

Speaking in tongues

English as official language can unify nation

Diversity in language part of U.S. culture



JILL RILEY

However, printing out government forms and public notices would not be the biggest expense. There is a debate whether immigrants have the right to learn in their native language. If all immigrants have the privilege of attending American schools and learning in their language, schools have a huge job ahead of them. Already, the shortage of good teachers is a problem in some areas of the country. What would it be like if it was necessary to find good teachers that speak several languages? This task seems unattainable, not to mention expensive.

Pushing for English as the official language of the United States may seem to advocate everyone being the same, but it does not. Immigrants who want to utilize their old language and way of life as a secondary culture can do so, just as immigrants have done for thousands of years. Those who wish to move permanently to the United States should be required to learn and use the language of the United States.

"The first duty of anyone who wants to become a citizen of a country is to learn the language of that country," Sen. S.I. Hayakawa said, in *Citizens Informer*. Hayakawa, of Japanese descent, is an author of a widely-used textbook on the English language and initiated a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the United States in 1981.

While it may seem that adopting English as our official language is unnecessary considering the country has run for 200 years without it, it is not. Americans are fortunate to live in a country with much to offer. The most Americans can do for their country is to remain unified and proud of their home, which would show others that maybe the idea of a melting pot can work after all.

Jill Riley is a senior journalism major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

It is difficult to believe that in these times of tolerance and diversity there still exist supporters of out-dated "English only" laws.

"English only" laws in the United States first appeared in the '60s as a result of a sharp increase in immigration, mostly from Latin America. Many Americans felt threatened by the influx of people and began to push for the government to make English the official language of the United States. In the 40 years since, American society has changed radically, and opposition and discrimination against immigrants dropped. However, 16 states still carry "English only" laws, a scar remaining from when racism was widespread. More alarming still is that an English Language Amendment has been gaining momentum as immigration issues have made the news.

"English only" laws would remove courtroom translations, prohibit multilingual ballots and prohibits the use of foreign languages in government agencies — basically an act to bury all glimpses to other cultures.

Such an amendment would breed ignorance and strengthen stereotypes of immigrants and non-English speaking citizens. If the following generations of Americans grow up with no contact with other languages, it will instill in them a sense of elitism over those who arrive from abroad and have not mastered the language yet.

The United States has a reputation as role model for what a modern nation should

be, both technologically and socially. Making English the official language would be nothing more than an unnecessary nationalist decision that will portray the country as old-fashioned.

Advocates of "English only" argue that since legal immigrants must pass an English mastery test, illegal immigrants would become discouraged and their numbers will decrease. This line of reasoning has two major flaws. Immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for over 20 years and those over 50 years old do not have to meet the language requirement. These citizens would lose many rights if ballots and other forms were not in various languages.

Many newly arrived immigrants do not know English and others have trouble mastering the language no matter how much they try. If "English only" laws were in effect, these citizens may not be able to get proper care in a hospital and would struggle needlessly if translations on public transport were removed.

Another reason the movement to push English is growing is because many people misunderstand the objectives of bilingual education in schools. Bilingual education is not meant to pamper immigrants and let them live their lives exactly as before.

Moving to another culture, it is extremely difficult to adjust, especially for children. Instead of throwing them into a classroom and expecting them to learn English is ludicrous.

It is much more effective to have immigrant students begin study in their native language and gradually get accustomed to their new lifestyle. They would be more comfortable with their surroundings and could learn about the culture from classmates who have been around longer.

It is true that the world is getting smaller. The right attitude to take is to accept more languages and remain open minded. English is the dominant language in the United States, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, there is something wrong with pushing other languages away.

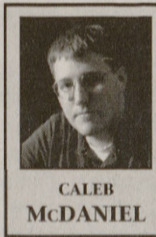
It would be a terrible regression if Americans revert from an attitude of understanding for immigrants to an attitude of ignorance.

Mariano Castillo is a sophomore international studies major

College apathy exaggerated

Low political interest speaks bad of politics, not students

Apparently, mainstream adult America loves to bemoan the alleged apathy of Generation X. The stereotypical image of the average college student as little more than a tree sloth in cargo pants has become disturbingly common these days. It has reached its most disgusting level in a currently popular commercial being seen on movie screens across the country.



CALEB MCDANIEL

The ad features two young women staring catatonically at a lava lamp, and, judging from the stupid grins spread across their faces, being unspeakably entertained. But just before the audience half-expects to see drool drop from their open mouths, the name of an online textbook company splashes into view. A sardonic voice sneers that the Website can provide college students with the intelligent reading "they so desperately need."

This advertisement is not an isolated example of the belief that the favorite pastime of twenty-somethings is being brain dead. (Consider Exhibit B: the marketing genius behind Old Navy's Performance Fleece campaign.)

Nor is the myth that college students are apathetic confined to corporate America. In fact, it is even more popular in Washington, D.C., where the observation that young people seldom exercise their rights to vote has become less interesting than Monica Lewinsky's confession that she seldom exercised — before Jenny Craig.

