

The U.S. Federal Congress and the Officialization of English

Arguments, Ideas, and Ideologies in Federal-Level Legislative Proposals

1. Introduction:

Language policy, language management and language ideologies

According to Bernard Spolsky's definition, "language policy" may refer to "all the language practices, beliefs and management decisions of a community or polity."¹

The first component ("language practices") is defined as the observable behaviors and choices – i.e. what people actually do, what linguistic features are chosen, which varieties of language are used.² The second component of language policy consists of beliefs about language, sometimes collectively called "an ideology."³ While Harold Schiffman prefers the term "linguistic culture" in the same context, there is an almost total overlap between the two concepts, with the latter having been defined as "the set of behaviors, assumptions, cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language, and religio-historical circumstances associated with a particular language."⁴ The third component of policy according to Spolsky is language management, i.e. the "explicit and observable efforts" to modify practices or beliefs.⁵

This analysis approaches the surface manifestations of language policy (i.e. explicit policy initiatives at federal level) in order to gain a deeper insight into the ideological background of the proposals, which supposedly reflect the shifting language-related perceptions by the people in general, expressed from time to time through their elected representatives.

The term "language ideology" was probably introduced for the first time by Heath in 1977 as "the self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning the roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of that group."⁶ Juan Cobarrubias proposed four typical ideologies that may justify lan-

1 Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9.

2 Bernard Spolsky, *Language Management* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

3 Spolsky, *Language Management*, 4.

4 Harold Schiffman, *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5.

5 Spolsky, *Language Management*, 4.

6 Quoted in René Galindo, "Language Wars: The ideological dimensions of the debates on bilingual education," *Bilingual Research Journal* 21.2–3 (1997), 170.

guage policymaking in a particular community: linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularization, and internationalism.⁷ More recently, Irvine defined language ideologies as “conceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices.”⁸

A considerable number of LP scholars seem to agree that US language ideologies have mostly been dominated by a discernible “English-only” strain;⁹ “linguistic nativism”;¹⁰ or even “xenoglossophobia.”¹¹ Similarly, Wiley argues that “Americanization” in the name of the “melting pot” tradition has been the guiding nation-building principle since the foundation of the Republic.¹²

Official English proposals – by their very nature – are expected to corroborate the assimilationist nation-building narrative, which emphasizes the “national unity” theme as opposed to the pluralist perspective, whose central tenet is the provision of ever greater equality for (language) minorities.¹³ Either way, language policy conflicts are by and large inseparable from identity politics, interpreted as the “wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups.”¹⁴

2. Official English Legislation in the United States

Since the 1990s, “Official English” has become a “mainstream phenomenon,”¹⁵ increasingly seen as a sign of patriotism rather than the latest manifestation of xenophobia and linguistic nativism. This development appears to have proven Schildkraut’s argument that liberalism alone (i.e. viewing America as “a land of freedom and opportunity”) is insufficient to explain fully the nature of American identity. In reality, there are at least

- 7 Juan Cobarrubias, “Ethical Issues in Status Planning,” in *Progress in Language Planning. International Perspectives*, ed. Juan Cobarrubias and Joshua A. Fishman (Berlin/New York/Amsterdam: Mouton, 1983), 63–66.
- 8 Judith T. Irvine, “Language Ideology,” *Oxford Bibliographies* (January 2012).
- 9 Reynaldo F. Macías, “Language Politics and the Sociolinguistic Historiography of Spanish in the United States,” in *Language in Action: New Studies of Language in Society Essays in Honor of Roger W. Shuy*, ed. Joy K. Peyton, Peg Griffin, Walt Wolfram, and Ralph Fasold (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2000), 53.
- 10 Terrence G. Wiley, “Continuity and Change in the Function of Language Ideologies in the United States,” in *Ideology, Politics and Language Policies. Focus on English*, ed. Thomas Ricento (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000), 84.
- 11 Sandy Cutshall, “Why We Need ‘The Year of Languages,’” *Educational Leadership* 62.4 (2004/2005): 21.
- 12 Terrence G. Wiley, “Diversity, Super-Diversity, and Monolingual Language Ideology in the United States: Tolerance or Intolerance?” *Review of Research in Education* 38 (March 2014): 1–32.
- 13 Ronald Schmidt, Sr., *Language Policy and Identity Politics in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 37–38.
- 14 Cressida Heyes, “Identity Politics,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. Published in the 2016 summer edition <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/identity-politics>>.
- 15 James Crawford, *At War with Diversity: US Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2000), 4–5.

three other related conceptions to be taken into consideration: the civic republican tradition (“America as a participatory democracy with vibrant communities and dutiful citizens”); the ethnocultural tradition (“America as a nation of white Protestants”); and the incorporationist tradition (“America as a diverse ‘nation of immigrants’ trying to find the balance between cultural assimilation and maintenance”).¹⁶ “Official English” legislative proposals generally reflect elements of all but the ethnocultural tradition – although pluralist critics (e.g. James Crawford) frequently point out the alleged nativist agenda behind the so-called “English-only” initiatives.

