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English-Only policy and belief in the United States

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Abstract

English-Only initiatives are commonplace in the United States. Proponents of Official English would like to make the official language of the United States English despite the prestige English already has in the United States. The motivations behind this movement are varied and have substantial effects on the opinion of the American population. This paper examines a group of American residents in the Northeast, aged 18 and older. States considered Northeastern in this study are Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. The survey distributed contains questions on the topic of English- only issues, languages in general, and the role of language in participant's personal lives. This survey tested assumptions about English-only attitudes and language use against the data contributed by participants. The findings confirm that English- only attitudes are pervasive in American society, that education is necessary to further compete against prevailing negative ideologies and beliefs, and that continued survey can accomplish more work and research in this area of study.

Keywords

English-Only, Northeast, Survey, COLA, English, Linguistics

Subject Categories

Linguistics | Sociology

English-Only Policy and Belief in the United States

A study of the Northeastern United States

Lauren E White

5/14/2012

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The United States is traditionally a linguistically and ethnically diverse nation. While there are more than 300 languages spoken nationwide, the de facto “lingua franca” is English. Half of “American” languages are indigenous to the area (Rhein, 1). The United States has no official language. A vast majority of the population is not aware of this fact because of the prominence of English. The problem in the United States is reconciling sociolinguistic prejudices. Multilingualism and language diversity in the United States are valued as an intellectual and social benefit in the modern world. As a “melting pot” nation, it is hard reconcile the desire for a unified culture, because the United States was built on the tenets of multilingualism and cultural diversity.

The United States uniquely displays resistance to the permeation of languages other than English in the form of English-only initiatives and “anti-accent” activists. These activists currently preach in many states, attempting to gain support through survey and election. These initiatives are talked about extensively in schools and in the news in order to inform public opinion; however I will examine the issue from the point of view of a sociolinguistics survey.

This paper examines a group of American residents in the Northeast, aged 18 and older. States considered Northeastern in this study are Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. The northeast is a useful area of study because of varying levels of diversity in each state. There has long been a tradition of diversity and pride about cultural heritage in the Northeastern States (Northeastern United States, 1). The goal of this research was to determine if certain factors, linguistic and non-linguistic affected the beliefs that are held by citizens and if this can be effectively determined through survey.

The survey distributed contains questions on the topic of English- only issues, languages in general, and the role of language in participant’s personal lives. This survey tested assumptions about English-only attitudes and language use against the data contributed by participants. The format of the survey was intentionally open response, because this survey format reveals more accurate attitudes and beliefs that exist not only in this area, but likely for other parts of the country. This work can help further current research in English only attitudes and provide some more in-depth information about diversity in opinion within populations.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The background section of this paper will give a brief introduction to the history of language use in the United States as well as English-only policies promoted in the United States. This paper will define language ideologies using Wolfram and Schilling-Estes broader definition: “ingrained, unquestioned beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language (Wolfram, Schilling-Estes, 2006).” Simplified to fit an English-only ideology, one can take this definition to encompass the unquestioned beliefs about the role of English in the United States and its relation to citizens, immigrants, and minority languages. This ideology tends to generate and support broader beliefs about languages that are not related to English and the people that speak them. I will discuss those broader beliefs that create the basics of an English-only ideology in the section 5.0 of this paper.

In order to understand language issues in the United States, the history of language diversity can be expanded upon in order to understand how English-only initiatives have developed. This includes discussions of xenophobic behavior. It is also necessary to expand on current population demographics and language demographics in the northeast, as well as representation of English-only issues in the Northeast, which will lead us into further discussion of survey data collected.

2.1 HISTORY OF LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

According to census data from 2007, there are more than 300 languages spoken in the United States. Out of those languages, around 160 of them are indigenous to the country. This includes only Native American languages (Rhein, 1). The rest of the languages represented are immigrant languages, which includes English.

The first non-native language to reach American soil in 1565 was Spanish. This was as a result of the Spanish colonization of Florida. Another group of European settlers came along with them, speaking English (Piatt, 5). The French came soon after, taking interest in the Northeastern area of the continent as well as Louisiana. The first settlers were a vibrant group of bilinguals; and Spanish, English and French colonies were in stable population divide.

Dutch and German settlers came soon after, the Dutch settling along the Hudson River in 1624 and Germans settling in Pennsylvania around 1683. In the original 13 colonies, German and English speakers were the most largely represented. Germans made up almost 34% of the population in 1790 (Lang, 28). The population of Germans became so large that the number of Germans at that point in history rivaled the number of English and French speakers (Piatt, 7).

The country was home to a large amount of language diversity before the constitution was ever penned. Even during the time of the founding of the United States, American revolutionary leaders had a distinct knowledge that multilingual communities were important and helped them maintain independence from Great Britain by keeping alliance with diverse linguistic groups. The founders respected minority languages and diversity rights. They did not want to offend the minorities that had supported the goals of the revolution to begin with (Wiley, 320). Many documents were printed widely in both French and German so that more people could participate in the new government (Piatt, 8).

Further in the history of the United States, leaders including Thomas Jefferson verbally encouraged the maintenance of a linguistically diverse population as a great asset to the country. He also encouraged the learning of foreign languages by monolingual speakers of English living in the United States. Briefly, there was conversation about creating a language academy in order

to refine the Standard English language in use, but it was voted down on an almost unanimous vote (Piatt, 9).

From this brief history one can observe that the United States has never been monolingual and has always been multidimensional as a group of people. So where did the monolingual tendency of speakers come from? Why have opinions about language diversity changed so rapidly over the course of United States history?

2.2 XENOPHOBIA

The reason the current widespread practice of monolingualism is so prevalent in American culture is a subject of argument. Xenophobia contributes heavily to the emergence of American monolingual ideological systems. Xenophobia can be defined as the fear of foreigners, or for the sake of this study, fear of foreign language groups and their respective cultures. The lack of a unifying culture in the United States contributes to this. Americans are taught that there is one way to be American and within this construct, the English-only movement strives to equate English monolingualism with American identity. If an American citizen or an immigrant does not fit the “standard,” they are by definition a deviation of what it means to be American, and furthermore, they themselves oppose the American unity and way of life. This is the basis of the opposition to “foreign” languages other than English.

The fear is justified to some extent. It is hard to define what being American means and it is hard to define what American culture is. This is because of the background of the United States as described in section 2.1. In response, unique standards have evolved that make it possible to qualify what it means to be an American. The way that this is often done is through the idea of unity by one language; however this tends to breed linguistic racism and intolerance (Schildkraut 2005, 4).

There is evidence of this thought process throughout history. Benjamin Franklin himself was quoted saying that German citizens will “never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion.” This was largely due to the amount of German speakers living in the United States. He was also quoted saying that English speakers would find living in Pennsylvania like living in a foreign country soon enough because of this (Lang, 29).

During the first hundred years of the nation’s history, immigration was allowed from any country without restriction (Daniels, 29). However, during years of large waves of immigration, nativist protests have occurred. This happened during the three large peaks of immigration history, when the Irish, Russian Jews, Germans, Swedish, Norwegians and Italians immigrated first, then Chinese immigration, followed by Eastern and Southern European immigration (Daniels, 29). The fear that people would not assimilate to American culture has been stated again and again, so much so that for a certain time, it was a requirement that immigrants learn English to become citizens. The mask of the language requirement is patriotism, but the reality quickly turns far less well-intentioned in practice.

2.3 ENGLISH-ONLY MOVEMENT

The English only movement is one such outcome of this xenophobic behavior. It is a fairly recent development in the nation’s history. The English only movement in the United States is defined by strong language ideologies of English monolingualism. The draw of English monolingualism has always been present in the minds of the citizens and government officials of the United States, but up until this point in history, no official action has been taken to try and

make law out of this tendency. Official law has never mandated that all citizens must speak English. This is partly because the dominance of English in the United States has never been contested, not even by the recent influx of Spanish speaking minorities.

The English-Only movement began gaining steam the 1970's and the bill to make English the official language of the United States was proposed in 1981 by Senator Hayakawa. Nativist perspectives were beginning to reoccur because of the influx of Spanish speaking populations (Wiley, 327). Within four years of this bill being proposed, English was approved as the official language in 23 separate states (Wiley, 329). Robert Greene, a columnist for Intelligent Life Magazine has said, "English only" campaigns appeal more successfully to American patriotism than campaigns that try to promote language-learning, as if the most successful language in history were threatened (Greene, 1)." The most common way that Official English officers have tried to make a point for the official language is because of the fear that Spanish or another language will soon outnumber English speakers.

Despite state success, the US English organization that was formed still has not succeeded in making English the official language of the United States. The effects of the movement however, can be seen nationwide. In 1987, just a few years later, English-Plus was formed in disagreement with Official English. English- Plus promotes the use of English, as well as heritage languages. There are many reasons this organization was formed. Official English is said to ignore civil rights in the United States. It also prevents successful integration of minority children, does not promote the study of foreign language for diverse job opportunities, attempts to restrict government assistance to United States citizens who do not speak English and furthermore promotes and normalizes dislike of non-English speakers, and subsequently the race they belong to (Wiley, 329).

2.4 CURRENT LANGUAGE AND POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

On average, there are 104 languages spoken consistently in each Northeastern state (U.S. English). The languages that are spoken in each state are diverse, including some Native American languages which have high speaker populations. Out of the nine Northeastern States, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont have French as the second most spoken language, due to proximity with Canada (Language in America). The rest of the Northeastern states, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and Pennsylvania have Spanish speakers as their second highest linguistic population in the state (Language in America).

There are large populations of certain languages primarily in the Northeast. Maine has the highest number of speakers of French and the Native American language Micmac in the United States. They also have a very large population of Passamaquoddy speakers. Massachusetts has the highest percentage of speakers of Irish Gaelic in the United States. Vermont has the highest percentage of speakers of Serbo-Croatian in the United States. Connecticut has the highest number of speakers of Albanian and Welsh in the United States and finally, Pennsylvania has the highest number of speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch and Slovak in the United States (Language in America).

Aside from linguistic demographics, population demographics in the Northeast are also interesting. The Northeast is overwhelmingly white, representing 82.1% of the population. In the Northeast, 11.1% of the population is foreign-born. This is an average for the entire area, while urban areas may have larger percentages of foreign- born. Out of the population 16.7% of

Northeasterners speak a language other than English as their primary language at home. This means that a small amount, around 5% of northeasterners are retaining a heritage language and are citizens (State & County Quickfacts).

2.5 ENGLISH ONLY REPRESENTATION IN THE NORTHEAST

Although the Northeast has the lowest general population of Mexican-Americans in the country, it has the highest immigration rate in the country for the same demographic (Northeastern United States, 1). Besides the current English-only issue of Spanish-speaker immigration to the country, the Northeast has always had a very diverse group of citizens. There are numerous ethnic communities in the Northeast, defined by the languages described in the previous section. Many Official English beliefs have affected the Northeast. Currently, two out of the nine states in the Northeast; Massachusetts and New Hampshire, have Official English laws in place. The remaining seven states do not have English as their official language (U.S States with Official English Laws, 1).

