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Reflection One

After co-presenting the topic of Englishes in class it reawakened my interest in the topic of English education policy in the U.S. I especially wanted to examine the effect of the English only policies that were forming in several states like the Unz initiatives in California, Arizona and Massachusetts. I also wanted to look at how these English only policies were effecting bilingual education policies in the U.S. Lastly, I wanted to see how these policies in the U.S. were similar or different to what was occurring in language education policies throughout the world.

The roots of the English Only policy stemmed from the Nativism movement. Nativism is when the original or native group decides to band together and pass policies or regulations in favor of their norm behavior. In this case the norm behavior would be speaking English. The first Nativism movement originated in the early 1920's and 1930's. This was shortly after World War I and the nativism feelings were sparked by anti-German sentiment. Nebraska was the first state to enact English as their official language in 1920 as a constitutional amendment. There is no official language in America, which is why many states like Nebraska pass legislation for English only policies (Tatalovich, 1995).

There have been several other instances of nativism in the U.S. and most are usually the result of war, and or immigration of large numbers of people from other countries who speak a different language. For a long time in the U.S. there has been much disapproval for the increasingly Spanish-speaking population. This is especially in states where a high proportion of Spanish-speakers live like: Arizona, California, Texas, and Florida. In most of

these states the initial policies proposed were for English as the official state language (Tatalovich, 1995). But what interested me the most was the passing of the Unz initiatives that directly affected education policy.

Ron Unz was a multimillionaire from the Silicon Valley with political aspirations. With his influence English only education policies were passed in California, and Arizona. In 1998 Proposition 227 passed in California officially abolishing bilingual education in favor of English immersion. In 2000 Proposition 203 passed in Arizona limiting the support for English language learners in favor of English immersion. Unz titled his program “English for the Children.” Which initially sounds like it would be a positive policy. As I read through the education code the language used was very persuasive, for instance it says: “English language is the leading world language for science, technology, and international business, thereby being the language of economic opportunity (Unz, 1997).”

We have discussed this in class about how English has become a dominant language as a lingua franca in business, technology and education. Yet, I find that Unz’s argument is too narrow. It does not take into account the benefits, especially in this increasingly globalized world of speaking more than one language. For instance in a project that I did for another class where I researched what employers were looking for in hiring employees; speaking more than one language, along with having experience with other cultures makes a potential hire much more attractive because they bring diversity. Diversity in the workforce is particularly crucial in a world where employers are looking to hire employees that will give them a competitive advantage. In order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, a firm needs to have the ability to exploit the full competitive potential of its

valuable, rare and inimitable resources, which in this case are its employees (Yang, 2011).

As we also discussed in class many countries are acknowledging the importance of English language education. Many countries are passing education so that their children learn English or at least another language as a mandatory part of their education. We have seen a trend for this language education to begin in primary school as opposed to secondary school like the policy passed April of 2011 in Japan (McCurry, 2011). But the significant difference between these policies and those in the U.S. is that their students are becoming competent in a foreign language while still preserving their mother tongue. Instead of instituting English only policies, there are increasingly instituting policies that support multilingualism (Phillipson, 2003).

For several decades it has been mandatory for most European children to learn at least one foreign language during their compulsory education. In 2008 the European Council recommended that least two foreign languages should be taught to all pupils from a very early age. In September of that same year the European Commission adopted a communication titled: "Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment." In November the Council passed a Resolution on a European strategy for multilingualism. In the resolution languages were seen as skill to develop mutual understanding in a multicultural society, language skills were seen as a way to improve employability and ensure a competitive edge for European businesses, European citizens were encouraged to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue and media and technology were seen as a bridge between speakers of different languages

(European Commission, Eurostats, 2012).

The acceptance of multilingualism is not only seen in Europe but in many countries throughout the world where speakers of multiple languages interact on a daily basis. It is only in the U.S. and even in Britain where multilingualism is being seen as a negative. I believe that this belief needs to be changed because it will disrupt the U.S.'s ability to continue to be a world leader. In the words of David Graddol a British linguist: "The future of global communication is unlikely to be based on a single language—English or any other. Rather, the future will be multilingual. People will need to be proficient in more languages than ever before (as cited in Katz, 2004, p.146)."

I believe that instead of supporting Education policies like the Unz initiatives there should be a push for policies that support not only bilingual education, but also education about other cultures. There is proven evidence from around the world that bilingual education can be successful when organized appropriately (Phillipson, 2003). I think that along with using that evidence we should also support education policy being in favor of education programs like the International Schools or the Avenue School where students are taught to be world citizens.

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