State-level officialization attempts in the United States can be traced back to the immediate post-WWI period, while the more recent wave of officialization gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s – and it has continued ever since. In 2017, *ProEnglish* (a leading advocate of the issue) listed 32 states with similar symbolic or – especially in recent years: substantive and enforceable – officialization policies.¹⁷

The formal beginnings of the “Official English” movement at the national (or: federal) level date back to April 27, 1981, when Senator S.I. Hayakawa (R-California) introduced into the Senate a proposed amendment to the Constitution (S.J.Res. 72),¹⁸ which would have designated English as the sole official language of the United States. Hayakawa’s joint resolution failed, just like the more than 100 similar bills and resolutions introduced in Congress between 1981 and December 2016. So far, only the Emerson “English Language Empowerment Act”¹⁹ (H.R. 123, 104th Congress, 2nd Session) reached the Congressional floor on August 1, 1996, and was passed by the House of Representatives – but not by the Senate. All the other, similar proposals died in committee.

3. Aims and Corpus

The aims of this paper are to collect, review and classify the arguments surrounding the officialization issue as reflected in the relevant legislative proposals of the U.S. Federal Congress. Focusing on all the “explicit and observable” language management efforts²⁰ by an entity which represents the entire electorate (and even the nonvoting members of society), this paper also strives to gain a deeper insight into the shifts in American language ideology or “linguistic culture” over time.

The corpus, which attempts to be as representative as possible, is based on the legislative database of the U.S. Federal Congress (congress.gov), and is comprised of all those proposals – including bills; simple resolutions; concurrent resolutions; and joint

16 Deborah J. Schildkraut, *Press “ONE” for English: Language Policy, Public Opinion, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.

17 “Official English Map,” *ProEnglish*, <https://proenglish.org/official-english-map-2/>.

18 S.J.Res.72, “A joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States with respect to proceedings and documents in the English language,” 97th Cong. (1981).

19 H.R.123 EH, “Bill Emerson English Language Empowerment Act of 1996,” 104th Cong. (1996). <https://www.congress.gov/104/bills/hr123/BILLS-104hr123eh.pdf>.

20 Spolsky, *Language Management*, 4.

resolutions from the 97th to the 114th Congress (1981–2016) – that contained both “English” and “official language” in the title and/or in the body of the proposal.

The online search (finalized on August 5, 2017) returned 128 such proposals, out of which 93 were at least marginally relevant to the officialization issue. The rest included 9 pluralist and wholly symbolic “English Plus” resolutions (introduced between 1995 and 2011 by Rep. José Serrano, D-NY) in addition to 11 proposals that attempted to strengthen Native Hawaiian education and heritage language maintenance in the state of Hawaii, plus nearly a dozen omnibus bills that contained “English” and “official language” in totally unrelated sections.

Due to the limitations of the online congressional database – in which the full text of bills is not available for proposals introduced prior to 1993 (103rd Congress) – the examined corpus is divided into two subcorpora: the designation “Corp.81-92” (including 29 bills) will refer to the collection of bills from the “outline years” (1981–92), while “Corp.93-16” (64 bills) will indicate the “full text years” data. “Corpus” – without post-modification – will be used for the entire set.

4. Methods

On the basis of the “Official English”-related proposals of the U.S. Federal Congress, the present analysis focuses on (1) the alleged threats to English; (2) the “English-intrinsic”; (3) “English-extrinsic”; and (4) “English-functional” arguments which are mustered to justify the legal enshrinement of the majority language. In addition, (5) the “needs” of English (i.e. whether the majority language should be protected, cultivated or promoted by the government); and (6) the references to other languages are also highlighted and briefly discussed.

The categories are loosely based on Robert Phillipson’s classification,²¹ where “English-intrinsic” refers to “what English is”; “English-extrinsic” focuses on “what English has” (in terms of infrastructure and resources); and “English-functional” is the shorthand for “what English does” or is supposed to do. The “English-functional” arguments are often closely related to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, whose renaissance has been observed in the past few years – in (popular) scientific articles and in state-level Official English proposals as well.²²

21 Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 271–72; Rebecca Mead, “The Prophet of Dystopia,” *New Yorker*, April 17, 2017, 43.

22 See e.g. Lera Boroditsky, “Lost in Translation: New Cognitive Research Suggests that Language Profoundly Influences the Way People See the World,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Saturday, July 24, 2010. <http://lera.ucsd.edu/papers/wsj.pdf>; Keith M. Chen, “The Effect of Language on Economic Behavior: Evidence from Savings Rates, Health Behaviors, and Retirement Assets,” *American Economic Review* 103.2 (2013): 690–731, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.103.2.690>; Sándor Czeglédi, “The ‘Image of English’ in State-level Official English Proposals,” in *Languages in Contact* (Vol. 1), ed. Piotr P. Chruszczewski, John R. Rickford, Katarzyna Buczek, Aleksandra R. Knapik, and Jacek Mianowski (Wrocław: Wyższa Szkoła Filologiczna we Wrocławiu & Polska Akademia Nauk, 2014), 45–61.