In the early 2000's, an anti-bilingual education referendum, promoted by millionaire Ron Unz was passed in Massachusetts schools. For the purposes of this research, bilingual education is defined as the teaching of students whose native language is not English, in both English and their native language, with the goal in the end as fluency in English for functional and societal purposes as well as fluency in the heritage language for cultural purposes. Bilingual education is now criminalized in the state of Massachusetts where there are large populations of Spanish-speaking students. Ron Unz also led these changes in Western States. The vote in Massachusetts was supported by almost 70% of the participating voters. If teachers do not obey this law and choose to teach English language learners with the aid of the heritage language, the school has the right to fire them. This change also means that parents themselves are allowed to sue teachers for speaking in anything other than English, even if only to clarify a point to a non-English speaker if they have the capability (Macedo, 6). This legislation ultimately was used to eliminate help for Spanish students in Massachusetts, but in doing so this effectively eliminated all help for every language minority student. The assumption that this referendum makes is that "bilingual" in Massachusetts means to speak Spanish, and this is how it was displayed for voters, despite the wide variety of other language minorities in the area (Macedo, 9).

In Westfield, Massachusetts in 1992, hundreds of people signed a petition in order to ban hiring teachers with an accent (Hernandez, 1). Four hundred people signed this petition and it was specifically a ban against elementary school teachers. The reasoning given by many people was that "accents are catching" and this was in response to only one Puerto Rican teacher being hired to an elementary school teaching position (Macedo, 12). The principal of the school gave his full support to parents who wanted the ban, because in his opinion even Albert Einstein would not have been allowed to teach there because his English had an accent (Macedo, 12). Additionally, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, students petitioned the administration to remove foreign professors because of difficulty understanding their accent (Macedo, 12).

This is just a sampling of some of the issues and questions that English-Only has brought up in the Northeast. These issues are common to most every area in the United States and the beliefs backing up these actions can be revealed by survey.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research that follows derives from information obtained through a survey distributed both in-person and online through the survey distribution service “Survey Monkey.” Subjects engaged in a 15-20 minutes written or typed survey experience. Participants either then returned the survey to the surveyor upon completion or submitted their survey via the online distribution service. Participants who claimed residence in the Northeast were included in the final results. This project’s primary objective was to obtain a diverse range of people from the Northeast region. After final collection of surveys, there were 376 participants, 191 participants were solicited through in-person surveys and the remaining 205 submitted surveys to the online service. All of the in-person surveys were distributed at the University of New Hampshire in both academic and non-academic settings. The reason for soliciting in both manners was to obtain a large pool of participants with different levels of interest in the topic, as well as varying educational backgrounds.

3.1 SURVEY STRUCTURE

Appendix A contains a copy of the survey distributed to online and in-person participants. The appendix will be referred to when discussing specific questions asked of participants. The questions were structured specifically to obtain unbiased and matter of fact statements from participants. Almost every question was open ended, a concrete yes/no answer or a number range was required to obtain useful data.

Leading questions are a pervasive issue in English-only opinion surveys. For example, here is a sampling of questions from a survey that is currently being distributed by the conservative caucus, “Uncompromising Defenders of American Liberty Since 1974.” These questions can be answered with a “Yes,” “No,” or “Not Sure.”

1. *Do you notice an increase in the number of people who do not speak English?*
2. *Are you concerned that firefighters, police officers, and 911 operators have to adapt to foreign-language speakers to do their jobs?*
3. *Ballots, driver’s license exams, tax forms, and official government documents are currently being used throughout the country in foreign languages. Do you feel this practice should be abolished?*
4. *To receive federal funds, hospitals are forced to increase the costs of healthcare by providing foreign language translators for patients who do not speak English. Do you have a problem with this policy?*
5. *Foreign-language traffic signs in the United States have been paid for by your tax dollars. Do you think this is a misuse of government funds, particularly with current government budget problems?*

The purpose of this survey is to gain support for a bill the conservative caucus would like to be passed by congress called “H.R. 997, The English Language Unity Act.” The purpose is to convince survey takers that American liberty and unity will be preserved through making English the official language (Make English America’s Official Language, 1).

Each survey question tends to start with a leading statement, and then concludes with a question that will almost always be answered with a negative response based on the background information given. The survey distributed for this research attempted to allow for non-leading, open- ended answers in order for participants to look at each question in either a positive or negative way from their own point of view. The goal of this survey was accuracy without coercion.

4.0 RESULTS

In the following section is all of the information collected from survey distribution. This includes information in aggregate from all surveys distributed. Numbered questions in this section can be found in Appendix A. The following sections of this paper will attempt to elaborate on assumptions made at the beginning of this project and whether or not these assumptions hold true after looking at the data collected.

4.1 INITIAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The survey that was distributed had 376 total participants. The largest number of participants came from New Hampshire with a total of 184. This is largely due to the state of origin of the researcher as well as the distribution of students overall who go to the University of New Hampshire where many surveys were distributed. Massachusetts was the second largest state population with 96 members. The rest of the states have a fairly even, but small distribution, ranging between 8 – 30 participants per state.

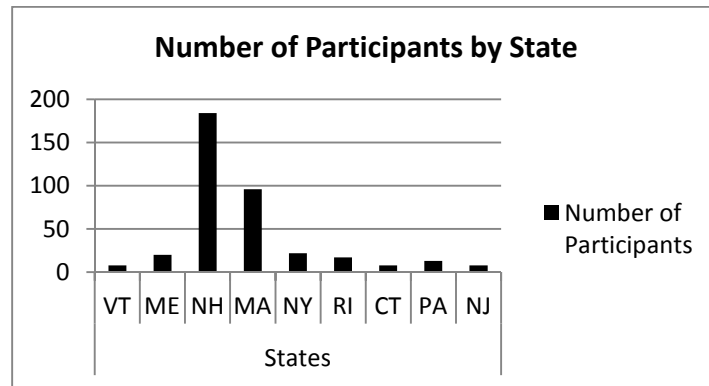


Figure 1: Distribution of Survey Participants by State

The age distribution is markedly skewed toward participants between the ages of 18 and 29. This is mainly due to the fact that the participant pool came from universities in the Northeastern area. In addition, the surveys were distributed on several social networking sites, which are mainly used by a younger population. The members of the study over the age of thirty roughly equaled the number of participants between the ages of 18-19. The largest age population of participants that was surveyed was between the ages of 18 and 29. Older individuals were also surveyed, to take advantage of the unique perspective of different generations. The overwhelming majority of student survey takers was not a hindrance to the research, rather it allowed for focused exploration of the English-only beliefs that exist in the younger population. It is important to the research that the participant pool was skewed towards the younger population because this population is comprised of people soon to be young professionals perpetuating these beliefs in a very practical way either in business settings or in educational settings.

Sex distribution was weighted in favor of females. 32% of participants were male, while the remaining 68% were female. Students were the largest population out of the people who participated, encompassing 81% of the participant pool. Students had a fairly even distribution of

majors, with the largest percentage of people coming from the college of liberal arts. The remaining professions of participants were mostly in office work and teaching, as well as very few stay at home parents. The reason for this distribution was the limited access the researcher had to age variation within the population.

Question 11 asked “What nationalities do you identify with?” 30% of participants identified themselves only as American. 48% of people identified themselves as American plus one or more other nationalities. 21% identified themselves as nationalities besides American. The remaining 1% preferred to not identify with any nationality.

4.2 LINGUISTIC AFFILIATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

The initial demographics section was dedicated to investigating the linguistic affiliations of participants with regards to what their native language is, how many languages they can personally speak, as well as the languages their family members speak. Around 97% of participants spoke English as their native language. Out of the remaining 3%, languages spoken included Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Indonesian, Greek, German, Italian, Nepali and Arabic.

Survey Question 8 then asked what languages speaker’s relatives spoke. This was in order to understand what sort of diversity was present in their linguistic backgrounds. Out of the participants who answered this question only 70% answered that their relatives were all monolingual English speakers. About 23% of participants answered that their relatives spoke both English and another language fluently and the remaining 7% of participants said that their family members only spoke languages other than English.

I then asked about personal language capabilities. Survey Question 9 asked how many languages participants spoke fluently. Obviously the degree of fluency amongst speakers is questionable because the survey relied on people judging their own fluency. Members were not given a range to judge their personally fluency against. However, for the purposes of analysis, one can assume honesty in their perceived sense of competence if they claimed fluency in another language. 82% of participants admitted to speaking only English. 16% claimed to speak English and one other language fluently. There were just over 2% of participants that declared fluency in English and two other languages, or English and three other languages. None of the participants lacked proficiency in English.

One final question about language affiliations, Question 10 asked how many languages participants studied in school. 58% of participants only studied one language during their time in school. 28% studied two languages during their lifetime, 8% studied three and a small 5% studied four or more. Only 1% have never studied a language besides English. Most commonly studied language was Spanish, followed closely by French.

4.3 GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

In order to get a grasp of the basic knowledge of participants in the study, one section of the survey was dedicated to understanding what people already knew about languages in the United States. This section also included a question about what participant’s believed to be the official language of the United States if any.

Question 12 asked “How many languages are spoken in the United States?” The vast majority of participants, 182 in fact, believed that there are somewhere under 50 languages spoken in the United States. Out of those participants that assumed 50 or less, 45 participants

believed that less than ten languages are spoken in the United States. The remaining participants that did not guess 50 or less guessed very high numbers which may indicate that there is an understanding of the amount of languages that are spoken in the United States.

When the question turned to Native American languages, the estimations became even smaller. Question 13 asked “Out of those languages, How many are Native American?” There are around 160 Native American languages spoken in the United States as of today, with populations of speakers very unevenly distributed (Rhein, 1). 180 participants agreed that there are less than 10 still surviving in the United States, while 12 members believed that there are in fact none left spoken. The remaining participants made much higher estimations, but no participant guessed more than 100.

The next two questions, 14 and 15 in this general knowledge section asked what the official language of the United States was, and whether or not participants knew of the US English activist group. Out of the 372 people that answered Question 14, “What is the official language of the United States (if any)?” 66% said that the official language was without a doubt English. Most of these responses were matter of fact, with no explanation, however a few participants wrote things such as “*English (despite what some would have you believe).*” 33% of participants were aware that the United States does not have an official language, and the remaining 1% believed the United States had either Spanish as its national language, or Spanish and English.

Out of the 373 people who responded to Question 15 “Have you heard of the U.S English activist group?” about 8% of participants had heard of the organization, and the remaining 92% had not. This information acquired from this section of the survey will help to lead into the discussion of beliefs present in the northeast as of right now. The rest of the survey encompassed a wide array of questions, attempting to evaluate what current beliefs are.

