar percentage of their populations. Both countries are able to run successful democratic elections, and both countries are still adapting their institutions to better integrate their ever-changing minority groups.

The English-speaking population in North America is like each other, even with the differences that each respective community has towards one another. How different are the English-speakers when compared to the rest of the world? Is integration to the American or

Canadian cultures with a foundation of English-speaking different today than it was in the colonial era? These are a couple of questions that should be answered in future research. But, when looked at through the lens of a linguistic anthropologist, it is very possible regard the two populations in each country as similar, and by tracing back the historical roots of each state even further one might find out that Canada and the United States are even more similar.

Work Cited Page

Hoffman, Stanley. "Globalization: Clash of Globalizations." *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*. Patrick H. O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski. 3rd. London: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2010. 513. Print.

Johnson, Fern. *The Linguistic Environment of the United States. Speaking Culturally*. Johnson, Fern. p. 3-23. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 2000.

Schmid, Carol. *Language and Identity Politics in Canada. The Politics of Language*. Schmid, Carol. p. 101-122. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2001.

"Similarities and Difference in the United States and Canada." *United North America*. United North America, n.d. Web. 13 Dec 2012. <<http://www.unitednorthamerica.org/simdiff.htm>>.

Ostler, Nicholas. *The Current Top Twenty and Looking Ahead. Empires of the Word*. p. 525-559. New York: HarperCollins. 2005.