The elements of the corpus are also examined from three additional aspects. First, a readily available feature is whether the given proposal was introduced in the House of Representatives, whose membership is elected for a two-year period, or in the Senate, where the members are more isolated from immediate voter control due to their six-year tenure. Second, the proposals are also weighted according to the type of legislation: simple and concurrent resolutions have no legal force, thus they are considered to be purely “symbolic”: they simply express the “sense” (i.e. collective opinion) of one or both chambers, whereas bills and joint resolutions are binding (“substantive”) if passed and signed by the President. Finally, the support behind each proposal is clearly indicated by the number of supporters (“sponsors” and “cosponsors”) backing the given initiative.

5. Hypotheses and Assumptions

Republican-controlled legislatures are considerably more supportive of the officialization idea; thus this aspect is not going to be examined in detail. Democratic cosponsors of Official English (hence: OE) proposals are few and far between.

Based on previous research,²³ the following initial assumptions are made:

- (1) The perceived need to protect English is becoming an integral element of OE proposals.
- (2) As OE is becoming a mainstream idea, similar proposals appear on the agenda of the Senate more frequently (and garner increasingly higher support).
- (3) Overall, Senate proposals are more moderate and less alarmist.
- (4) 9/11 represents a discernible watershed in OE legislation, increasing OE-related activity in both chambers.
- (5) OE proposals also try to ban strong (“maintenance-oriented”) forms of bilingual education (BE) and seek to curtail access-related minority language rights, i.e. the OE initiatives attempt to erode the pluralist achievements in other areas of LP conflict as well.
- (6) Both English-intrinsic and English-functional arguments appear more frequently in recent OE proposals.
- (7) The overall belief in the transformative power of English is growing (mirroring the recent tendencies in state-level proposals).
- (8) OE proposals support foreign language learning but stop short of endorsing immigrant heritage language maintenance.
- (9) On the other hand, recent OE proposals support indigenous language maintenance without reservations.

23 Sándor Czeglédi, “A multikulturalizmus alkonya? Nyelvi ideológiák és a hivatalos nyelv kérdése az Egyesült Államokban,” in *Anglisztika és amerikanisztika: Magyar kutatások az ezredfordulón*, ed. Tibor Frank and Krisztina Károly (Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó, 2009), 247–55; Czeglédi, “The ‘Image of English,’” 58–61.

- (10) OE proposals generally reinforce the civic republican interpretation of American identity (i.e. “America is a participatory democracy with vibrant communities and dutiful citizens”).

6. Findings I: General Trends

Out of the 93 relevant OE proposal versions there were 61 pieces introduced in the House; 19 in the Senate (13 proposals were versions of the introduced bills and resolutions reappearing – usually in an amended form – at later stages of the lawmaking process).

House	Senate	Congress (nr.)	Year
1	1	97	1981–1982
1	1	98	1983–1984
2	2	99	1985–1986
6	1	100	1987–1988
5	2	101	1989–1990
2	1	102	1991–1992
3	1	103	1993–1994
8	2	104	1995–1996
3	1	105	1997–1998
5	0	106	1999–2000
4	0	107	2001–2002
3	0	108	2003–2004
4	1	109	2005–2006
6	1	110	2007–2008
2	1	111	2009–2010
2	1	112	2011–2012
2	1	113	2013–2014
1	1	114	2015–2016

Figure 1. The distribution of introduced OE proposals in the two chambers (1981–2016)

In the House, the overwhelming majority of introduced pieces (59 proposals) were substantive. The two symbolic concurrent resolutions date back to 1985 (H.Con.Res. 127)²⁴ and to 1987 (H.Con.Res. 129).²⁵ Both proposals expressed “the sense of the Congress that the English language is the official language of the United States.”

²⁴ H.Con.Res.127, “A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of the Congress that the English language is the official language of the United States,” 99th Cong. (1985).

²⁵ H.Con.Res.129, “A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the English language is the official language of the United States,” 100th Cong. (1987).

The Senate witnessed the introduction of 18 substantive pieces and 1 symbolic resolution (S.Con.Res. 43 from 1985),²⁶ which was an identical proposal to (H.Con.Res. 127).

Figure 1 indicates that the peak years of OE-activism (in terms of the number of introduced pieces) happened during the 100th and 101st Congresses (1987–90); then in 1995–96 (104th Congress); in 1999–2000 (106th Congress), and finally in 2007–08 (110th Congress).

However, it was only the House of Representatives that reacted with a flurry of OE-related legislative activity to real and perceived crises and/or political opportunities (e.g. ESEA-reauthorization debates and the “Republican Revolution” of 1994) – the Senate remained largely detached from OE issues during the examined period.

