

11 The stranger within the gates

“It was all my fault, your Majesty,” said Jack, looking rather foolish. “I thought we must surely speak different languages, since we came from different countries.”

“This should be a warning to you never to think,” returned the Scarecrow severely.

Frank L. Baum, *The Land of Oz* (1904)

The 1990 census established that the United States is a nation of some 248 million persons, of whom 2,015,143 are Native American and 205,501 Hawai’ian. Thus it is an obvious and inescapable truth that the majority of people residing in the US are immigrants, or the descendents of immigrants, the greatest portion of whom came of their own will, while others came in chains. We are a nation of immigrants, but having made the transition and established ourselves, we have a strong urge to be protective of what is here; we talk at great length about closing the door behind us. At times, we have acted on this impulse:

- In the 1840s during a depression, mobs hostile to immigrant Irish Catholics burned down a convent in Boston.
- Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, one of our first immigration laws, to exclude all people of Chinese origin.
- In 1942, 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent had their homes and other property confiscated, and were interned in camps until the end of the Second World War. At the same time, many Jews fleeing Nazi Germany during that war were excluded under regulations enacted in the 1920s.

(American Civil Liberties Union 1996)

Language often becomes the focus of debate when these complex issues of nationality, responsibility, and privilege are raised. English, held up as the symbol of the successfully assimilated immigrant, is promoted as the one and only possible language of a unified and healthy nation. Using rhetoric which is uncomfortably reminiscent of discussions of race in fascist

regimes, a California Assemblyman notes the multilingual commerce in his home town with considerable trepidation: "you can go down and apply for a driver's license test entirely in Chinese. You can apply for welfare today entirely in Spanish. The supremacy of the English language is under attack" (report on pending English Only legislation in California, CBS Evening News, October 1986).

In considering the history of multilingualism and public fears around it, Ferguson and Heath noted that "whenever speakers [of other languages] have been viewed as politically, socially, or economically threatening, their language has become a focus for arguments in favor of both restrictions of their use and imposition of Standard English" (1981: 10). This is illustrated by the history of German use in the US, a language (and people) which particularly irritated Benjamin Franklin, who expressed his fears in a letter dated 1753.

Those [Germans] who come hither are generally the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation, and as Ignorance is often attended with Credulity when Knavery would mislead it, and with Suspicion when Honesty would set it right; and as few of the English understand the German Language, and so cannot address them either from the Press or Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain. . . . Not being used to Liberty, they know not how to make modest use of it. . . . Advertisements, intended to be general are now printed in Dutch [German] and English, the Signs in our Streets have inscriptions in both languages, and in some places only German: They begin of late to make all their Bonds and other legal Writings in their own Language, which (though I think it ought not to be) are allowed good in our Courts, where the German Business so increases that there is continued need of Interpreters . . . they will soon outnumber us, that all the advantages we have will not, in My Opinion, be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious.

(cited in Crawford 1992: 18-19)

If this kind of commentary is reminiscent of current-day fears focused on Asian and Latino populations, then the reasons for the shift are seen in part in numbers, as illustrated in Figure 11.1.

The relationship between shifting powerbases and the public consciousness of language use often focuses on legislation of one type or another, as in this news report on a vote to repeal an English Only law in Florida:

In reality, Miami has been a bilingual city for a long time. The Miami Herald is printed every day in both English and Spanish. Automatic teller machines here offer both languages. And whether you're at the airport . . . or on the streets, you constantly hear English and Spanish. But after the Mariel boatlift of 1980 brought thousands of Cubans here,

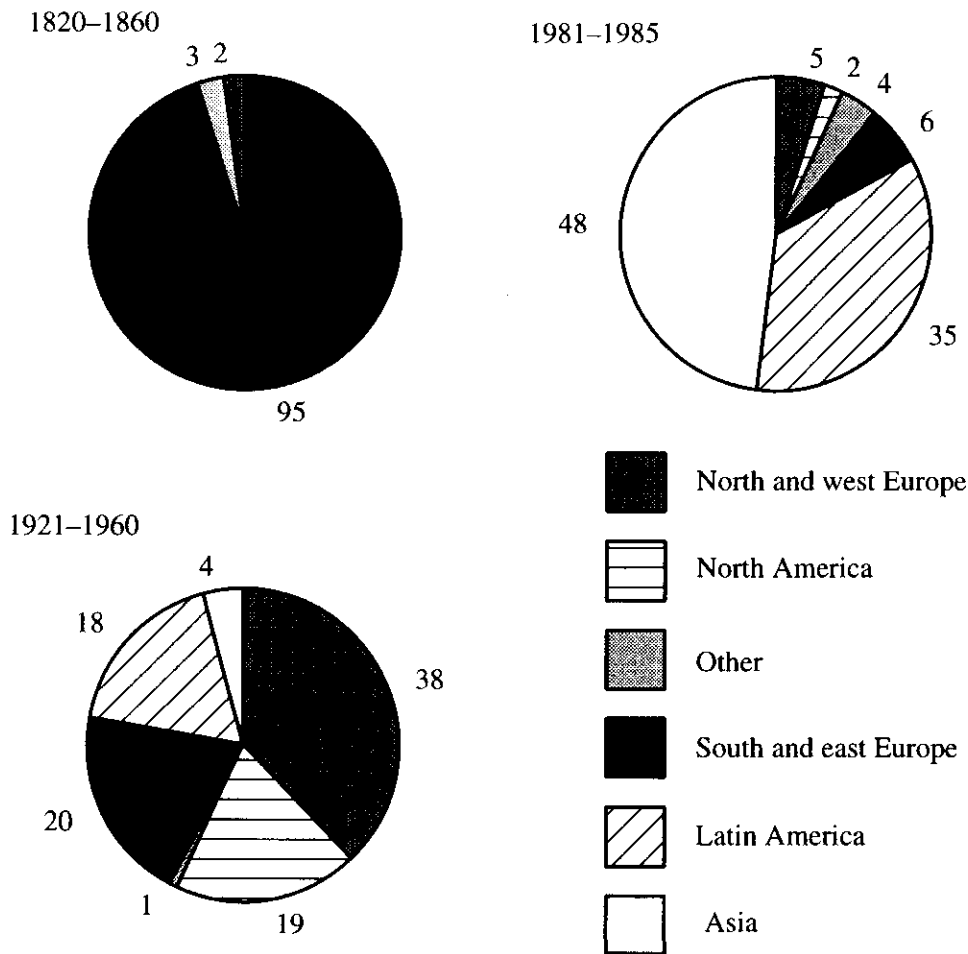


Figure 11.1 Legal immigrants (percentage) coming into the US in three time periods, by stated region of last residence

Source: US Government (1996) "Immigration to the US: the unfinished story." *Population Bulletin*. Washington DC: Population Reference Bureau, vol. 41.4, p. 16

voters overwhelmingly passed a law prohibiting the use of any language in official county business except English. For example, if you want to testify at a commission hearing, question your water bill, or make a formal complaint, it must be in English.