4.4 YES/NO QUESTIONS

Question 16 asked, “Should American citizens that are non-native English speakers have to learn English?” Out of the 369 participants that answered this question, 71% of participants answered “yes,” while the remaining 29% of participants answered “no” they should not. Reasons for participant’s answers varied and are represented in Figures 2 and 3 below. Figure 2 shows reasons for a “Yes” response and Figure 3 shows reasons for a “No” Response.

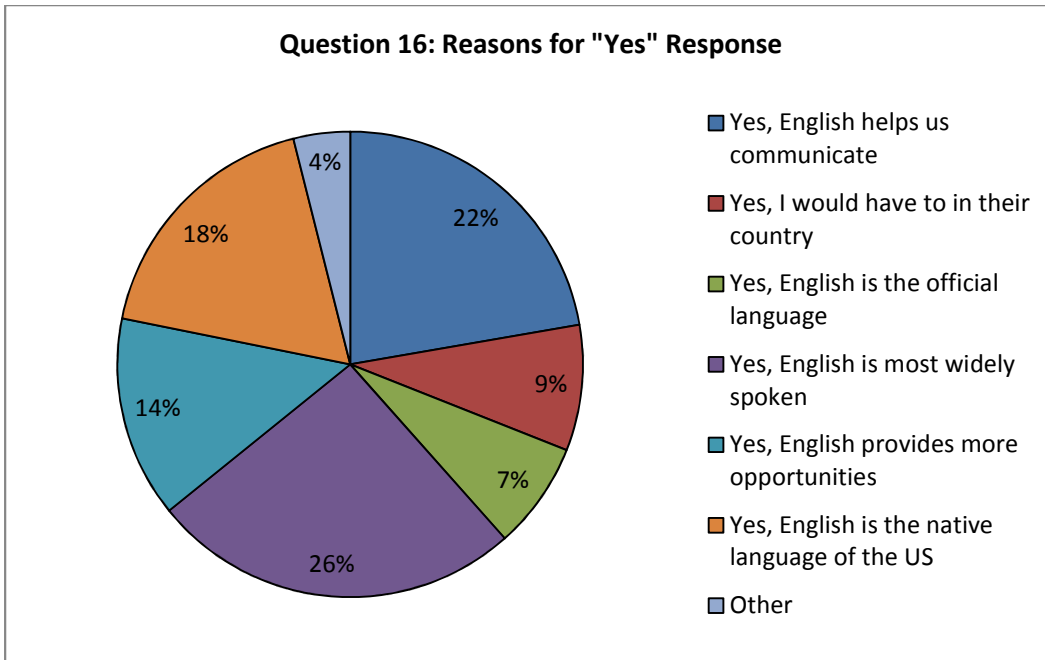


Figure 2: Question 16, Reasons for "Yes" Response

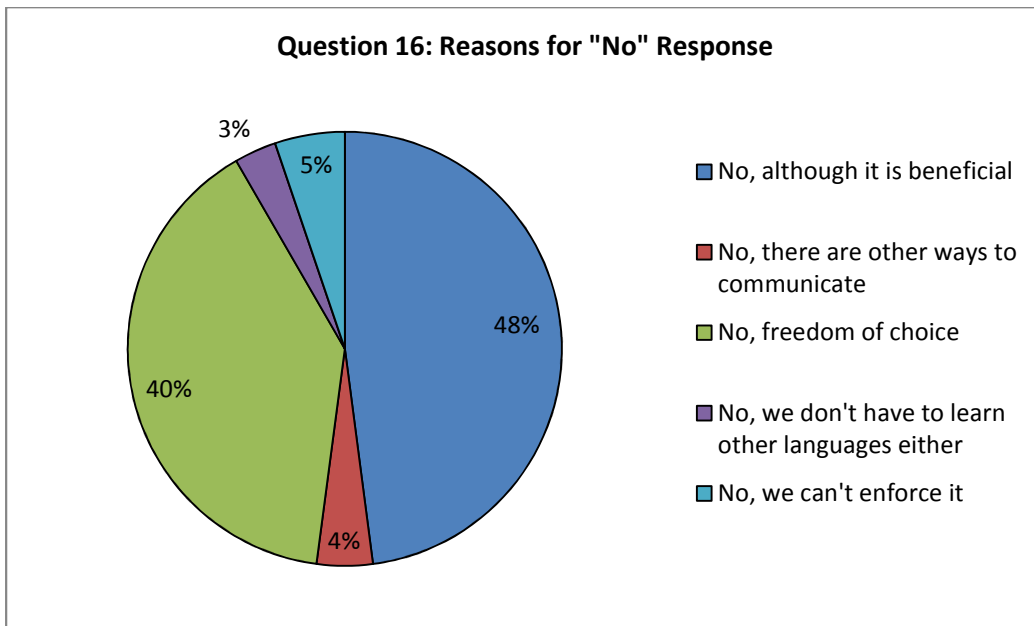


Figure 3: Question 16, Reasons for "No" Response

Out of the respondents that answered “yes,” the largest reason given was that English is most widely spoken and the second reason with the most subscribers was that English helps to communicate with one another in general. Out of the “No” responses, the largest reason was not actually a reason, but rather a qualification. They claimed that although they do not think it should be mandatory, it can only be beneficial. The second largest reason was because of freedom of choice.

Question 17 asked “Do you get frustrated when someone you meet cannot speak English? Why?” Out of the 356 participants who answered this question, 46% answered with a “yes” response while the remaining 54% answered with a “no” response. Figures 4 and 5 below represent the reasons for responses of “yes” or “no.”

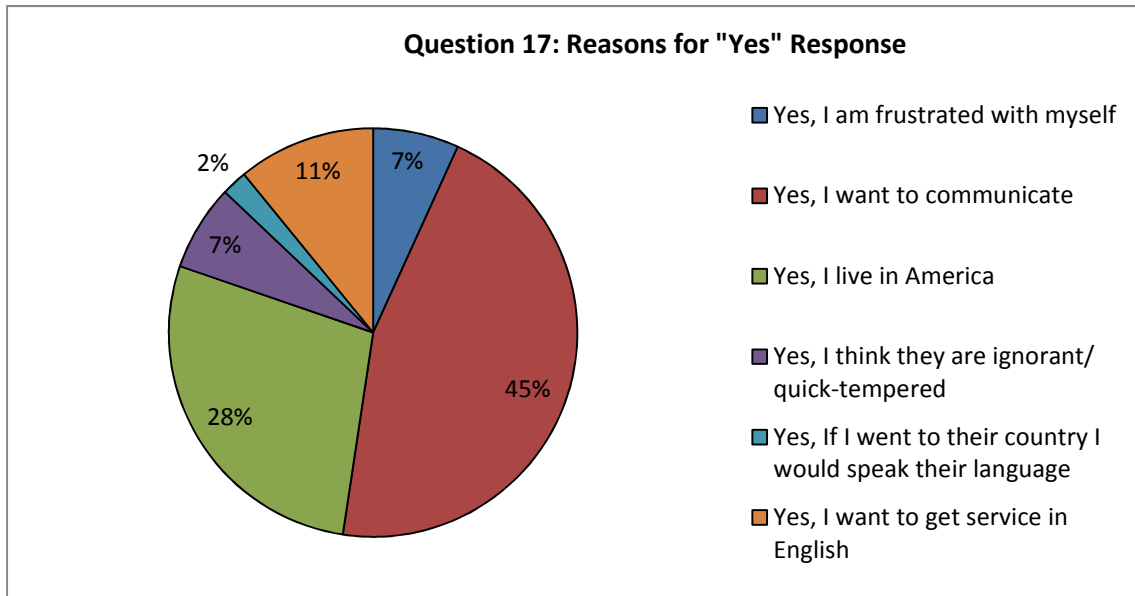


Figure 4 : Question 17, Reasons for "Yes" Response

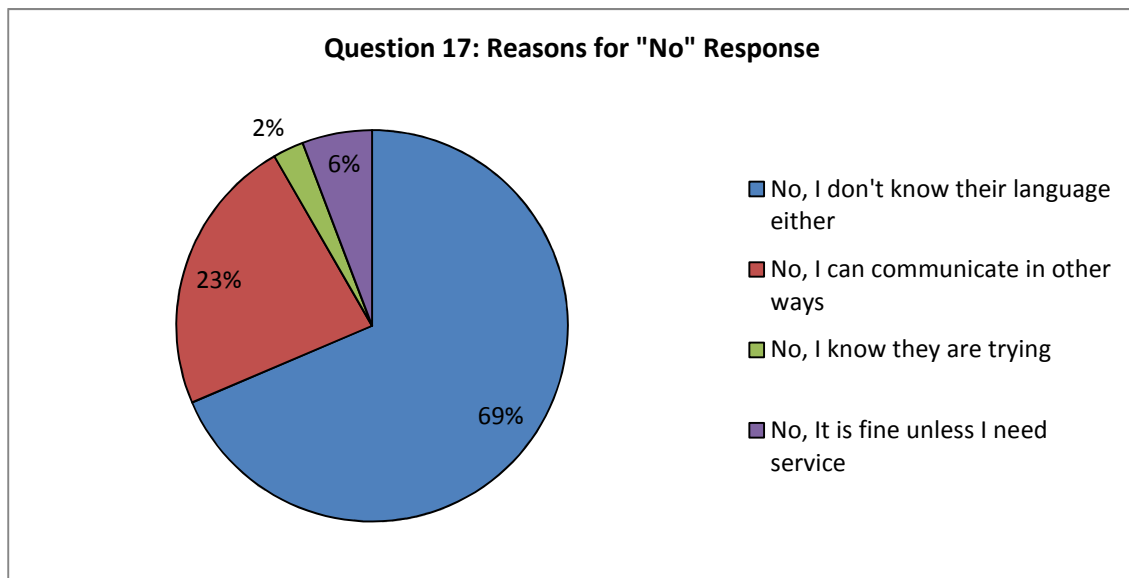


Figure 5: Question 17, Reasons for "No" Response

Both set of responses seem to have one reason that accounts for more of the responses than the others. In Figure 4 the largest reason for a “yes” response was simply the need or the desire to communicate. In Figure 5 the largest reason overall for a “no” response was that respondents didn’t know the other person’s language either. Many participants expressed an unwillingness to judge a speaker of another language based on the lack of their own knowledge.

Question 18 asked participants “Have you ever been in a situation in the United States where English was not used for conversation? Which situations?” Out of the 371 participants that answered this question, 62% of participants said “yes” they had experienced situations where English was not dominant in the United States, and the remaining 38% said no they had not. Figure 6 below represents the locations where participants claimed that they had heard another language besides English in dominance in conversation.