Nevertheless, the fluctuation of support behind the flagship OE bill in each Congress – calculated as the percentage of the total membership of the given chamber (435 in the House; 100 in the Senate) – appears to be more informative than simply the number of introduced proposals:

House (%)	Senate (%)	Congress (nr.)	Year
0.002	11	97	1981–1982
4.1	8	98	1983–1984
12.2	17	99	1985–1986
13.6	6	100	1987–1988
16.9	4	101	1989–1990
32.2	9	102	1991–1992
37.5	14	103	1993–1994
45.3	23	104	1995–1996
9.0	22	105	1997–1998
32.0	0	106	1999–2000
11.5	0	107	2001–2002
25.1	0	108	2003–2004
37.9	4	109	2005–2006
35.4	10	110	2007–2008
32.0	4	111	2009–2010
28.3	4	112	2011–2012
21.8	7	113	2013–2014
20.9	8	114	2015–2016

Figure 2. Percentage of support behind the leading OE proposal during each Congress

Here it can be seen that S. I. Hayakawa’s OE joint resolution (S.J.Res. 72, 1981) attracted 11% support in the Senate during the 97th Congress, but this level of endorsement was not to be reached in the House for similar measures until 1985. By that time, the relevant

26 S.Con.Res.43, “A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of the Congress that the English language is the official language of the United States,” 99th Cong. (1985).

percentage in the Senate was 17%, and topped at 23% in 1995–96, during the 104th Congress.

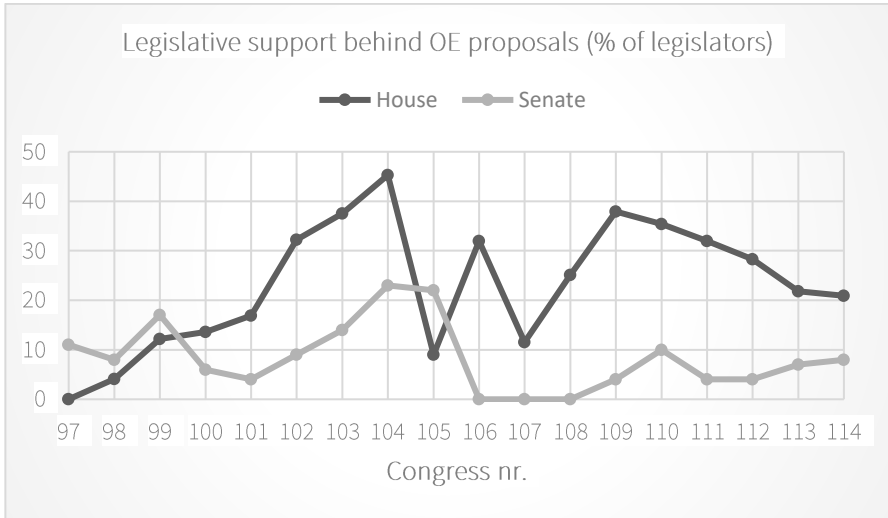


Figure 3. Percentage of support behind the leading OE proposal during each Congress

The absolute peak years for OE support in the House came during the very same 104th Congress in 1995–96, when the most successful OE bill to date, the Bill Emerson “English Language Empowerment Act”²⁷ was passed by the House of Representatives on August 1, 1996.

H.R. 123 reversed the pluralist critique of quick transitional bilingual education (BE) models (i.e. that early-exit BE frequently “disempowers” minority students) by trying to codify the hotly debated “time-on-task” (or “maximum exposure”) hypothesis, implying that the way to empower immigrants was through maximized exposure to English.

In the “Findings” section, H.R. 123 seemed to relish the idea of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity characterizing the United States.²⁸ The English language was described as a “common thread binding individuals of differing backgrounds,” which needed federal intervention to be able to fulfill this historical function properly:

In order to preserve unity in diversity, and to prevent division along linguistic lines, the Federal Government should maintain a language common to all people.²⁹

27 H.R.123 EH, 104th Cong. (1996).

28 H.R.123 EH (Title I, Sec. 101(1–2)), 104th Cong. (1996).

29 H.R.123 EH (Title I, Sec. 101(4)), 104th Cong. (1996).

H.R. 123 intended to facilitate immigrant assimilation and empower immigrants to take advantage of economic and occupational opportunities in the United States. Moreover, English language skills and literacy were also deemed “necessary” in order to turn immigrants into “responsible citizens and productive workers.”³⁰

The perceived correlation between a responsible attitude and English proficiency is vaguely similar to early 20th century “scientific” study findings, which frequently linked non-English proficiency with lower intelligence.³¹

As its main goal, H.R. 123 declared English the sole official language of government (although oral communication with public officials in non-English languages was allowed even in official situations); required “fluency in English” as a prerequisite to naturalization (with ceremonies conducted entirely in English); and repealed the bilingual voting requirements as specified in the later amendments of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.³² The “teaching of languages” and the preservation of Native American and Native Alaskan languages were not to be affected by the provisions of HR 123.³³

Eventually, the “English Language Empowerment Act” of 1996 did not get further than passing the House by the healthy majority of 259 votes to 169. Despite its success in the lower chamber, the Senate failed to act on the measure after President Clinton hinted at the possibility of a presidential veto – and there was neither veto-proof majority on the part of the proponents, nor the political will to pursue the matter any further around election period.³⁴

H.R. 123 was the leading OE bill in the House between 1991 and 1999. Since the 108th Congress (2003–2004) its role has been taken over by H.R. 997, the “English Language Unity Act,” which is a very similar measure, although it contains far fewer English-intrinsic and English-functional arguments than H.R. 123 did: only the English-intrinsic “common thread binding individuals of differing background” phrase has remained in the proposal.³⁵

More importantly, however, H.R. 997 would require the implementation of uniform English language testing standards as a naturalization requirement stating that “All citizens should be able to read and understand generally the English language text of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the laws of the United States.”³⁶ The idea of employing the key documents of the American Creed as an English language proficiency-based gatekeeping mechanism or obstacle for future citizens is not a new

30 H.R.123 EH (Title I, Sec. 101(6–7)), 104th Cong. (1996).

31 April Linton, *Spanish for Americans? The Politics of Bilingualism in the United States* (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2002), 18.