(ABC Evening News, May 14, 1993)

While most of the public debate around languages has to do with a deceptively simple question of *Which language?* here I want to look more carefully beyond that issue to the underlying one. When immigrants become bilingual (as happened, for example, in the case of the majority of the German immigrant population), the question is no longer which language, but *Which English?* or more specifically in this chapter *Which Accent?*

Table 11.1 Language spoken at home by persons 5 years or older

<i>Language</i>	<i>No. of people</i>
English only	198,600,798
Spanish or Spanish Creole	17,345,064
French or French Creole	1,930,404
German	1,547,987
Chinese	1,319,462
Italian	1,308,648
Other and unspecified languages	1,023,614
Tagalog	843,251
Polish	723,483
Korean	626,478
Other Indo-European language	578,076
Indic	555,126
Vietnamese	507,069
Portuguese or Portuguese Creole	430,610
Japanese	427,657
Greek	388,260
Arabic	355,150
Native North American languages	331,758
Other Slavic language	270,863
Russian	241,798
Other West Germanic language	232,461
Yiddish	213,064
Scandinavian	198,904
South Slavic	170,449
Hungarian	147,902
Hmong-Khmer	127,441

Source: 1990 US census data. Database: C90STF3C1

WHO HAS A FOREIGN ACCENT?

The census bureau estimates that 22,568,000 persons or 8.7 percent of the population of the United States was foreign-born in 1994, a figure which is nearly double the number of foreign-born in 1970 (4.8 percent).¹ A total of 31,844,979 persons – many of these not foreign-born – reported that they spoke a language other than English in the home, as is seen in Table 11.1. We note that this list does not specify a single language from the continent of Africa beyond the Arabic languages of the north. It must be assumed that as immigration from the mid- and southern African nations is limited, speakers of languages such as Swahili and Zulu are subsumed under the category “Other and unspecified languages.”

If the purpose is to come to an approximation of who speaks English with a foreign accent, it is useful to have some accounting of proficiency in English. The census bureau attempts to access this information by simply asking the question. The published results are conflated into four groups: native English speakers who have no other language in the home

Table 11.2 (Non-English) language spoken at home and ability to speak English, by age

Age	Language spoken	Evaluation of English-language skills: census count		
		"Very well"	"Well"	"Not well" or "Not well at all"
5-17	Spanish	2,530,779	993,417	643,457
	Asian or Pacific Island	455,339	224,821	135,430
	Other	948,573	262,442	128,676
18-64	Spanish	6,105,722	2,589,195	3,425,937
	Asian or Pacific Island	1,496,466	1,048,835	755,324
	Other	4,312,500	1,315,685	658,210
65+	Spanish	398,568	223,350	434,639
	Asian or Pacific Island	99,461	82,351	173,594
	Other	1,515,069	570,205	316,934

Source: 1990 US census data. Database: C90STF3C1

(this would include, for example, people who have limited second-language ability through schooling);² and then three universes, as seen in Table 11.2: speakers of Spanish, speakers of Asian and Pacific Rim languages, and speakers of other languages which do not fall into any of the previous groups. This last group must include a great variety of languages, from those spoken in Africa to Scandinavia and middle and eastern European.

A graphic representation of the 18-65-year-old group from this table is given in Figure 11.2. Here we see that there is in fact a differential in the individual's assessment of ability to speak English according to national-origin subgrouping. In all three groups, the majority of non-native English speakers claim a very good command of their second language. The differential between "very good" and "not well at all" is smallest for the Asian-languages group, which is in turn the smallest of the three groups overall.

We note especially that there are four million people in the "Other language" category who call their own English "very good" and another million or so of this same group who find their English not very good at all. This mysterious "Other language" group is in fact larger than the Asian-languages group. While this profusion of numbers still does not provide an exact count of how many people speak English with a foreign accent, it does raise two crucial points.

First, millions of people resident in the US are not native speakers of English, and use a language other than English in their homes and personal lives. As established in Chapter 2, any individual who takes on the task of learning a second or third language in adulthood will have some degree of L2 accent, a degree which is not readily predictable and