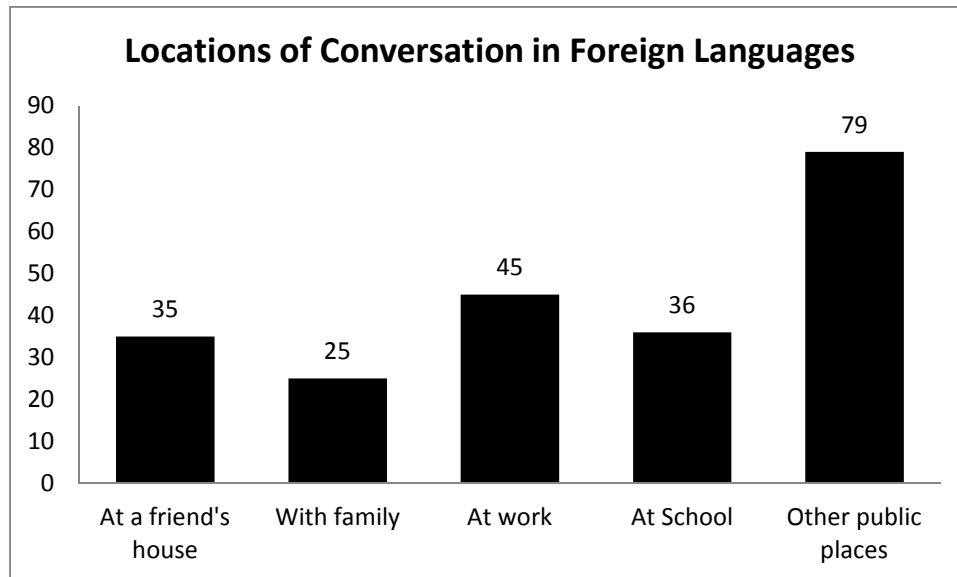


Figure 6: Question 18, Locations of Conversation in Foreign Languages

The majority of people who responded with “yes” said that they heard conversations that were not in English mainly in public places. The second most cited place that they heard conversations in other languages was at their place of employment. Other places included at school, at friend’s houses and 25 participants said that they heard a language other than English when they were with their family.

The next question asked more about participant’s perceptions of the importance of other languages in practical situations. Question 19 asked “Are there more opportunities in the United States for people who speak multiple languages? Why?” Respondent’s reasons for answering “yes” or “no” are in Figures 7 and 8 below. 363 participants responded to this question. An overwhelming 93% of participants answered favorably towards this question, saying that they do believe there are more opportunities for those who speak more than one language in the United States. Only 7% of participants answered that they did not think there were more opportunities.

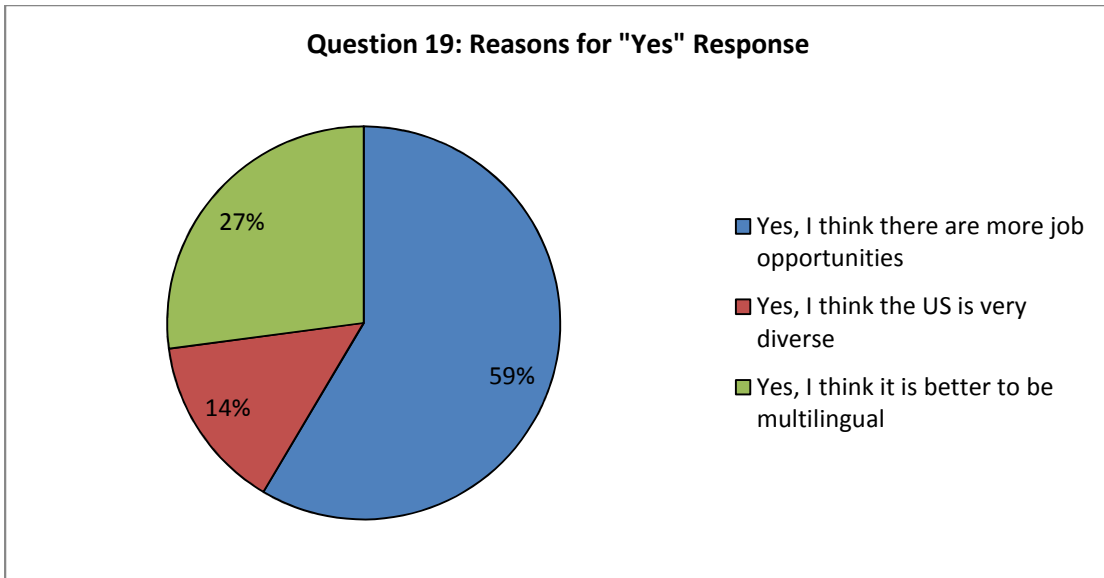


Figure 7: Question 19, Reasons for "Yes" Response

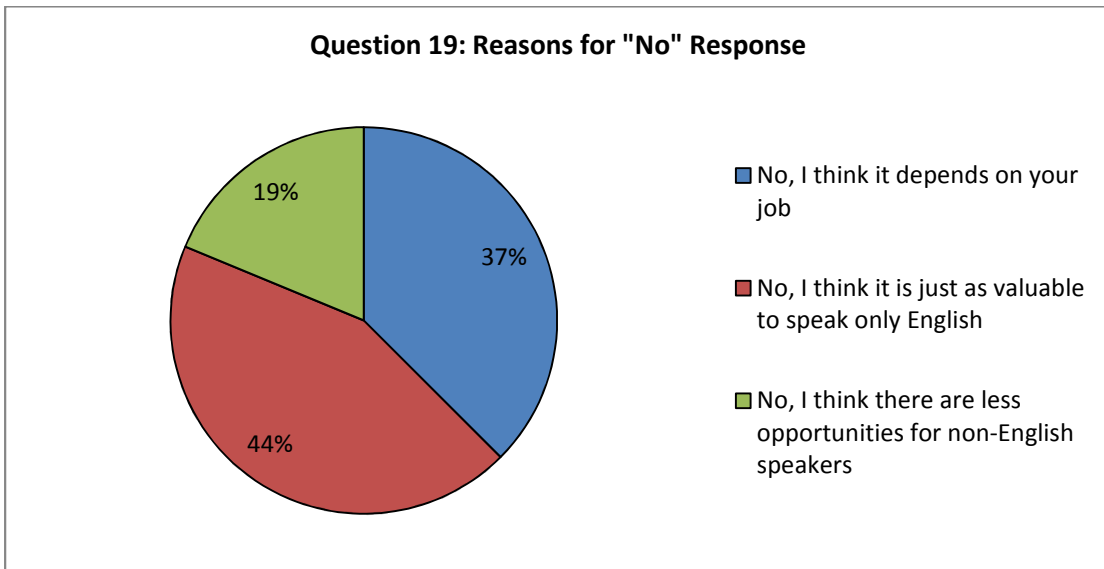


Figure 8: Question 19, Reasons for "No" Response

Out of the majority who answered “yes” to this question, the most cited reason was the perception that knowing more than one language will provide more job opportunities. The second most cited reason was that people simply believed it was better to be multilingual in general because it provides opportunities everywhere. Out of the 7% of people that responded with a “no” answer, Most responded this way because they personally believe it is just as valuable to be an English monolingual.

The next question in this section was more personal and depended on the participant to provide information pertaining to their personal beliefs about language and how it may have helped or not helped in their life. Question 20 asked “If you have studied another language, do you feel like this has helped you in other parts of your life? Which parts?” This question had 370 respondents and out of those respondents, 74% responded “yes” that they felt learning another language had helped them in their life, and only 26% claimed that they did not feel language

learning helped them. The reasons for these responses were interesting as well and are represented in Figures 8 and 9.

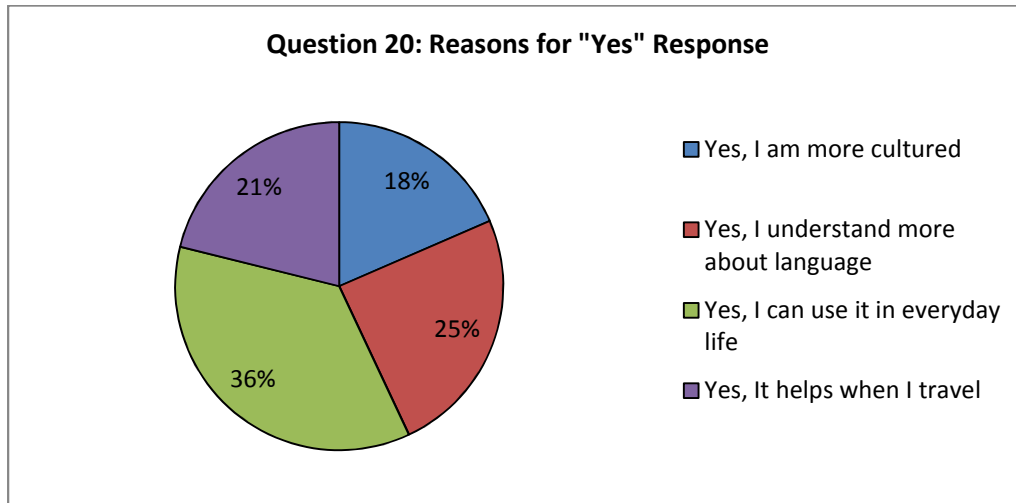


Figure 9: Question 20, Reasons for "Yes" Response

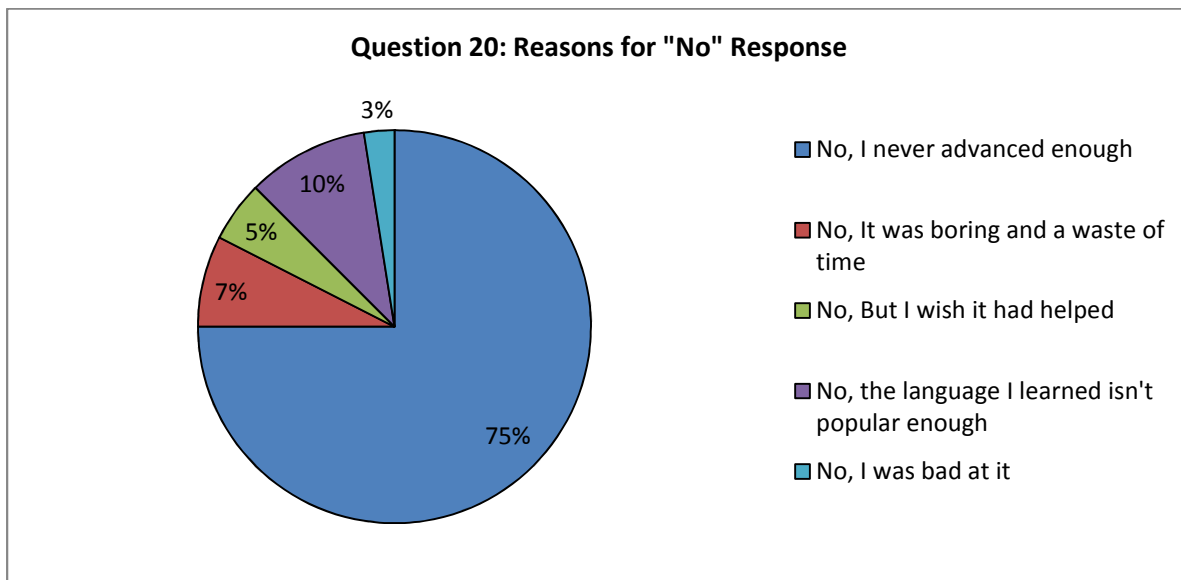


Figure 10: Question 20, Reasons for "No" Response

Out of the participants who responded favorably, the largest reason for a “yes” response was that participants had been able to use their language skills in everyday life and for practical purposes. The largest reason people said “no” was that they never advanced enough. 75% of participants who said “no” cited that as a reason.