32 H.R.123 EH (Title I, Sec. 102, Title II), 104th Cong. (1996).

33 H.R.123 EH (Title I, Sec. 102(a), Ch. 6, Sec. 167(2)). 104th Cong. (1996).

34 Crawford, *At War*, 47–49.

35 H.R.997, “English Language Unity Act of 2015,” (Sec. 2(2)), 114th Cong. (2015). <https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr997/BILLS-114hr997ih.pdf>.

36 H.R.997, “English Language Unity Act of 2015,” (Sec. 3(a) Ch. 6, Sec. 164(a)), 114th Cong. (2015).

one, though: the very first version of H.R. 997 already contained such stipulations in 2003.³⁷

What is more, two years before, in 2001, an identical “English Language Unity Act” had been introduced in the House³⁸ with the same requirements. Although it would be tempting to associate that proposal with the immediate gut-reactions following 9/11, the sponsor of H.R. 1984, Rep. Bob Barr (R-GA) actually introduced the bill on May 24, three and a half months *before* the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks.

7. Findings II: English-language Related Arguments in OE Proposals

This part of the analysis focuses on “Corp.93-16,” which contained 62 full-text proposals.

7.1 *Threats to English*

Only 13 proposals contained any references to the threats to English, with the most frequent alarmist scenario being the fear from “division along linguistic lines,” which was to become a recurrent feature of OE proposals at least from 1993 onwards. Yet, although the phrase was a characteristic feature of OE bills in 1995–1996, it has never surfaced after 1999.

7.2 *“English-intrinsic” arguments*

The “English-intrinsic” arguments have also been present in the proposals at least since 1993. Approximately half of the pieces contained such arguments: 23 House bills and 9 Senate proposals.

In the House bills the most frequent theme identified was the “language of opportunity” idea, occurring 15 times altogether between 1993 and 2010 in various proposals, followed by the “common thread” phrase (13 times) between 1993–2016. The “common language” phrase (cropping up 5 times between 1993 and 2000) achieved the third place in the frequency ranking. Although, numerically speaking, it is the “language of opportunity” designation that turned out to be the hands-down winner, the “common thread” description has proved to be the most constantly enduring idea over the entire examined period.

In addition, the House witnessed the introduction of a few especially restrictive bills describing English as the “preferred language of communication” among U.S. citizens. The “Declaration of Official Language Act” contained this phrase 4 times: in 1993, 1995, 1997, and in 1999, respectively. The most successful version of the Act reached 24% support in the House in 1995.³⁹

37 H.R.997, “English Language Unity Act of 2003,” (Sec. 3(a) Ch. 6, Sec. 164(a)), 108th Cong. (2003). <https://www.congress.gov/108/bills/hr997/BILLS-108hr997ih.pdf>.

38 H.R.1984, “English Language Unity Act of 2001,” 107th Cong. (2001). <https://www.congress.gov/107/bills/hr1984/BILLS-107hr1984ih.pdf>.

39 H.R.739, “Declaration of Official Language Act,” (Sec. 2(a) Ch. 6, Sec. 162), 104th Cong. (1995). <https://www.congress.gov/104/bills/hr739/BILLS-104hr739ih.pdf>.

Preferred Language	Common Language	Language of opportunity	Common thread	Cong. (nr.)	Year
1	1	1	1	103	1993–1994
1	3	5	4	104	1995–1996
1		4		105	1997–1998
1	1	2		106	1999–2000
		1	1	107	2001–2002
			1	108	2003–2004
			1	109	2005–2006
			1	110	2007–2008
		2	1	111	2009–2010
			1	112	2011–2012
			1	113	2013–2014
			1	114	2015–2016
4	5	15	13	SUM	

Figure 4. The distribution of “English-intrinsic” arguments in the House OE proposals (1993–2016).

In the Senate, however, the “preferred language” idea never emerged. As a further difference, OE proposals in the upper chamber tended to emphasize the “common thread” function of the English language (8 instances), while the “language of opportunity” idea (occurring 4 times) took the second place only.

Preferred Language	Common Language	Language of opportunity	Common thread	Cong. (nr.)	Year
	1	1	1	103	1993–1994
	2	2	2	104	1995–1996
	1	1	1	105	1997–1998
				106	1999–2000
				107	2001–2002
				108	2003–2004
				109	2005–2006
				110	2007–2008
			1	111	2009–2010
			1	112	2011–2012
			1	113	2013–2014
			1	114	2015–2016
	4	4	8	SUM	

Figure 5. The distribution of “English-intrinsic” arguments in the Senate OE proposals (1993–2016).