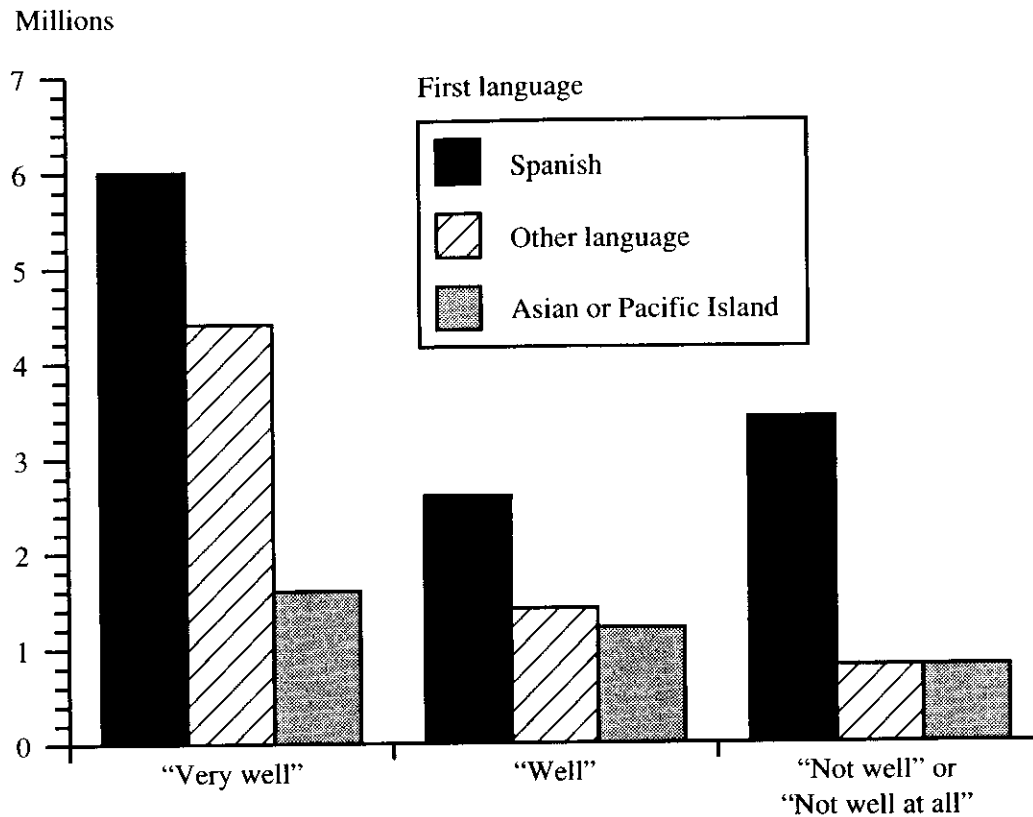


Figure 11.2 Persons between 18 and 65 years who claim a first language other than English, and their evaluation of their English-language skills

Source: 1990 census

will not correlate, overall, to education, intelligence, or motivation. Thus there is a large population of US residents who speak with an L2 accent.

Second, there are preconceived notions about non-native speakers of English which have repercussions even in the way we count their numbers and talk about them. The US Census Bureau distinguishes between Spanish, Asian, and other languages. It is from this departure point that we look at the way foreign-language groups and the language stereotypes associated with those groups are used to classify – and often to dismiss – individual needs and rights.

FROM BALI HAI TO NEW DELHI: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ASIAN

We have seen that the non-south US tends to conceptualize all 25 million southerners as a linguistically and culturally homogenous monolith, in spite of the proximity between the north and south, and in spite of a great deal of common ground in historical and cultural terms. Thus it will

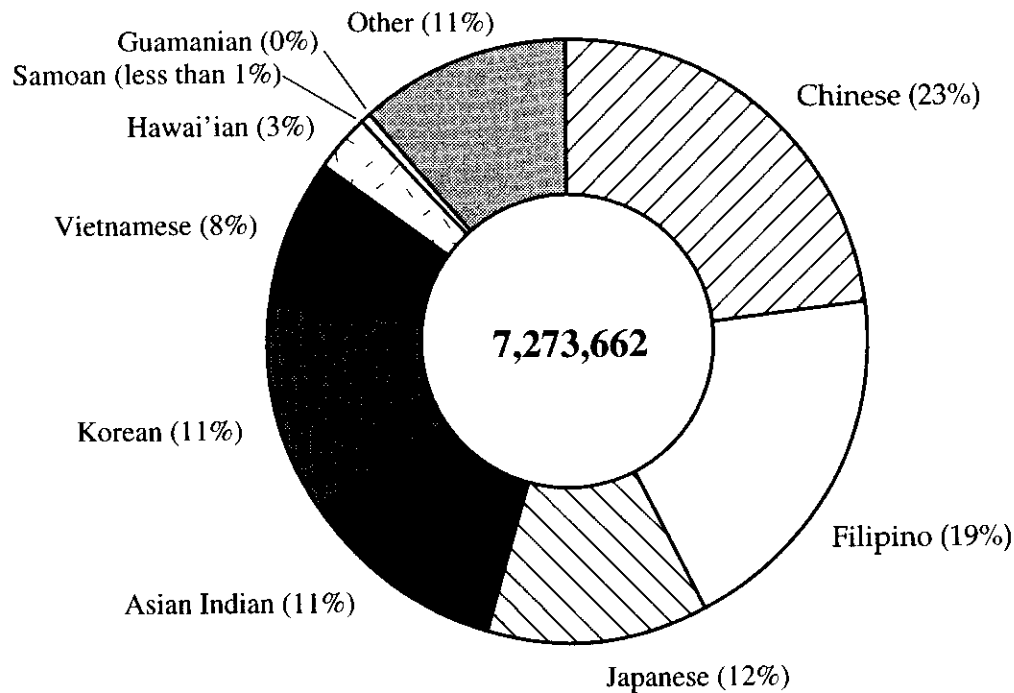


Figure 11.3 Breakdown of "Asian or Pacific Islander" category in the 1990 US census, by national origin

not be surprising that the urge to lean on stereotype is magnified when immigrant groups come into consideration.

The Census Bureau lists a figure of almost 7.3 million Asians in the US population. Figure 11.3 breaks down this figure, according to census data, into more specific national origins. In examining this chart, it immediately becomes apparent that even in its more specific form, the subgrouping 'Asian' is internally immensely complex and diverse. It might be argued that generalizations are necessary when dealing with this kind of data, for as seen in Table 11.3, the nations of Asia and the Pacific are numerous. In linguistic terms, even this breakdown is deceiving.³

We take for example India, a nation of 844 million persons which recognizes fifteen official national languages each with a large number of dialects. India is linguistically complex, especially when viewed in comparison to the US, but it is not the exception to the rule. It is not even extreme in the larger global view. We consider China (population 1.1 billion), with fifty-five official minority nationalities and eight major languages in addition to literally hundreds of other languages from Mongolian to Hmong; or Fiji with a mere 740,000 residents spread out over 7,000 square miles of islands on which fifteen languages (in addition to Fijian) are spoken.