Question 21 asked “Has anyone recently or in the past expressed the importance of learning another language? What was the reason? Out of the 371 participants who answered this question, 74% answered “yes” while the remaining 26% answered “no.” Reasons for a “yes” response are located in Figure 11.

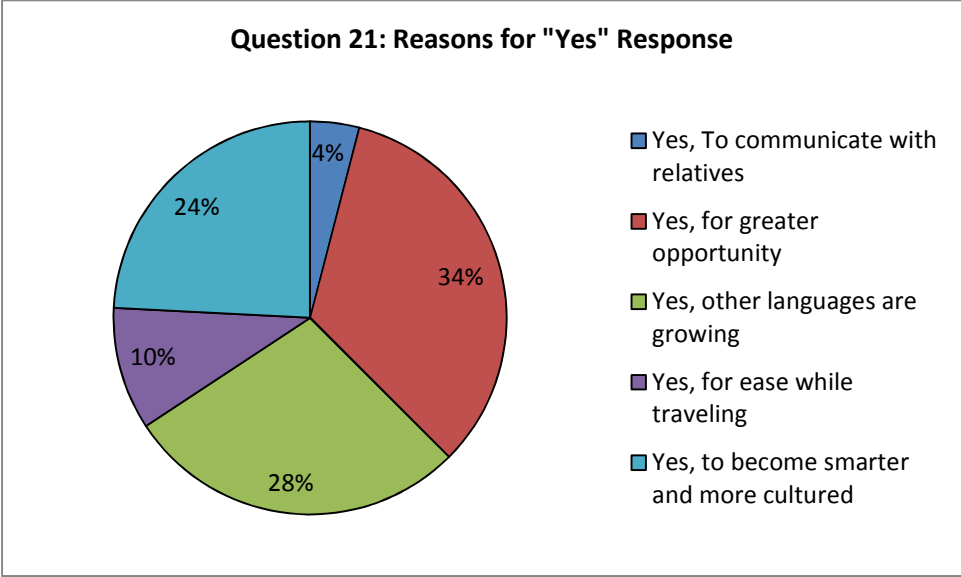


Figure 11: Question 21, Reasons for "Yes" Response

The main reason that respondents claimed other people told them to learn another language was because it will provide them with greater opportunity in general in life and in the workforce. Another largely cited reason was that other languages are growing. Many participants expressed that they had heard English may not be dominant in the near future, so it is beneficial to learn another language to ensure success in the country.

The last question in the Yes/No question section asked specifically of participants whether or not they believed that language learning was important. Question 22 asked “Do you personally think it’s important to know more than one language? Why?” Out of the 364 participants that responded, 85% responded with a “yes” answer, while the remaining 15% responded with a “no.” Overall, participants personally believed that it was important to know more than one language. The reasons for these answers also varied and are represented in Figures 12 and 13 on the following page.

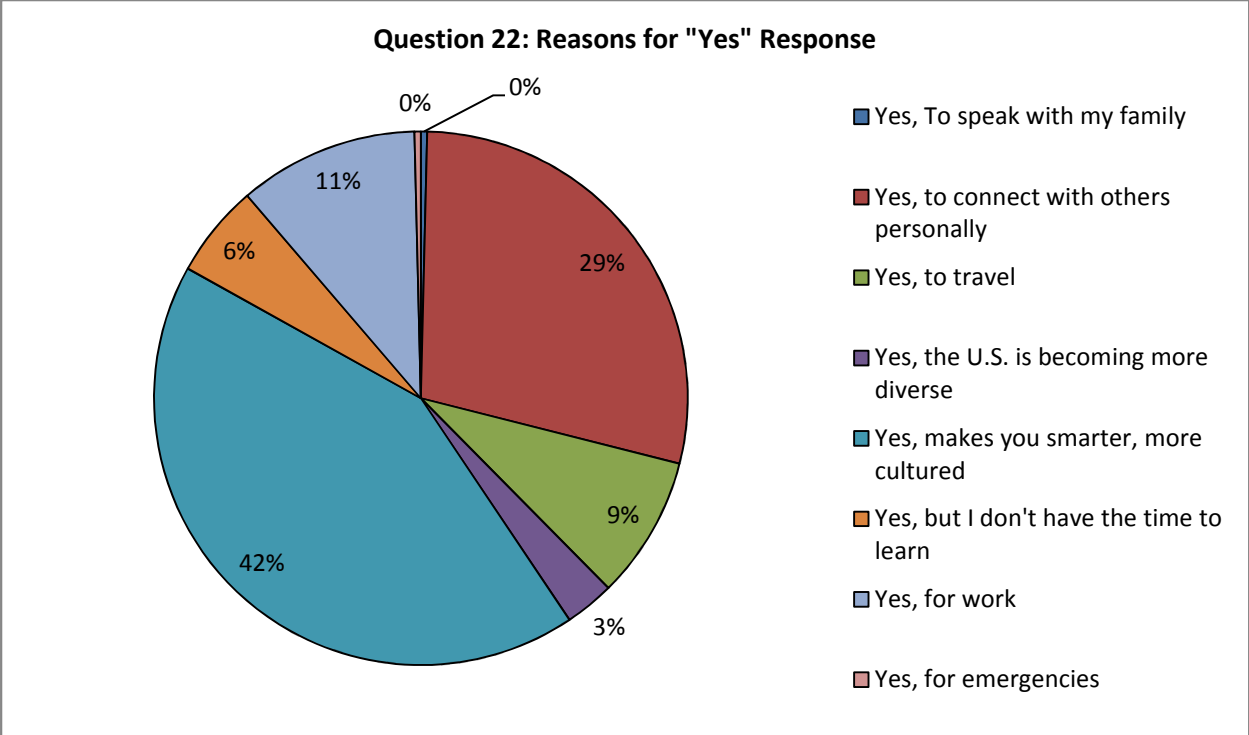


Figure 12: Question 22, Reasons for "Yes" Response

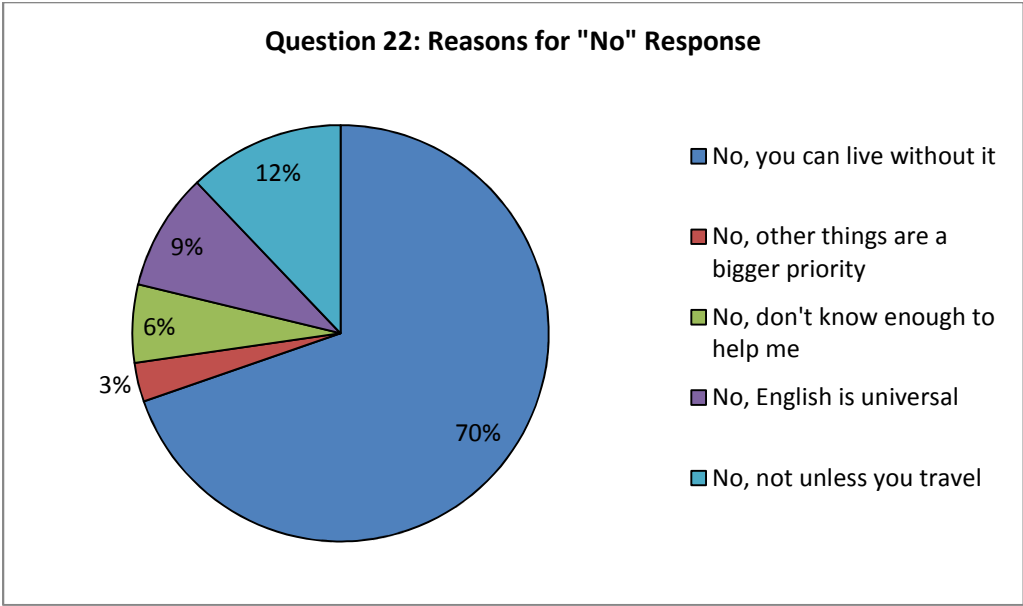


Figure 13: Question 22, Reasons for "No" Response

The biggest reason people personally believed that learning another language was important was because of the idea that language makes a person intelligent and more well-rounded. Many people explained that it made them feel like they knew more about the people around them and about their own language. The reason most common for people to say “no” was

that they believed that one can live without knowing another language. They wrote that in the United States, there is not a real need to learn another language because English is so prominent.

4.5 ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

The final section of the survey asked additional open ended questions pertaining to other issues of relevance to acquire a free response answer for. Participants were instructed to answer with what first came to mind and to give their most honest opinion. The questions were very broad and could be answered in a variety of ways. This section was experimental in the sense that it was of interest to see what would spontaneously come from people if allowed to discuss the subjects of the questions freely.

Question 23 asked “What should the official language of the United States be? Why?” This question was to gain a sense of what participants already knew and what they think would be the best language to represent the country as a whole. 78% of participants wrote that they thought English should be the official language in the United States. The second most popular answer was “none” with a total of 19% of participants. The remaining 3% was divided amongst participants who believed that Spanish and English should both be the official language, that whatever the majority of citizens spoke should be the official language but could change over time, and finally that it didn’t matter which language was official but an official language was necessary for overall organization of the country and government. There were an interesting array of reasons for why English should be the official language as well as for why there shouldn’t be an official language. Reasons for each are represented in Figures 14 and 15 on the following page.