In both chambers the combined frequencies of “common language” and “common thread” are roughly equal to those of “language of opportunity,” but the “common thread” theme appears to be a more predictable feature of the recent bills and resolutions.

7.3 “English-extrinsic” arguments

“English-extrinsic” arguments, i.e. the material and immaterial resources behind the language⁴⁰ are not utilized in the OE proposals at all – references to the “resource power” of the language are mostly deployed in campaigns focusing on the international promotion of the language.

7.4 “English-functional” arguments

Contrary to initial expectations, about two-thirds of the proposals from the 62-element “Corp.93-16” did *not* contain any “English-functional” arguments at all.

Furthermore, those bills that eventually did were concentrated in the period between 1993 and 2001 (comprising 14 House proposals and 4 Senate bills or resolutions). There have been no similar, explicit arguments embedded in the post-2001 proposals:

English empowers immigrants to become “responsible citizens and productive workers”		3	1	1	
English promotes “efficiency and fairness”	1	5	1	1	
English promotes “full citizenship”		5	2	2	1
Congress	103	104	105	106	107
Year	93 94	95 96	97 98	99 00	01 02

Figure 6. “English-functional” arguments in the House OE proposals (1993–2002)

English empowers immigrants to become “responsible citizens and productive workers”		3	1	1	
English promotes “efficiency and fairness”	1	5	1	1	
English promotes “full citizenship”		5	2	2	1
Congress	103	104	105	106	107
Year	93 94	95 96	97 98	99 00	01 02

Figure 7. “English-functional” arguments in the Senate OE proposals (1993–2002)

40 Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 276–77.

The appearance of the “empowerment through English”-theme around 1995–96 is related to the legislative successes of the eponymous “English Language Empowerment Act” (H.R. 123, see above in 6.1).

Nevertheless, it was a considerably less controversial idea (“English promotes efficiency and fairness”) which turned out to be more acceptable in both chambers during the relatively short careers of “English-functional” arguments.

7.5 What English needs

Although the Constitution is silent about linguistic matters, the majority of OE proposals in “Corp.93-16” – 44 out of 62 – were to compel the government to take an active role in protecting and promoting the majority language. Somewhat contrary to certain European practices, this recommended protection never amounted to a purist, corpus planning-oriented attitude; instead, the government was expected to be an active agent in enshrining the legal status of English and was frequently obliged to encourage internal language spread.

Already in 1993, the “Language of Government Act” of 1993 declared that “The Government shall have an affirmative obligation to preserve and enhance the role of English as the official language of the United States Government. Such obligation shall include encouraging greater opportunities for individuals to learn the English language.”⁴¹ Despite the fact that the full text of the pre-1993 proposals is not (yet) available, even the outlines of the 1989–93 period show that this obligation had already been an integral part of similar “Language of Government” bills at least since 1990, and it has remained a key feature of OE bills ever since.

In addition to protecting and enhancing the role of English as the sole official language of the United States, several proposals tried to abolish certain existing minority language accommodations directly. The most frequent targets of OE bills and resolutions were:

- (a) bilingual education (i.e. the repeal of the Bilingual Education Act or BEA);
- (b) the abolition of bilingual election materials (i.e. the repeal of the relevant Voting Rights Act [VRA] amendments);
- (c) setting compulsory English language proficiency tests as a prerequisite to naturalization;
- (d) naturalization ceremonies to be conducted in English;
- (e) repeal of EO 13166 (the executive order from August 2000 aimed at “Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency” (LEP) by requiring Federal agencies to examine their services and implement a system to provide meaningful LEP-access to those services).

Theoretically, the most stringent OE bills are those that require the government to function as an English-language guardian and promoter plus also include all of the five goals mentioned above. Practically, it is not possible, though, due to the different timeframes

⁴¹ H.R.123, “Language of Government Act of 1993,” (Sec. 3(a) “Ch. 6, “Sec. 162), 103rd Cong. (1993). <https://www.congress.gov/103/bills/hr123/BILLS-103hr123ih.pdf>.

associated with some of these policies: e.g. EO 13166 had not been a problem prior to its signing by Bill Clinton in the summer of 2000; conversely, the repeal of the BEA disappeared from the agenda after the passage of the assimilation-oriented “No Child Left Behind” Act in 2001.

Nevertheless, there appeared one single proposal containing all of the goals above except the repeal of EO13166: it was H.R. 3333,⁴² the “Declaration of Official Language Act of 2001” (sponsored by Rep. Bob Stump [R-AZ]). The measure (which eventually reached a very modest 6.4% support) was introduced on November 16, 2001 – two months after 9/11.

As a tendency, prior to 2006 Senate bills had been more lenient than their House counterparts: none of them contained any references to any of the five goals above. Since 2009, the situation has changed: with the regular introduction of the “English Language Unity Act” (which is H.R. 997’s identical companion bill) in the upper chamber, the differences between the House and Senate OE proposal versions have started to fade: now the Senate versions also contain the English-only naturalization requirements and the idea of the Constitution-based proficiency test, too.