While it would be an unreasonable burden on the Census Bureau to make note of each and every world language spoken in the US, the great

Table 11.3 Nations of Asia and the Pacific

<i>Asian nations</i>	<i>Pacific nations</i>
Afghanistan	American Samoa
Bangladesh	Australia
Bhutan	Belau
Brunei	Cook Islands
Cambodia	Easter Island
China	Fiji
Hong Kong	French Polynesia
India	Guam
Indonesia	Hawi'ian Islands
Japan	Kiribati
Kazakhstan	Marshall Islands
North Korea	Micronesia
South Korea	Midway Islands
Kyrghyzstan	Nauru
Laos	New Caledonia
Macau	New Zealand
Malaysia	Niue
Maldives	Norfolk Island
Mongolia	Northern Mariana Islands
Myanmar	Papua New Guinea
Nepal	Pitcairn
Pakistan	Samoa
Philippines	Solomon Islands
Russia-Asian	Tokelau
Singapore	Tonga
Sri Lanka	Tuvalu
Taiwan	Vanuatu
Tajikistan	Wake Island
Thailand	Wallis and Futuna
Turkmenistan	
Uzbekistan	
Vietnam	

disparity between *how* we make official note – what we see when we look outward at the majority of the world's population – and the *reality* of those nations, bears some consideration. What are the repercussions of the fact that we group together persons as different as the native people of Hawai'i – US citizens with a history which should be very familiar to us – with Cambodians who sought political asylum in the US and middle-class exchange students from New Delhi? How can policies which do not distinguish between the immigration patterns and educational and language backgrounds of such disparate peoples be functional?

And why do we do this? Is expediency the single most viable answer? Or is it simply that when it comes to language, we hear a single "Asian" accent?

An obvious but disturbing answer is that we feel justified to group so many distinct nations and peoples and languages together because they all look alike to "real" Americans, to European Americans. *Asian* evokes an association not to national origin, but to race. In Chapter 5, we looked briefly at one example of how Asian stereotypes are used in entertainment film as a kind of shorthand, in the 1993 film *Falling Down*:

*The proprietor, a middle-aged ASIAN, reads a Korean newspaper ...
the Asian has a heavy accent ...*

DE-FENS: ... You give me seventy "fie" cents back for the phone ...
What is a fie? There's a "V" in the word. Fie-vuh. Don't they have
"v's" in China?

ASIAN: Not Chinese, I am Korean.

D-FENS: Whatever. What difference does that make? You come over
here and take my money and you don't even have the grace to learn
to speak my language ...

(Smith 1992: 7-8)

Here, the script uses the generic term "Asian" in a way that echoes the exchange between fictional characters. Neither the script writers nor D-Fens, the white-collar worker on the edge of his sanity, make a distinction between Chinese and Korean (although it is interesting that the shopowner is *reading*, and reading Korean rather than "Asian" or, perhaps more significantly, English).

The Korean has committed three sins in the eyes of the customer: he has "come over here" and, having immigrated, he "takes my money" by establishing himself in a social position in which he has economic capital and goods to dispense. These sins are compounded by the fact that the shopowner "doesn't have the grace to learn to speak my language."

Of course, the evidence is just the opposite of what the customer is claiming: *the shopowner does speak English*. He speaks English well enough to get into a rousing argument with the customer, to assert his rights as owner of the shop, and to ask the customer to leave. But, crucially, he does not speak English to the customer's satisfaction, because he speaks English with an *Asian* accent. Here we are reminded of Heath's characterization of situations in which non-native speakers of English gain social or economic currency: "their language has become a focus for arguments in favor of both restrictions of their use and imposition of Standard English" (1981: 10).

Non-native English-speaking Asian Americans, as a large and diverse group, experience something in common, regardless of their economic status, education, or national origin: there is a special stigma attached to their presence which is externalized in reactions to the way they speak English. So conditioned are we to expect a different world view, a different accent, that we hear one where none is present. This was demonstrated

in the Florida study of university student comprehension of lecture material (see Chapter 6). Individuals experience this regularly, as shown in the following examples.

A young woman of Asian Indian family, but a native and monolingual speaker of English, relates a story in which a middle-aged man in a music store is unable to help her when she asks for a recently released Depeche Mode tape (Kapoor 1993). "You'll have to speak slower because I didn't understand you because of your accent," he tells her. She is understandably hurt and outraged: "I have no discernible accent. I do, however, have long dark hair and pleasantly colored brown skin. I suppose this outward appearance of mine constitutes enough evidence to conclude I had, indeed, just jumped off the boat and into the store." The pain of this experience is real whether or not a foreign accent is present. In this case, the harm was real, but without repercussions which affected the young woman in a material way. Others are more unlucky.

In February of 1992, at the Department of the Treasury building on Main Street in San Francisco, a Treasury official called down to the lobby with a question. Irritated by the quality of response that he or she received, this official made a formal complaint of "communication difficulties" based on Filipino accent. He or she did not provide the name of the security guard responsible for the poor service. Subsequent to this report, the General Services Authority directed the subcontractor who supplied the security guards to remove *all five Filipino agents* who had been on duty that evening, because of "language barriers."⁴ The men removed from their positions were not given regular employment at another site, but were used as fill-ins on a variety of assignments, which caused them significant financial and other problems.

While we saw in Chapter 8 that this kind of treatment is not unusual, the reaction of the men in question was quite remarkable. As a group, they sued their employer under Title VII, "to restore our honor and dignity." For Filipino Americans, the charge of insufficient or inadequate English is especially stinging, as English is one of the primary languages of education in their homeland, where in the 1975 census more than fifteen thousand claimed it as a first language and in 1980 almost half a million listed it as a second language (Grimes 1992). The five men in question had lived in the US for most of their lives, and their public comments on the case left no doubt that the harm was as much emotional as economic: "It was a slap to my face," "It deeply hurt my feelings."

In fact, the attorneys for the security guards established to the court's satisfaction that they were qualified and experienced workers, with between three and nine years on the job without any complaints about their language abilities. The court found for the security guards, but a question was never raised: how was it that an anonymous official could bring about the removal of five men with solid work histories, solely on the basis of an unsubstantiated claim of an irritating and distracting

accent? If the guards in question had been Italian or Norwegian speakers, would the same progression of events be imaginable?

The issue is not so much accent as "otherness," as illustrated in a series of court cases involving Asian American English:

Managerial level employee [LS] told Xieng he was not being promoted because he could not speak "American."