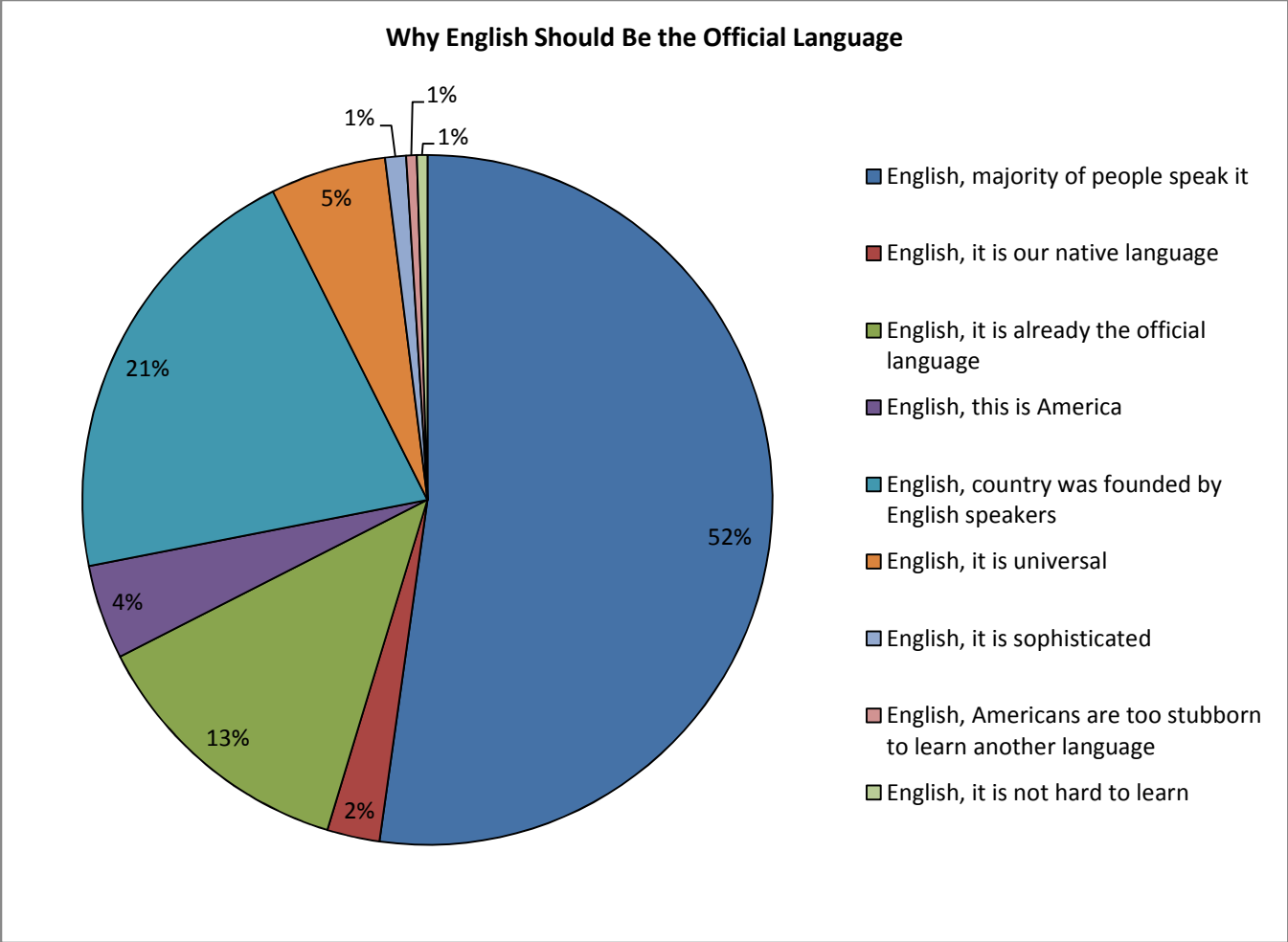


Figure 14: Question 23, Why English Should be the Official Language

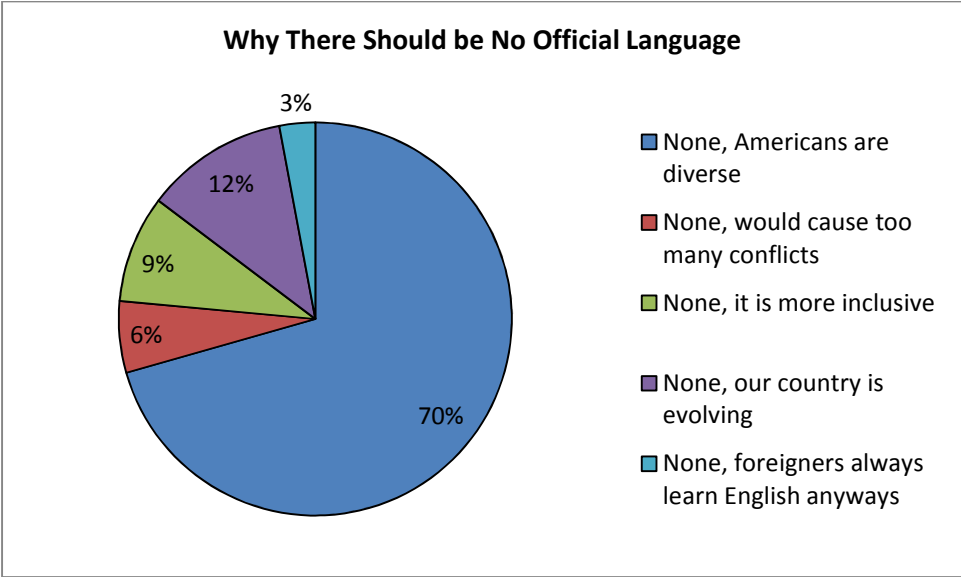


Figure 15: Question 23, Why There Should be No Official Language

Out of the participants who said that English should be the official language. 52% of people said that the majority of Americans speak English, so it makes sense for English to be the official language. The largest reason for participants answering “none” was for reasons of diversity. 70% of people said that America is too diverse for an official language to ever make a difference.

The next question asked about bilingual education. Question 24 asked, “For American students who **do not speak English fluently**, do you believe the United States should have bilingual education (instruction half in the student’s native language, half in English) **OR** English immersion programs (instruction entirely in English)? Why?” This question required that participants picked either bilingual education as the best option or English immersion programs as the best option for non-native English speaking students to learn from. Bilingual favors keeping the home culture and language and English immersion promotes the entirety of the education in English without preservation of the home language.

Participant’s answers are represented below in Figure 16 depending on which type of instruction they believed would be a best fit for students.

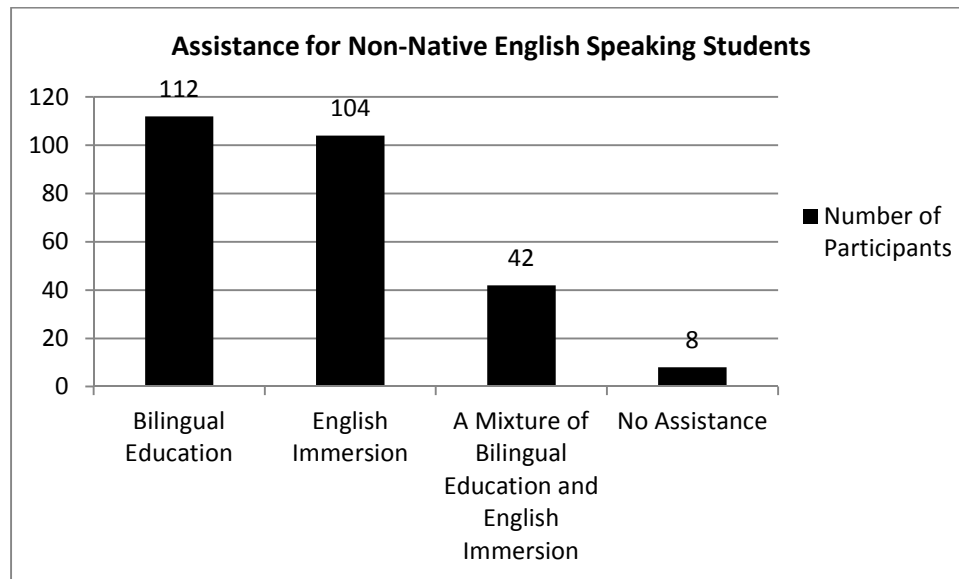


Figure 16: Question 24, Assistance for Non-Native English Speaking Students

The largest number of participants, 112 thought that bilingual education was the best fit for these limited English students. The second largest number of people, 104 believed that English immersion was the best fit and the remainder of participants either believed a mixture of the two were necessary or no assistance should be provided for non-English speakers. Most participants seemed to be unsure of the need for official policy because they felt it was directly related to the personal capacity to learn and the amount of people in the school system with the same problems. Funding also came up as a very large issue.

Question 25 was given to participants in order to identify the languages that participants believed should be learned in the school system. This question was also left with an open response option so that participants could explain why they believed certain languages to be

important to learn. Question 25 asked “Which foreign languages should be taught in schools? Why?” Figure 17 shows which languages came up when this question was asked.

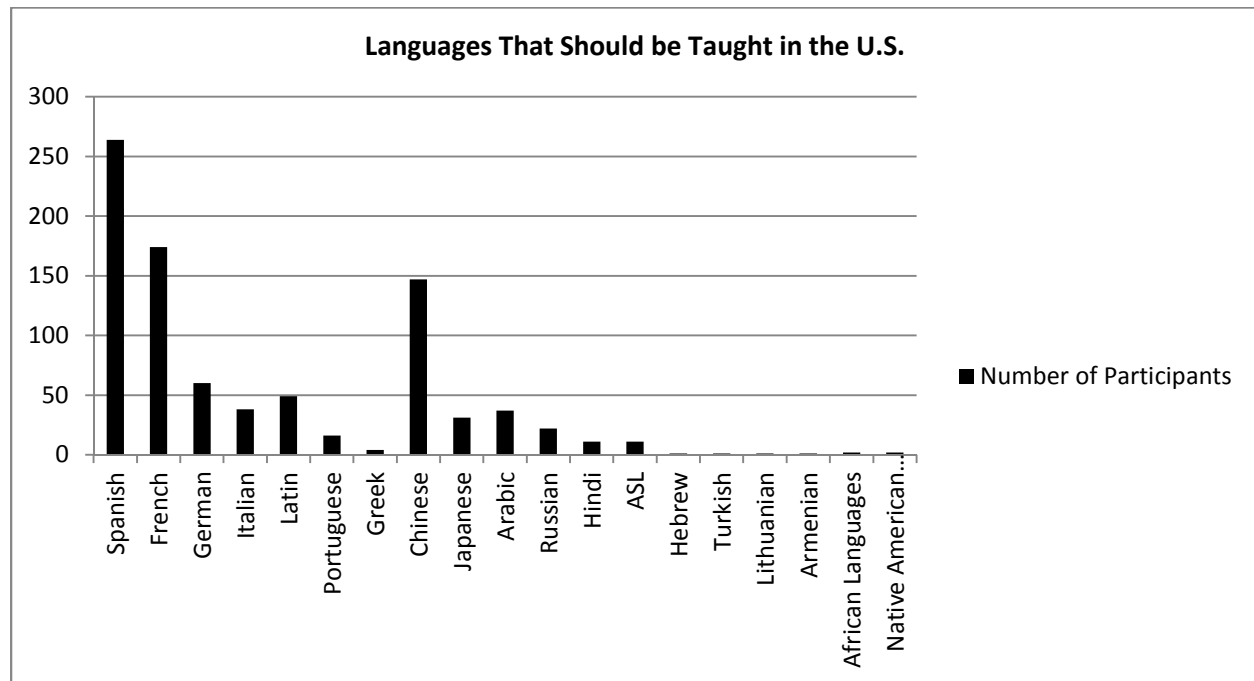


Figure 17: Question 25, Languages That Should be Taught in the U.S.