7.6 References to other languages

The OE proposals frequently make a distinction between indigenous (Native American, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian) languages and “foreign” languages: the intergenerational transmission of the former category has been a supported goal roughly since the passage of the Native American Languages Acts (NALA) in 1990 and 1992, whereas foreign language teaching (FLT) and learning (FLL) have generally been granted exemption from the scope of the proposed OE laws.

In addition to the substantive guarantees concerning indigenous languages and FLT / FLL, the symbolic praising of diversity is an almost ubiquitous phenomenon in the nonbinding “Findings” sections of OE pieces.

8. Summary and Conclusions: Dis/proving the assumptions

After analyzing the general legislative trends and particular, diachronic distributions of the language-related arguments surrounding the officialization issue in the United States, the following findings appear to crystallize around the hypotheses and assumptions listed in Section 5:

The perceived need to protect English is becoming an integral element of OE proposals. Pre-1999 OE bills and resolutions had tended to emphasize openly the threats to the *de facto* status of English but this type of explicitness is becoming extremely rare nowadays. On the other hand, despite the supposedly *laissez-faire* governmental attitude and the Republican opposition to the idea of “big government,” two-thirds of the OE bills of the past two decades would have empowered the government to act as the defender and promoter of the national language.

42 H.R.3333, “Declaration of Official Language Act of 2001,” 107th Cong. (2001). <https://www.congress.gov/107/bills/hr3333/BILLS-107hr3333ih.pdf>.

As OE is becoming a less controversial concept, similar proposals appear on the agenda of the Senate as well more frequently (and garner higher support). On the basis of the congress.gov corpus, it is difficult to determine exactly when OE became a mainstream idea. Since the first OE proposals were introduced in the Senate (and attracted relatively more cosponsors than their House counterparts) it is possible to argue that OE has always been – i.e. since its first emergence in the Senate in 1981 – a mainstream phenomenon. However, between 1999 and 2005 the issue had disappeared from the Senate agenda. After it resurfaced in 2005, the introduction of the “English Language Unity” Act (H.R. 997) in the Senate in 2009 (in the form of an identical companion bill) could be regarded as a symbolic step towards the general acceptance of English as the “common thread” that binds together the increasingly diverse American society.

Overall, Senate proposals are more moderate and less alarmist. This expectation has turned out to be true, although the differences between the House and Senate versions of OE bills started to disappear after 2009. Nevertheless, House support for the same OE bill has routinely exceeded two to three times the Senate popularity of the companion measure.

As it has turned out, 9/11 did not represent a particularly characteristic let alone cataclysmic watershed in OE legislation. As a matter of fact, more dramatic events had taken place 5-6 years before, immediately after the “Republican Revolution” of 1994, during the 104th Congress (see 7.2 and 7.4). The only direct consequence of 9/11 might have been the introduction of the harsh H.R. 3333 (107th Congress, 1st Session) (see 7.5). However, as a symbolic consequence, the strengthening of the English-intrinsic “common thread” notion may be regarded as a long-term effect of the September 11 trauma.

OE proposals also tried to ban strong (i.e. maintenance-oriented) forms of bilingual education (BE) in the past and have regularly attempted to curtail access-related minority language rights. These stipulations have routinely been present in the House bills for the past two decades, and they appeared in the Senate proposals as well in 2006, which development reinforces the previous observations concerning the general, assimilation-oriented shift in American language ideology as far as non-indigenous minority languages are concerned.

Contrary to the initial expectations based on previous research findings, with the exception of the “common thread” idea both the English-intrinsic and English-functional arguments are actually disappearing from OE proposals.

Consequently, it cannot be proved, either, that the overall (legislative) belief in the transformative power of English is growing. The “English empowers immigrants to become ‘responsible citizens and productive workers’” idea was strong during the 1995–96 Congressional sessions, but never since.

Both the “OE proposals support foreign language learning but not immigrant heritage language maintenance” and the “OE proposals support indigenous language maintenance” hypotheses appear to be correct.

OE proposals emphasize the civic republican interpretation of American identity (i.e. “America is a participatory democracy with vibrant communities and dutiful citi-

zens"). This hypothesis could be regarded as partly true: the "duty to learn English" theme features prominently in several proposals, mostly in the substantive, compulsory sections of the OE bills. Yet, exactly there we can find frequent references to the "opportunity" idea as well. In addition, the symbolic "Findings" sections of the majority of OE bills are replete with the incorporationist "nation of immigrants" image, which appears to be a permanent feature of the nonbinding sections of the Official English proposals, yet the substantive, enforceable parts of the very same legislative initiatives routinely assume a significantly more "problem-oriented" mindset regarding the role of immigrant languages in the nation-building process.