(*Xieng* 1991: Appeal Court Opinion: 5)

the complainant's supervisor had removed her because of concern about the effect of her accent on the "image" of the IRS, not any lack in either communication or technical abilities.

(*Park*: EEOC press release, June 8, 1988)

Our relationship to the Far East and Pacific is shaped to a great degree by the facts of nineteenth-century colonialism, in which the US, young in comparative terms, followed the European model in the way that smaller nations were overcome and dominated politically, economically, and socially. We have a history of dealing with the Asian world as a warehouse of persons and goods available to suit our own purpose and fill our own needs, a practice justified by the supposition that those people are inherently weaker. Because they are also cast as manipulative and wont to use natural wiles and treacherous means to achieve their own ends, we are able to rationalize aggressions toward them. Thus the primary male Asian stereotype is of an intelligent, clever, but crafty and unreliable person. A secondary stereotype grows out of the mystification of Asia, the mysterious "Orient" where hardworking but simple people ply their crafts and study arcane philosophies, attaining wisdom and a spirituality specific to their race. We are uncomfortable with Asians unless they correspond to the stereotypes we have created for them.

There is a great deal of affection for Charlie Chan, the wiser Chinese detective employed by the Honolulu Police Department (played first by the Swedish-born Warner Oland and then by Sidney Toler, both in "yellow face"), who dispensed calm fortune-cookie wisdom and always solved the crime. His sons, played by Keye Luke and Victor Sen Yung (both native Chinese), provided the comic foil. As Americanized second-generation types, they played the gap between expectation and reality for all it is worth. While the actors portraying Charlie Chan contrived Chinese accents, the sons (both of whom came to the US as very small children) spoke English as a primary language and with a markedly urban discourse style ("Pop!"). In a similar way, the 1937 film of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* also used white actors to play the leads, to the satisfaction of reviewers who found that the main character met (stereotypical) expectations: "Physically, Muni becomes satisfactorily celestial, imbued with racial characteristics" (*Variety*, January 29, 1937: 3).

Female Asian stereotypes focus on submissiveness, beauty, a need for

strong male direction, and a talent for tragedy (the opera *Madam Butterfly* and the popular musical *Flower Drum Song* provide good examples of these stereotypes). While Asian stereotypes have evolved in this century for males (overachieving in education and business, whether the business be a green grocery or computer-chip research and development), female images seem to be more resilient.

In Chang-Rae Lee's critically acclaimed 1995 novel, *Native Speaker*, a Korean American narrator called Henry Park first tells the story of how he came to fall in love with his wife, an American who is of interest to him not just as a woman, but because as a speech pathologist she works with children who are non-native speakers of English, helping them to acquire that difficult language. "People like me are always thinking about still having an accent," he tells her in their first discussion. What he does not say, but which is clear from real-life experiences of people like Ms. Kapoor, is that people "like" Henry Park must always be thinking about having an accent, because that is what is expected of them: to be different, and to externalize that difference with language.

Caught between his own and public expectations, Henry Park can please no one. When his wife leaves to travel without him, and perhaps forever, her note of explanation is a simple list of descriptors for him, which include

illegal alien
emotional alien
Yellow peril: neo-American.

Later he finds another scrap of paper with a definition of himself on it that she could not quite include on the final list: *False speaker of language.*

Like African Americans, Asian Americans have more and more difficult hurdles to leap before they can transcend stereotype and be accepted as individuals. Accent, when it acts in part as a marker of race, takes on special power and significance. For many in the African American community there is little resistance to the language subordination process, in part because the implied promises of linguistic assimilation – while obviously overstated – are nevertheless seductive, *precisely because the threats are very real.* The seduction of perfect English, of belonging absolutely to the mainstream culture of choice, is one that is hard to resist for Asian Americans as well.

It is easy to establish that language variation is linked to race, and more specifically that foreign-language accent is linked to national origin. But once accomplished, what is to be done with such a collection of facts? Perhaps the only realistic thing is to ask harder questions of ourselves. Discrimination against Asian Americans which centers on language, but which has more in actual terms to do with race, is an established practice. How is it that in a nation so proud of its civil rights legislation and democratic ideals, people can so easily use *accent* to exclude, to limit discourse,

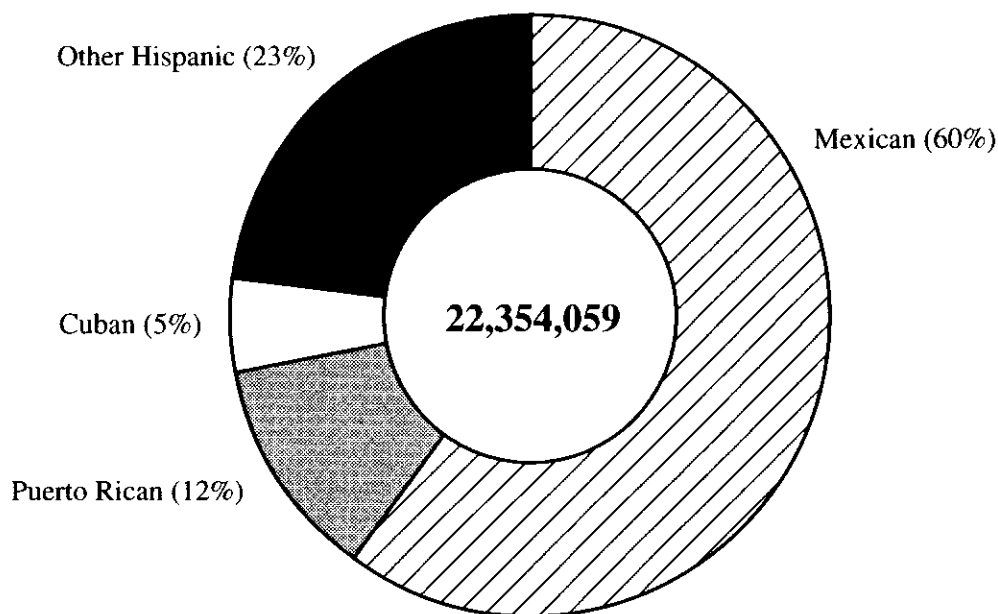


Figure 11.4 Hispanics counted in the 1990 US census

and to discredit other – very specific – voices, because they simply do not sound white enough?

