

Gabby Clark

Steve Lewis

Writ 101-1

10/30/19

Language is a vital part of human life since it is extremely important for communication. Language can occur through physical forms of writing or verbally through various types of speech. America is made up of many people from around the world and, therefore, has a variety of cultural backgrounds, different beliefs, and a wide range of physical characteristics. In short, it is a diverse nation. America does not have an officially declared language even though English is common and abundant. If English is the official language it would benefit government proceedings and create a common sense of American pride. On the other hand, if English becomes the official language, it would possibly harm relationships, be discriminatory, and downgrade cultures. The English-only movement is an important issue to investigate since it affects America as a whole nation as well as individual people.

Good communication through language is vital for government growth and stability. Jamieson reports, "Supporters of English-only contend that all government communication must be in English. Because communication is absolutely necessary for democracy to survive, they believe the only way to ensure the existence of our nation is to make sure a common language exists" (251). Communication among the government must be in a well-known language, and making English the official language of the United States would ensure that government business would be conducted in an agreed upon language. He also states it is thought having English as the official language will help with the diversity issues in the country (251). Another point

Jamieson presents is, America is made of many different people groups. He acknowledges, "... immigrants who come to America... should be expected to become a part of its culture instead of hanging on to their past" (250). President Theodore Roosevelt said something similar. He proclaimed, "We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house" ("English-Only"). Roosevelt claims English unites the people of the United States, provides a feeling of permanency, and of nationalistic pride. Having English as the official language would better government meetings, unite Americans as one people through pride for their language, and break down the barriers caused by language diversity.

Language impacts everyone in different ways, and its diversity can evoke a multitude of emotions for people. Jamieson states that some claim the English-only movement is discriminatory towards non-English languages. David Price declared, "that official-English legislation is a good idea because most English-speaking Americans prefer 'out of pride and convenience to speak on the job'" (qtd. In Jamieson 253). If English was made the official language of America it could lower the importance of other languages and possibly cause feelings of discrimination towards people who favor another language as their main one for communication. Lorraine Ramos and her husband Jorge Flores worked at the Colorado Central Casino. During their time there, an English-only speaking policy was put into place. Jorge Flores only spoke Spanish. This proved to be an issue for the couple since they could not communicate within the building. Other workers who spoke Spanish also began to have problems. Waxer writes, "Senior-level managers and non-Hispanic employees soon began shouting 'English, English' at the Hispanic employees... Humiliated and verbally harassed, a group of Spanish-

speaking housekeepers, including Ramos and Flores, took their plight to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.” Later, the casino “was ordered to pay \$1.5 million for subjecting its employees to unlawful English-only rules” (57). Making English the official language of the United States could prove to be problematic for communication among individuals.

Language is extremely important for understanding cultures and customs and for clear communication. A study conducted by the *Asian American Journal of Psychology* pointed out in certain cultures, such as Chinese and Korean, respect for parents and maintaining cultural traditions is highly regarded (129). The study further investigated this very topic in a detailed survey. The study focused on immigrated Chinese and Korean families, since their cultures originate from similar values (130). Boutakdis, a professor at California State University, acknowledged that the parents, “first-generation”, were fluent in their native language and the children, “second-generation”, were stronger in English (136). The results pointed out that “consistent language gaps exist between adolescents and their parents regardless... of ethnic group samples, creating the potential for communication issues that may impact their relationship” (136). With some cultures, in order to fully understand the customs they must be communicated in their native tongue (129). Having the ability to communicate in the same language fluently between parents and their children can positively result in “respect for mother and father” (136) and for tradition (129). Communication impacts families and specific people in their understanding of cultural tradition. Good communication also promotes healthy relationships among individuals.

The English-only movement has support from multiple sides and must be examined for America’s betterment. It seems more likely that making English the official language would be

more detrimental than advantageous. It may logically appear valuable to make all government proceedings in English but, in reality, it is better to have people understand what is happening. If someone understands and communicates more effectively in a different language than English, let them! It makes more sense for the sake of America to have citizens who can respond according to their beliefs for voting and to also understand legal matters to the best of their abilities. As for unity and diversity issues, English will not cure the social problems created by human nature. People need to be allowed to speak in the language best for them. Having strong personal relationships due to good communication is more important than being able to speak to everyone they encounter. Declaring English the official language of the United States would place it in a higher status than other languages and, thus, cause feelings of diversity and animosity. Remembering the cultures where people come from is important because it helps shape them into who they are today. English should be kept as the common language of America and not made official since it would prove more harmful than empowering for communication.

Works Cited

"English-Only Movement." *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice*, edited by Sherwood Thompson, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1st edition, 2014. *Credo Reference*, hctproxy.lib.umt.edu.

Ioakim, Boutakidis P., et al. "The Role of Adolescents' Native Language Fluency on Quality of Communication and Respect for Parents in Chinese and Korean Immigrant Families." *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 2, Jun. 2011, pp. 128-139. *PsycARTICLES*, hctproxy.lib.umt.edu.

Jamieson, Jake. "The English-Only Movement: Can America Proscribe language with a Clear Conscience?." *Models for Writers: Short Essay for Composition*, edited by Alfred Rosa, Paul Eschholz, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018, pp. 249-256.

Waxer, Cindy. "English-Only Policies Can Translate into Problems for Employers." *Workforce Management*, vol. 83, no. 1, Jan. 2004, pp. 57-59. *Academic Search Complete*, searchebcohost.com.