Bibliography

- Boroditsky, Lera. "Lost in Translation: New Cognitive Research Suggests that Language Profoundly Influences the Way People See the World." *The Wall Street Journal*, Saturday, July 24, 2010. <http://lera.ucsd.edu/papers/wsj.pdf>.
- Chen, Keith M. "The Effect of Language on Economic Behavior: Evidence from Savings Rates, Health Behaviors, and Retirement Assets." *American Economic Review* 103.2 (2013): 690–731. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.103.2.690>.
- Cobarrubias, Juan. "Ethical Issues in Status Planning." In *Progress in Language Planning. International Perspectives*, edited by Juan Cobarrubias and Joshua A. Fishman, 41–85. Berlin/New York/Amsterdam: Mouton, 1983.
- Congress.gov. Accessed August 5, 2017. <https://www.congress.gov/>.
- Crawford, James. *At War with Diversity: US Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2000.
- Czeglédi, Sándor. "A multikulturalizmus alkonya? Nyelvi ideológiák és a hivatalos nyelv kérdése az Egyesült Államokban." [The Decline of Multiculturalism? Language Ideologies and the Official English Question in the US]. In *Anglisztika és amerikanisztika. Magyar kutatások az ezredfordulón*, edited by Tibor Frank and Krisztina Károly, 247–55. Budapest: Tinta, 2009.
- . "The 'Image of English' in State-level Official English Proposals." In *Languages in Contact* (Vol. 1), edited by Piotr P. Chruszczewski, John R. Rickford, Katarzyna Buczek, Aleksandra R. Knapik, and Jacek Mianowski, 45–61. Wrocław: Wyższa Szkoła Filologiczna we Wrocławiu & Polska Akademia Nauk, 2014.
- Cutshall, Sandy. "Why We Need 'The Year of Languages.'" *Educational Leadership* 62.4 (2004/2005): 20–23.
- Galindo, René. "Language Wars: The ideological dimensions of the debates on bilingual education." *Bilingual Research Journal* 21.2–3 (1997): 163–201.
- Google. "Privacy Policy." Privacy & Terms. Last modified April 17, 2017. <https://www.google.com/policies/privacy/>.
- H.Con.Res.127, "A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of the Congress that the English language is the official language of the United States," 99th Cong. (1985).

- H.Con.Res.129, "A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the English language is the official language of the United States," 100th Cong. (1987).
- Heyes, Cressida. "Identity Politics." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University (Summer 2016). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/identity-politics>.
- H.R.123, "Language of Government Act of 1993," 103rd Cong. (1993). <https://www.congress.gov/103/bills/hr123/BILLS-103hr123ih.pdf>.
- H.R.123 EH, "Bill Emerson English Language Empowerment Act of 1996," 104th Cong. (1996). <https://www.congress.gov/104/bills/hr123/BILLS-104hr123eh.pdf>.
- H.R.739, "Declaration of Official Language Act," 104th Cong. (1995). <https://www.congress.gov/104/bills/hr739/BILLS-104hr739ih.pdf>.
- H.R.997, "English Language Unity Act of 2003," 108th Cong. (2003). <https://www.congress.gov/108/bills/hr997/BILLS-108hr997ih.pdf>.
- H.R.997, "English Language Unity Act of 2015," 114th Cong. (2015). <https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr997/BILLS-114hr997ih.pdf>.
- H.R.1984, "English Language Unity Act of 2001," 107th Cong. (2001). <https://www.congress.gov/107/bills/hr1984/BILLS-107hr1984ih.pdf>.
- H.R.3333, "Declaration of Official Language Act of 2001," 107th Cong. (2001). <https://www.congress.gov/107/bills/hr3333/BILLS-107hr3333ih.pdf>.
- Irvine, Judith T. "Language Ideology." *Oxford Bibliographies* (January 2012). doi: 10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0012.
- Linton, April. *Spanish for Americans? The Politics of Bilingualism in the United States*. PhD diss., University of Washington, 2002.
- Macías, Reynaldo F. "Language Politics and the Sociolinguistic Historiography of Spanish in the United States." In *Language in Action: New Studies of Language in Society Essays in Honor of Roger W. Shuy*, edited by Joy K. Peyton, Peg Griffin, Walt Wolfram, and Ralph Fasold, 52–83. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2000.
- Phillipson, Robert. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- ProEnglish. "Official English Map." <https://proenglish.org/official-english-map-2>.
- Schiffman, Harold. *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Schildkraut, Deborah J. Press "ONE" for English: Language Policy, Public Opinion, and American Identity. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Schmidt, Ronald, Sr. *Language Policy and Identity Politics in the United States*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.
- S.Con.Res.43, "A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of the Congress that the English language is the official language of the United States," 99th Cong. (1985).
- S.J.Res.72, "A joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States with respect to proceedings and documents in the English language," 97th Cong. (1981).
- Spolsky, Bernard. *Language Policy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . *Language Management*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

- Wiley, Terrence G. "Continuity and Change in the Function of Language Ideologies in the United States." In *Ideology, Politics and Language Policies. Focus on English*, edited by Thomas Ricento, 67–85. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000.
- —. "Diversity, Super-Diversity, and Monolingual Language Ideology in the United States: Tolerance or Intolerance?" *Review of Research in Education* 38 (March 2014): 1–32. doi: 10.3102/0091732X13511047.