It is necessary and important at this point to look at another large group, composed in large part of non-native speakers of English. The Spanish-speaking people of this country comprise nations within the nation. As speakers of languages other than English, they are also subject to the process of homogenization which has been seen for other groups.

CHIQUITAFICATION

The group of peoples which the Census Bureau calls “Hispanic” included some 22 million US residents in the 1990 census.⁵ As was the case for the Asian population, this overarching term hides a great deal of ethnic variety, in this case compounded the racial diversity, as seen in Figure 11.4 and Table 11.4

As might be predicted, Mexican Americans account for most of the Latino population, with a much smaller Puerto Rican population and a Cuban population of just over one million, or about 5 percent of the whole. Almost a quarter of *Latino* is made up of “Other,” in this case comprising primarily Central and South Americans (just over a million residents each) and half a million Spaniards. About half a million persons could or would not be specific in identifying their national origins.

It is important to note that the racial classifications do not include *mestizo*, and thus persons of mixed European and Native American ancestry – a large portion of the population of Mexico and Central

Table 11.4 Hispanic origin by race

Race	Non-Hispanic	%	Hispanic	%
White	188,424,773	83.1	11,402,291	52.1
Black	29,284,596	12.9	645,928	2.9
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	1,866,807	0.8	148,336	0.7
Asian or Pacific Islander	6,994,302	3.1	232,684	1.1
Other race	239,306	0.1	9,470,850	43.2
Total	226,809,784	100	21,900,089	100

Source: 1990 US census data. Database: C90STF3C1

America – must choose between allegiances (a fact which probably accounts for the large number of persons who identified themselves as “other race”). This oversight is compounded by the assumption of an overarching Spanish monolingualism which spans more than ten countries in three continents. The Mexican population of more than 88 million includes more than 5 million speakers of indigenous Indian languages (about 8 percent of Mexico’s total population), of whom almost half a million are monolingual and speak no Spanish at all (Grimes 1992). Guatemala’s population of 9.3 million is approximately 55 percent Indian and 44 percent mestizo. The Indian population includes some 20,000 speakers of Kanjobal, 5,000 of whom are reported to be in Los Angeles (ibid.).

In addition to racial and ethnic diversity, “Latino” subsumes persons from all economic groups, political and religious backgrounds, and does not recognize a residency status differential. It overlooks the fact that many ethnically Spanish-speaking persons live here on land their families have owned for many generations, and predate European settlement. In addition to this group, which cannot logically be called “immigrant,” there are populations of more recent arrivals, short-term residents, cyclical immigrants made up primarily of farmworkers, and individuals who seek asylum in the US to escape political persecution, in addition to undocumented workers.

The use of language as a preliminary qualifier in the construction of ethnicity is an established custom, but it is nevertheless a troublesome one, as the scope and depth of “Hispanic” has made clear. Zentella (1996) speaks and writes of what it was like for her as a child to have had a singing and dancing Chiquita Banana as a solitary Latina figure in the public eye. Thus she uses the term *chiquitafication* to speak of public policies and practices which homogenize Latino cultures and languages into a tidy and digestible package for the rest of the nation. Three areas which concern her greatly are

- the construction of a homogenous “Hispanic community” that refuses to learn English;

- the belittling of non-Castilian varieties of Spanish;
- and the labeling of second-generation bilinguals as semi- or a-linguals. (1996: 1)

The second of these concerns points to an issue which has not been raised much in this discussion, and that is that language ideologies are not restricted to the English-speaking world. Discourse around “good” and “lesser” language, “appropriate” and “inappropriate” varieties can be found wherever people care to look. For each nation, there is a supra-cultural awareness of which are the “right” varieties, although there will also be competing constructions of social acceptability – for without those who find the “right” language unacceptable in social terms, stigmatized language would not flourish as it does. Table 11.5 presents the simplest answers one would be likely to get in asking an average person on the street “Where is the best [language] spoken?” and “Where is the worst [language] spoken?”⁶

For Spanish, with a much greater geographic coverage than any of the other European languages with the exception of English, standard language ideology has established Castilian Spanish and, following therefrom, Castilian literature and culture as inherently superior and more worthy of study than New World language or language artifacts, as Zentella notes. Within Central and South American nations, there are similarly constructed ideologies, so that in Mexico there is a conception of three *normas* or levels of speaking: *la norma culta*, which Valdés (1988: 119) calls “educated standard,” *la norma popular* (“a less elaborate and cultivated style”), and *la norma rural* (“This style of speaking generally sounds rustic to city people and is normally associated with rural lifestyles and backgrounds”) (ibid.), as well as a conception of good and bad varieties over space, so that the Spanish spoken in the Yucatan is stigmatized. Overarching the national constructions of “good” and “bad”

Table 11.5 Popular constructions of “good” and “bad” language for other countries

Country	“Good” “Proper” “Cultured” “High”	“Low” “Bad” “Inappropriate”
Italy	Florence	Sicily Calabria
Spain	Burgos Valladolid	Huelva
England	Oxford Cambridge	Liverpool Birmingham
Turkey	Istanbul	Black Sea Southeast Anatolia
Northern India (Hindi)	Delhi	Bombay Calcutta
Pakistan (Urdu)	Lucknow	Hyderabad

language, however, is a very persistent idea that *Castilian* is the only real, original language. This functions much in the same way as it does in the US, when popular belief may point to Ohio as "Standard US English" but then defer to that mythical beast "the King's English," or a British norm.

As interesting as it would be to compare the way language subordination tactics function across language and cultural boundaries, here I would like to concentrate instead on the first and third of Zentella's concerns. Together they summarize some conflicts about the process of language subordination which are instructive and important.

Zentella states that there is a troublesome, contrary-to-fact "construction of a homogeneous 'Hispanic community' that refuses to learn English" in the US, and she goes on to demonstrate how dangerous such homogenization can be. This is a willful policy which

encourages wholesale demonizing of the type reflected in a memo written by John Tanton when he was Chair of US English, the group that has been lobbying to make English the official language of the United States since 1981. Tanton portrayed Hispanic Catholicism as a national threat to the separation of church and state, and declared that a Latin American tradition of bribery imperiled US democracy. His most outrageous insult was a vulgar reference to "the Hispanic birthrate," charging that "perhaps this is the first instance in which those with their pants up are going to get caught with their pants down."