A large number of participants believed that more than one language should be taught in the United States. One can observe that African languages and Native American languages are lumped into two categories. No respondents cited any specific languages but rather, put those categories in as their answer. Most noticeably, Spanish, French and Chinese were the languages that most people believed should be taught in the United States. Spanish and French occurred as a response because of the proximity of Spanish and French speaking minorities, and Chinese because of its power in the business and academic world. Some participants managed to not put a language as their answer. 27 participants put “whichever languages have the highest population in the U.S.” Another 49 said that any language that a student takes interest in should be offered in school to learn, and 1 participant said that no languages should be taught to children in schools.

Question 26 asked “What age should foreign language instruction start in schools (please circle one range): **Age 5-8** **Age 9-12** **Age 12-15** **Age 15 and up.**” One good reason to ask this question was to determine what participants knew about the critical period as described by Lenneburg (Lenneburg, 1967). There is a belief that United States citizens do not learn languages quite as fast because it is not considered a skill that needs to be developed and practiced, but rather an academic pursuit that can be started at a later age. Figure 18 below shows the responses 370 participants gave for this multiple choice question.

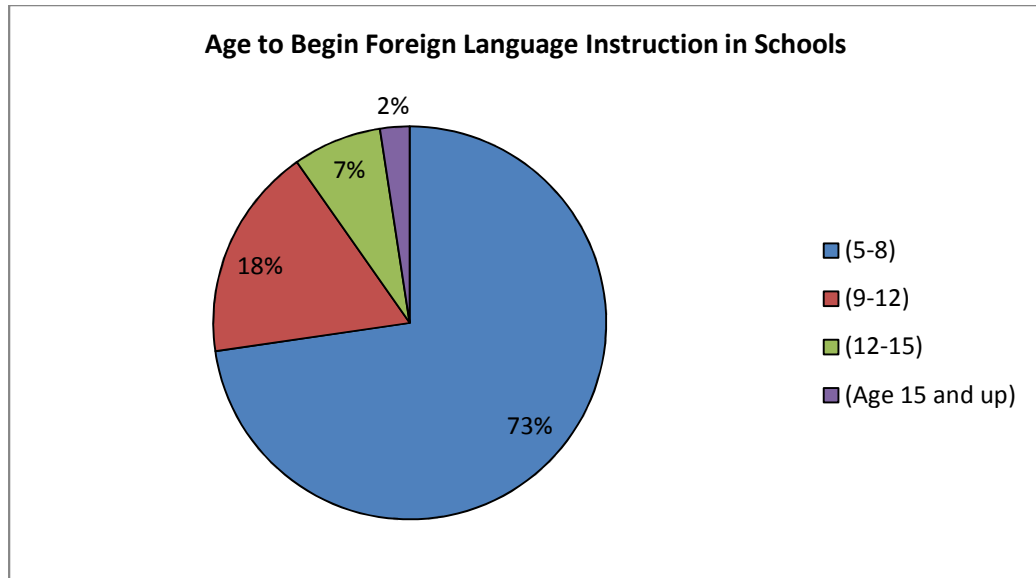


Figure 18: Question 26, Age to Begin Foreign Language Instruction in Schools

73% of participants agreed that language instruction in schools should begin between the ages of 5 and 8. A few participants added a note on their survey that said that it is easier to learn a language at a younger age. Second most votes went to 9-12 at 18% and the last 9% were for votes for the two oldest options that were given.

The very last question on the survey was about perception of accent and whether or not accent makes a speaker effective or ineffective. The question asked “If you have had a non-native English teacher for a class conducted in English, have they been effective? If not, what made them ineffective?(Ex: lack of preparation, accent, presentation of material etc.)” Participants were allowed to give a free response to this as well.

Respondents who said “yes,” their teachers were effective, only accounted for 30% of all answers. Most of these respondents said that accent was obviously there and noticeable but was reasonable to learn from. They enjoyed that the instructor’s presentation was good and the teacher was very active in the subject. Many also said that the teacher had a lot of enthusiasm and worked hard and this made them just as effective as a native English speaking instructor.

42% of respondents said that the instructor they had was not effective. Their reasons for that response are divided in Figure 19 below.

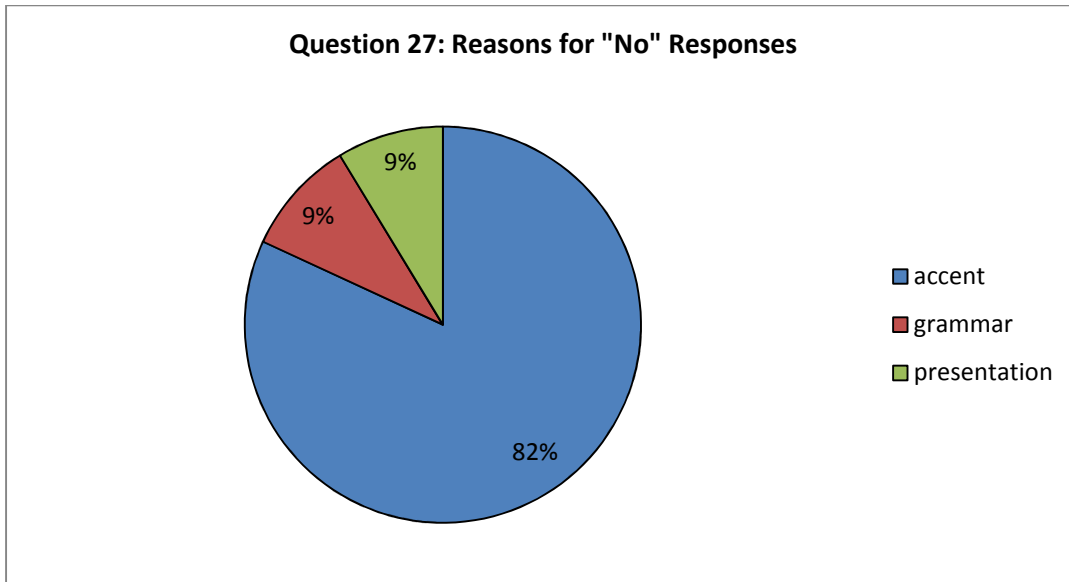


Figure 19: Question 27, Reasons for "No" Responses

A large majority of respondents said that accent in general accounted for their inability to learn in a class taught by a foreign instructor. The other reasons were grammar, and then more plainly, presentation. The only other responses besides “yes” and “no” given by participants were interesting. 8% of respondents said that some teachers that they have had were excellent, and some were very bad. They claim that there is a line when it comes to foreign teaching instruction and as long as that line isn’t crossed then learning goes on unaffected. The remaining 20% said that they have never had an instructor that was not a native English speaker.

5.0 COMMON LANGUAGE BELIEFS PRESENT IN SURVEY

After analysis of the survey results, some general beliefs were present that stem from the English-only ideology. They represent a common worldview that Americans possess. The country has many monolinguals, and the American experience has never required of citizens, fluency in more than one language. These unquestioned beliefs that Americans have developed come to surface quite commonly. Many of these beliefs of Americans have been cited by (Fishman, 2004) and (Wiley, 2004) and in the survey research they were present as well. Most beliefs stemmed from the practice of English monolingualism, some were related to language in general and some were related to the people who speak those languages.

5.1 ENGLISH IS THE LANGUAGE OF PRESTIGE AND SUCCESS

One of the most prevalent beliefs of survey participants was one that stated that English is the language of prestige. This belief mandates that English is the language of opportunity, both domestically and abroad. Many participants gave reasons such as these when they answered the questions. For instance, one participant wrote, “...*It is to one's disadvantage to not speak English in the United States as there may not be as many opportunities/high quality opportunities available to them.*” Most survey participants believed this to be especially true, that English was the language of prestige. The higher the competency in English, the more successful participants believed one could be.

Another respondent wrote, “*English is not the official language of the United States, but it is the unofficial international language of commerce. English is necessary in the United States to promote success and growth, especially of immigrants and migrant workers.*” Survey takers almost unanimously agreed that in order to have success, one must speak English. An interesting point to note, especially in the previous quote, is the idea that immigrants can only amount to more successful positions if they speak English.

5.2 ENGLISH AS UNIFIER

A second belief, and one that is present in almost every English-only argument, is the belief that English monolingualism will unite the country and make life more peaceable to live as immigrants and citizens alike. There was a common fear amongst respondents that everything may fall into disorganization without English. One respondent wrote, “*We have to have some kind of common ground. How could we function in society otherwise? How could a teacher teach? How could we ask questions and learn if we are only learning to speak everyone's different language?*” Another respondent similarly wrote, “*Everything that is done in America is in English, it would be hard to have a unified country if no one could understand each other.*” Many respondents agreed that it would be hard to remain organized as a nation if there was more than one language spoken commonly.

5.3 AMERICANS SPEAK ENGLISH

One of the most powerful opinions, and one that came up almost everywhere in the survey when there was a free response available was the belief that being American equals being an English speaker. Plainly spoken, this is America, if one does not speak English one cannot be American. One participant put it very clearly by saying, “*It is the best way to establish an American national identity. If we can't identify ourselves as Americans, why do we care about*

living here?” This seemed to be a very large fear amongst participants. It is hard to define the identity of “American,” so the way many people have learned to do this is by proclaiming that a language can define us.

Deborah Schildkraut has done extensive research on this topic. Her case study from 2003 involved participants debating about what it means to be an American in relation to language usage and cultural factors. She says on this topic, “Americans do not consistently subscribe to a single definition of what it means to be American...12% of the thoughts involve the simultaneous expression of more than one tradition (Schildkraut 2003, 496). Americans at once say that diversity is what defines them, and on the other hand when asked about linguistic issues say that language is what defines them.

A lot of anger is associated with this particular belief. Most responses are defensive. Some of these responses sounded much like this, *“English is the language spoken in America. I don't even understand why you'd want to be an American citizen but not learn English.”* Others, even more telling, are akin to the following declaration, *“White Americans founded the United States and that is our language, it would be an insult for it to be anything else.”* The identity crisis is well-documented and survey results aligned to this quite consistently in the survey.

5.4 LACK OF ENGLISH MAKES YOU IGNORANT

Another belief prevalent in survey responses was that lack of English knowledge and usage makes one ignorant. This belief states that one is ignorant if they lack English knowledge, yet live in America. Subliminally this belief also states that English is simply the most respectful language to speak in. Many people said things along the lines of *“They are coming to our country and taking our jobs, they should at least learn the language our country was founded on.”* The “they” in this instance refers to immigrant people and denotes the xenophobic behavior that accompanies such beliefs.

Another similar reason for this way of thinking was represented in this response and many others, *“To come to this country as an American citizen not knowing how to speak English is an insult because most likely our taxes are paying for them to live here as freeloaders.”* More participants went on to claim that people who do not speak English could be talking about them behind their back, are typically frustrated and quick-tempered and do not appreciate the country. This is one of the beliefs that has led to continued xenophobic behavior.