Two things must be made very clear in this morass of misconceptions. First, it is true that young citizens have a noted low interest in politics. But second, this fact says something disturbing about politics, not about college students.

In reality, the youth of America are not slackers who could care less about the world they live in. We watched Care Bears growing up. Captain Planet? He's our hero.

And scholarly research provides more concrete evidence that students are more involved than ever in community service, school activities and political activism. They may not vote much, but they definitely do much.

Perhaps America's adults have too quickly concluded that low voter turnout among college-aged citizens can be blamed on the popularity of lava lamps. The other possibility is the more likely one — political apathy is not the symptom of a general apathy. Instead, young people simply see politics in particular as a waste of time for their usually inexhaustible energies.

A poll reported in The New York Times on Jan. 12 suggested this conclusion. The survey showed 73 percent of college students polled had done volunteer work like helping the homeless and mentoring underprivileged children. Sixty-four percent said they would consider spending some of their careers in education, and 63 percent said they could work for a nonprofit organization. But only 25 percent of the students said they would consider time in politics.

The disparity between such figures provides key insight into

the way college students think. They think helping others is important, but they do not think government is helping. They want to change the world, but they believe the way to do it is not as simple as changing presidents or becoming politicians.

But these findings should not be interpreted as pessimistic or cynical. The poll also found that 41 percent of the students, as opposed to 27 percent of the general public, trusted the federal government to do the right thing at least most of the time. Politics has the tacit approval of young people. It simply fails to get their full-fledged support.

What this study points out is the important distinction

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between failing to be actively involved in politics and failing to be active in anything. Most of the respondents stressed that they would probably be more interested in politics if they were not so busy with other more worthy causes. 24-year-old Kristin Hightower's admission that volunteering is "an influence in a more immediate way, whereas in politics it's a little slower in getting to the individual" typified a prevailing sentiment in the responses.

The lesson of these kinds of confessions is twofold. First, a lack of interest in politics does not translate into an inordinate fascination with lava lamps. There is no reason to weep and wail over the political laziness of college students, who are, for the most part, extremely energetic. In many places, they are enthusiastic activists, zealous for causes as various as the anti-sweatshop movement and inner-city mentoring. Compare the average attendance at meetings of College Republicans or Aggie Democrats with the turnout at Big Event, and the priorities of many students will become immediately evident.

This realization teaches a second lesson: the way to lure young people back into politics is not by trying to make government "cool" again — by gilding government with MTV glitz.

Government must simply be relevant again. If leaders would step forward and convince students that their convictions are shared in the halls of power, students would see a reason to care about what goes on there. Politicians who do things that are well worth doing will find allies, not enemies, in young people.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

MAIL CALL

President Bowen should stay

In response to Jan. 19 editorial.

Dr. Bowen's pledge to resign if the administration were found responsible for the collapse of bonfire is indeed a noble gesture and raises the bar for personal responsibility in leadership.

I would expect nothing less from a man of Dr. Bowen's character and leadership experience.

However, this course of action will cause more harm than good. Dr. Bowen and the rest of the administration have done a tremendous job in helping this campus heal after a horrible tragedy.

While no one can ever erase the scars of the tragedy, there is no one more experienced or with more first hand knowledge of this campus who can continue the healing process.

The Bonfire Commission will most likely recommend corrective measures to help prevent future accidents.

Dr. Bowen should take the lead in implementing these initiatives and setting higher standards of safety if bonfire continues.

This tragedy has already taken twelve valuable assets to this University — it will only be compounded if Dr. Bowen resigns

and takes his unique experience with him.

Tase Bailey
Class of '99

'Sensitivity training' draws commentary

In response to Nicholas Roznovsky's Jan. 20 column.

The Constitution guarantees the right of free speech to all Americans, even if what they say may be unpopular. It does not say, however, that people have the right to not be offended by anything they see or hear in the media. Rucker's comments were stupid, obnoxious, and offensive. They speak for themselves.

Ignore him. What he said will not take away civil rights and will not change immigration laws. People in this country are entirely too hypersensitive.

John Rucker had every right to say what he did. People have every right to think he's an idiot for his remarks. Leave it at that.

Dave McCaughrin
Class of '99

The movement for eradication of intolerance that has recently tak-

en this country by storm goes against the principles of which this country was founded and by which it is regarded.

Intolerance is defined as being "unwilling to grant equal freedom of expression." By blasting John Rucker's "intolerance" and whom ever else's, one hypocritically commits intolerance. It is a completely relative term when used as society does today. Who sets the bounds for what we should tolerate as the years roll on?

Until we can listen to what every one has to say (as protected by the 1st Amendment) without violence or opposition, including bigots and racists we will always be intolerant.

We are guaranteed the right to this intolerance, and I would argue that none of the great religious, political, economic, and social changes that have made this country great would have never taken place if not for intolerance. The simple fact is everything that makes this world great is motivated by intolerance for views of another, and rightly so.

If we all believed in the same things this world would be a boring place. Everyone in America should support first Amendment freedoms, including the right to say intolerant things.

Keith Franks
Class of '00



Mike Luckovich

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