(Zentella 1996: 9)

Zentella's analysis of US English and other English Only movements as xenophobic, hostile, and threatening to more than just language rights is clear and convincing (see also Crawford, ed., 1992 for a lengthy discussion). When she sets out to counter their arguments with hard data, she does so carefully:

Despite the continued influx of monolingual immigrants, Veltman (1983) found that Hispanics are undergoing language loss similar to, and even exceeding that of other groups in US history. Language shift is most advanced among the US born, who constituted the majority (64%) of the US Latino population in 1990; immigrants shift to English within 15 years . . .

(1996: 10)

But somewhere an issue has gone missing.

Tanton and his colleagues construct not only a *homogenous* "Hispanic" community, but a *resistant* one. Zentella attacks both premises: it is not true, she asserts, that Hispanic immigrants are resistant to, and reject, the importance of English or the necessity of learning it. She claims that this is not true because the numbers show us that they do indeed learn it. But does the result preclude resistance to the process, or resentment

of the necessity? Further, if this kind of resistance does exist, is it necessarily bad? Would the existence of a Spanish-speaking community in Florida or Texas or New Mexico which does not use and manages to function without English render Tanton's claims credible? Would asserting the right not to be bilingual (a right which would bring along with it many great difficulties) be tantamount to an attack on American democracy? It is clear that Zentella does not mean to make this claim, and that she is constructing "resistance" in a purposefully narrow way.

However, the third concern (*the labeling of second-generation bilinguals as semi- or a-linguals*) does demand a wider conception of resistance. This question moves beyond the issue of whether or not bilingualism is necessary and reasonable (something she, and most others, take for granted) to the issue of *Which English?*

Some immigrants live in communities of monolingual English speakers, where a Spanish accent stands out. Others live in communities where multiple varieties of English coexist in relative harmony, in which Spanish, English, and Chicano or another variety of Latino English each have a sphere. Chicano English, Puerto Rican English and Cuban English in Los Angeles, New York, and Miami are individual varieties of English, distinct in certain syntactical, morphological, and discourse markers from one another and from other varieties of English (Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia 1985; Zentella 1988; Valdés 1988; García and Otheguy 1988). There is a recognized Chicano American and Latino American literature which is taken as a serious object of study.

When Zentella protests the labeling of second-generation Spanish-language immigrants as semilingual or a-lingual, she is discussing a related phenomenon, that of code switching. Code switching is the orderly (rule-based) alternation between two or more languages, a subject of great interest to linguists and one which is widely studied. This complicates the picture of the Spanish-speaking universe considerably. We have distinct languages, each with its own stylistic repertoires: Spanish and English. To these we add more recently developed but distinct varieties of English, for example Chicano English as it is spoken in Texas. Now we have also the phenomenon of living and working with three languages, and switching among them as determined by language-internal (syntactical and morphological) rules as well as social and stylistic ones. The criticism Zentella discusses is aimed at switching, which may seem to an unsympathetic outsider nothing more than a language hodge-podge, and is often labeled *Spanglish*.

In fact, I would argue that whether the object of subordination is the act of style switching, or pressure to use a specific language, the ultimate goal of language subordination remains the same: to devalue and suppress *everything Spanish*.

To call code-switching *Spanglish* in a dismissive way is just another subordination method with a long history: to deny a language and its

people a distinct name is to refuse to acknowledge them. There is a shorthand at work here, and that is, there is only one acceptable choice: it is not enough for Spanish speakers to become bilingual; they must learn the *right* English – and following from that, the right US culture, into which they must assimilate completely.

On rare occasion, there will be public commentary which makes clear that the offer we make to immigrants is contingent on a *certain kind of English*, as in this radio essay which begins with images of confusion and bloodshed in a multiethnic urban setting:

Los Angeles has cosmopolitan eyes and ears. We know a Korean billboard from a Chinese one even though we may not read either language. Those bloody names that spill out of the television every night – Gorazde, San Cristobal. They don't sound so foreign here as they might in the Dakotas. So, why are we frustrated at the sound of own voices?

(Morrison 1994, broadcast)

Note the clever tactic of a straightforward demand for cooperation: *We* are frustrated by *ourselves*, by the multilingualism of Los Angeles. By coercing participation in this way, the commentator makes *his* frustration *everyone's* frustration. Thus, a great deal of latitude can be assumed in matters where he might not otherwise feel entitled to impose his opinion:

It's because over the counters in our banks, over the tables in our restaurants, and over the phones in our offices, in job interviews and in meeting rooms, Los Angeles speaks not just with dozens of foreign languages, but with dozens of variations of English, not to mention our own native accent, from Ice-T to Beverly Hills 90210. It's all English, we're all speaking the same language, but that doesn't mean we're communicating. How do you bring up something that's more personal than bad breath and more embarrassing than an unzipped fly? How do you tell people who are speaking English that it's a kind of English we can't understand? Mostly we don't even try. We say "thank you," and then we hang up the phone and call back a few minutes later, hoping that someone else will answer.

(*ibid.*)

Having assumed that all immigrants want to be bilingual, and work toward that goal in order to have a common vehicle of communication, the switch is made: the total lack of English is unimaginable, but the wrong English, accented English (and specifically elsewhere in this essay Spanish-accented and Asian-accented English) literally *stinks of unwashed humanity*. There are no excuses made for rejecting the communicative burden; it is acceptable just to "hang up the phone." Presumably it is this mindset which was at work when an anonymous Treasury department worker, irritated by a Filipino accent, hung up only to make another call, one which cost five men their jobs.

The commentator moves on to make some concessions: accent is immutable, past a certain age, even when people would like to acquire a perfect English.

The newcomers want to learn English. . . . The cruelest thing about this is that learning the words is the easy part; learning the accent may never happen. An expert in these things says that after puberty, muscles that have formed one language for years just can't change very easily to a new one.