5.5 FOREIGN LANGUAGES ARE ACADEMIC PURSUITS

The last belief that was very prominent in the survey results was the belief that learning foreign languages is only for academic pursuits and is not very useful as a practical subject. Many participants said that they only studied languages for brief amounts of time, not long enough to become fluent, or they only studied a language in order to fulfill a requirement or learn more about the English language. Some responses were as follows, *“I don't feel it has helped much, I was never able to fully understand/remember-but sometimes it's good to at least partially be able to read/understand another language.”* Another participant wrote *“I only studied Latin which is a dead language, but it showed signs of help with my SAT scores.”* These two responses were very common amongst survey takers and highlight the reason why many foreign language learners in the U.S. give up quickly on a foreign language. Many Americans use foreign language learning as a means to an end, to further their understanding of a similar but unrelated topic that does not require practical everyday usage.

If language was viewed as practical, this belief might change. Joshua Fishman in particular cites this notion in his 2004 paper. Fishman speaks about the USA when he says, "...in a world that is becoming increasingly multilingual, Americans will be consigned to being linguistically retarded or (to use a currently more fashionable and euphemistic term) "linguistically challenged." Particularly in the USA, one cannot platonically proclaim one's love for "multilingualism" while neglecting to provide everything that multilingualism needs to prosper (Fishman, 127). When Fishman says this, he means that the way the educational forces view language right now is as a special and unique skill, but for all practical purposes besides academic, it is useless. Multilingualism needs to be fostered in practical settings even in school situations, rather than just promoted as a way to get through standardized testing or as a resume booster.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF ASSUMPTIONS

As a final component of this research, it is necessary to examine some assumptions the researcher had at the beginning of this project, and see if they had any basis in truth. I made several assumptions about the results of the surveys when I began to research and solicit participants. Results of these assumptions were varied and very few of them offered a sufficient conclusion based on the survey.

One of the first assumptions I had, was that the data would prove even more in favor of official English policies than in traditional survey formats. I felt this because of the open survey format and especially because of the dynamic of the area being surveyed. The Northeast has varying levels of diversity. Some places, largely populated cities especially, have a widespread amount of diversity, and other places have unusually low levels of diversity. It turns out, that comparing survey results to ones collected by the Pro English organization, surveys collected were less in favor of official English policies.

Pro English, an official English organization, performs a variety of a “language census” survey. The most recent Pro English survey results from 2010 said that 87% of their near 1,000 participants claimed that English should be the official language, while only 78% of the 376 participants in the study described in this paper voted for the same (Vast Majority of Americans Support Official English, 1). Where the results of this survey did line up with the survey conducted by Pro English was in the bilingual education section of the results. The Pro English survey said 68% of survey takers opposed bilingual education, while the percentage in these results were more in the 50% range of opposition (Vast Majority of Americans Support Official English, 1) The northeastern survey takers were much less opposed to bilingual education in comparison to that of Pro English. Although these two surveys are not completely similar in their methods, it was still an interesting comparison to make. The view on bilingual education was significantly different between the two surveys, while the opinions about English as the official language did not seem to offer a conclusion.

There were some factors that I considered crucial in my assumptions. I thought for instance that people who had the opportunity to learn how to speak more than one language during their time in school would have more positive things to say about languages other than English in general. I felt they might also feel that another language was beneficial to them in their everyday life.

For Question 20, “If you have studied another language, do you feel like this has helped you in other parts of your life? Which parts?” Out of the whole group of 376 participants, about 74% said that “yes,” studying another language was beneficial, while out of the group of 158 participants who had taken more than one language, only 83% said “yes,” they found their language instruction beneficial in other parts of their life. This is not a very large difference between the group of speakers who had taken more than one language, versus the group that had taken 1 or less. As for this data, it seems that the assumption that language learning helps develop the idea that learning another language is necessary potentially has a basis in reality.

When comparing the group of 376 participants in Question 22, “Do you personally think it is important to know more than one language? Why?” to the group of 158 people learning more than one language. Out of the group of 376, 85% were in agreement that “yes” it is important to learn another language, and only 87% of the group of 158 people who had taken more than one language were in favor. I believe this particular outcome has a lot to do again with the idea that foreign languages are considered an academic subject in the United States, and not a practically applied subject. It would seem that if a person had taken more than one language in

school, they would consequently appreciate other languages, but evidently this is not as true as is often cited.

Another assumption that I made previous to collecting data, was that participants who identified with nationalities besides American would be more likely to be tolerant of other languages and the experience of people learning English. The reason I assumed this, is because American identity is tied with speaking English, so if participants claimed an identity/ identities besides American, they would be more likely to be understanding of foreign languages being used in the United States.

The results of this inquiry were very revealing. When asked Question 16, Should American citizens that are non-native English speakers have to learn English? Why?”, the 114 participants who identified with American as their only nationality were 75% in favor, while the 79 people who did not claim American as their nationality were 73% in favor. These numbers are not different enough quantitatively to make that much of a difference.

Another set of numbers came from Question 17, “Do you get frustrated when someone you meet cannot speak English? Why?” People who only identified themselves as American had 44% of participants responding that they did get frustrated when meeting someone who was not an English speaker, and 48% of people who did not write American said that they got frustrated when meeting someone who did not speak English. Again this is not a large difference, however it is interesting to note that the group of people who identified as something other than American still said they were frustrated when encountering someone who did not speak English.

The last question I compared for the two parties was Question 23, “What should the official language of the United States be? Why?” For the American group, 67% believed that English should be the official language while 82% of the participants that identified with another nationality besides American said the same. This information exhibits perceived identity is not a conclusive way at figuring out which side participants will agree with. This data may be different in different parts of the country.

The final assumption that I had before starting surveying was that people whose first language was not English would favor bilingual education. Bilingual education ideally perpetuates the goal of keeping the home language and strengthening English skill at the same time. There were 13 members of this study who did not speak English as their native language. Only 11 participants answered this question and out of those, 6 favored English immersion, while 5 favored bilingual education. I was under the assumption that all members of this group would say that bilingual education was an easier and smoother transition into being in school, but they were not unanimous. This points to the flawed system of bilingual education in the United States because even non-native English students, who supposedly benefit from it, are not entirely of the opinion that it is worthwhile.

7.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF DATA

This survey revealed a significant amount about a small group of diverse people and also revealed a significant amount in general about problems that exist in the United States that are related to English-Only policy. The data is significant because it displays in actuality what English- only ideologies have done to the general population. The data provides quantitative and qualitative data to suggest that these issues must to be looked at more in depth by government, by citizens themselves and by minority language speakers living in the United States.

Another reason for the significance of this research is that opinions seem to be homogeneous across state and country. Although the study was focused in the nine Northeastern states, surveys of a similar nature seem to result in similar data. This indicates to me that attention needs to be paid at a national level to the effects of English-only policy on all groups of people and efforts need to be made on a national level to educate people on linguistic realities relevant to the country. Subjects that need critical attention are the role of bilingual education, the learning of languages other than English for their practical usage and also a general understanding of the realities that English- only policies inflict on minority groups. A restructuring of the way that Americans think about language seems to be above all the necessary conclusion to any data gathered in this field.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

More surveys such as the one explored in this research need to be developed in order to acquire continued legitimate information. English-only supporters say there are very clear cut answers and that a certain percentage of people give a certain answer, however it is hard to tell what the real issues are from quick yes or no questions that are positively or negatively charged according to the beliefs of the organization. In addition, more studies need to be done in different areas of the United States, to see if there is diversity amongst opinions. The reasons tend to be homogenous amongst groups of people, however there are areas in which these issues have a greater presence, so opinions may vary. Participant's conclusions are drawn from ideals that are pervasive in society and help to fuel the English-Only movement. Education is key to eliminating the detrimental effects of the English- only movement.

As far as the survey construct, it is important to leave space for open-ended answers, because that is what indicates what people are thinking about the issues. That being said, one of the downfalls of those questions, specifically within the domain of the survey analyzed in this research, are that sometimes participants interpret the questions incorrectly and responses can't be used in a quantitative manner. For future surveys conducted, it would be most useful to have a variety of question types and to leave open space on fewer questions that are less broad in nature so that answers to questions are not vague or misguided. This survey included very broad questions as a way to gather information, but in reality, questions that are narrowed further would still provide as much or maybe even more conclusive information.

8.0 FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION

Although the survey had a lot of negativity, there were also many points that very positive responses came from survey participants. The issue is certainly not as cut and dry as it may seem. For example, one participant wrote, *“The country mainly speaks English and would be helpful to one’s success, however Americans should and must speak multiple languages.”* Another participant wrote, *“Some argue that the language we speak, and the words used in that language construct our world view. I would say studying other languages has not only opened my mind to experience other cultures more authentically, but it has actually offered me new ways of thinking, particularly in respect to certain aspects of languages that are not translatable.”* Finally, one more person says, *“I am more accepting of other cultures. I am more accepting of people who don't know English well; languages are hard to learn and I have better cognitive skills like memory from having to learn a language.”*

United States citizens have simply become complacent in their practice of learning and appreciating other languages and cultures, yet they do have an understanding of the benefits of multilingualism. Social pressures have conditioned citizens to develop beliefs that cause them to act upon the negative beliefs rather than the positive ones. The English-only movement will continue to grasp on to that complacency unless education is offered and common beliefs are challenged in the United States.

APPENDIX A – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Preliminary Demographic Information:

1. Age:
2. Sex:
3. Hometown/State of residence:
4. Profession (If student please write so):
5. Major in college (If have ever attended):
6. Native (First) Language:
7. Primary Language Spoken at Home:
8. Languages Spoken by Relatives:
9. Languages Spoken Fluently:
10. Languages you have studied in School:
11. Which nationalities do you identify with? *(Can be more than one, ex: American, Irish, Mexican):*

General Knowledge Questions

(Please answer each question to the best of your ability)

12. How many languages are spoken in the United States? (Please give a **number** estimate):
13. Out of those languages, how many are Native American?:
14. What is the official language of the United States (If any)?:
15. Have you heard of the U.S English activist group?:

Yes/No Questions

*(Please Respond with **Yes** or **No**, and then **if possible provide a sentence of explanation**)*

16. Should American citizens that are non-native English speakers have to learn English? Why?
17. Do you get frustrated when someone you meet cannot speak English? Why?
18. Have you ever been in a situation in the United States where English was not used for conversation? What situation(s)?
19. Are there more opportunities in the United States for people who speak multiple languages? Why?
20. If you have studied another language, do you feel like this has helped you in other parts of your life? Which parts?
21. Has anyone recently or in the past expressed the importance of learning another language? What was the reason?
22. Do you personally think it is important to know more than one language? Why?

Additional Questions

23. What should the official language of the United States be? Why?
24. For American students who **do not speak English fluently**, do you believe the United States should have bilingual education (instruction half in the student's native language, half in English) **OR** English immersion programs (instruction entirely in English)? Why?
25. Which foreign languages should be taught in schools? Why?
26. What age should foreign language instruction start in schools (please place an X next to one range):
Age 5-8 _ **Age 9-12** _ **Age 12-15** _ **Age 15 and up** _
27. If you have had a non-native English teacher for a class conducted in English, have they been effective? If not, what made them ineffective? (*Ex: lack of preparation, accent, presentation of material etc.*)

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