The friction of all these accents bumping into one another has created a new enterprise – accent reduction classes, although accent acquisition is the preferred neutral term. All accents are considered equal, and reducing an accent implies superiority, and that isn't politically correct, even though everyone knows an English accent gets you invited to lunch, but a Spanish accent gets you dirty looks.

(*ibid.*)

Finally, we come to the heart of the matter. Certain accents are frustrating and disturbing, and worthy of *reduction*, as he has admitted that elimination is an impossibility. *We* want to reduce these accents, but there's a complication: in so doing we are making a negative statement about the social identities to which they are attached. In order to soften this blow and render accent reduction more palatable, another tactic is employed: the concern with fairness is labeled "politically correct," a neat and very quick way to render the idea behind it petty and worthy of rejection. *I know that this is wrong on some level*, the commentator is saying, *but it is done so much – why fight it?*

The negative impact of a Spanish accent in some parts of the country is considerable, as we see here, and elsewhere. Not only are these accents stigmatized, but there is no hesitation to act on prejudice associated with language, as in this anecdote recounted by a doctoral student conducting research on attitudes toward Spanish in San Diego's business community:

I was on an early morning flight where most of the passengers were gentlemen in business suits. The passenger in the seat next to mine asked about [the recording equipment], and I explained briefly about my research. He was very curious and wanted to know what results I expected. I told him that I didn't know what I might find, and he offered his personal opinion. He told me that he worked in sales for a large company in San Diego, and that it was his job to hire salesmen. He told me quite frankly that he would never hire anyone with a strong foreign accent, and especially not a Mexican accent. I asked him why. His only response was, "That's smart business. I have to think of the customers. I wouldn't buy anything from a guy with a Mexican accent."

(Spicher 1992: 3–4)

Whether or not it is actually smart business to willfully ignore the needs and wants of a population of more than 20 million consumers is doubtful, but it is a question which can't be explored here in detail. Nevertheless, this anecdote is more useful than any number of statistics, because it makes some things painfully clear: the degree of accent is irrelevant when the focus is not on content, but on form. The businessman cannot conceive of a middle-class Spanish-speaking population with money to spend, and therefore the entire Mexican American population is worthy of rejection.

Stereotypes around Chicano and Latino Americans are almost exclusively negative, in all forms of popular culture. Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia identify the exception to this, the Californian *Don* or the New Mexican *Rico* who as "symbols of the aristocratic class . . . were both linked more to Spain than Mexico" (1985: 78). These characters in film (*The Mark of Zorro*) or popular fiction speak an English which is accented, but elegant and archaic. Both men and women speak this kind of "noble Spaniard" English:

"Come out," she said.

"Ay! They have me fast. But when they do let me out, *niña*, I will take thee in my arms; and whosoever tries to tear thee away again will have a dagger in his heart. *Dios de mi vida!*" . . .

"But thou lovest me, Carlos?"

(Gertrude Atherton (1901) *The Dooms woman: An historical romance of old California*, as cited in Simmen 1971: 40)

More usually the stereotypes for Mexican Americans depart from the *greaser*, a classification subdivided into three types: "a Mexican *paisano* – poor rural inhabitant; as a *mojado* – 'wetback' or illegal alien; and as a *bandido* – a robber wearing 'huge sombreros . . . tobacco-stained fingers and teeth, and grotesque dialect and curses'" (Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia 1985: 78). These characters are portrayed as speaking English with extreme dialect features; the more stereotypical the role, the more extreme the features:

Billee the Keed. Ah, you have heard of heem? He was one gran' boy, senior. All Mexican pepul his friend. You nevair hear a Mexican say one word against Billee the Keed . . . so kind-hearted, so generaous, so brave. And so 'andsome. Nombre de Dios! Every leetle seniorita was crazy about heem . . .

(Walter Noble Burns, *The Saga of Billy the Kid*, as cited in Pettit 1980: 162)

Recent stereotypes in film and television, note Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia, have one thing in common: Mexican Americans are almost always portrayed as violent; they are drug-pushers, gang-members, pimps. A particularly extreme example of a trivialized character was Frito Bandito,

a 1980s counterpart and mirror image of the wholesome Chiquita Banana. In the 1980s, however, the Latino community was vocal and persuasive enough to convince the Frito-Lay company to drop that negative character (1985: 84).

The Spanish-speaking population of the US is very large, and has more resources and expertise with US law and the legal system than other groups. Latino resistance to all kinds of discriminatory practices is well organized, and extends to language matters, especially when education is at issue. Unlike a smaller and more fragmented Asian population, many Spanish speakers are ready and willing to speak out on these issues. Unfortunately, they continue to have to battle, because as the San Diego businessman makes clear, equal opportunity and equal standing are not always forthcoming.

SUMMARY

Foreign accent is a sharp dissecting tool, and it is one that we are willing to use liberally and without concern for the harm it does. The degree of accentedness is not necessarily relevant; we have seen that where no accent exists, stereotype and discrimination can sometimes manufacture one in the mind of the listener.

A high degree of education does not necessarily bring with it any protection from discrimination based on foreign accent, as was seen in the case of *Fragante v. City and County of Honolulu*, and *Hou v. Pennsylvania Department of Education*. In fact, some people are willing to reject foreign accent in a public way when expectations about social prominence are affronted and stereotypes confounded. This was the case in a 1987-1988 search for a president at the University of Michigan, when a Regent allegedly told student reporters that his institution "would never hire a president with a foreign accent" (Wainess 1994) in explanation of that Regent's opposition to a particular candidate, a native speaker of Greek. The Regent was voicing an illegal intent, but this statement - made public six years after the search with the rest of the documentation - still passed without public commentary.

A person who is a non-native speaker of English may want nothing more than to assimilate to the language and culture of the mainstream, but because sincerity and application are not enough to replace one accent with another, hard work toward a non-stigmatized variety of US English will not necessarily protect anyone from discrimination. This is a lesson hard learned:

One student in the [accent reduction] class ... a 22-year-old from Columbia, feels that the course is critical to his future. "To tell you the truth," he said during a break, "this class is my last hope. If it doesn't work out, I'm going back to my country."



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The problem, he said, is that he feels that his accent sets him apart from others, even though he has lived in this country for nine years. He graduated from Newton High School in Queens and is now a junior at Queens College.

“I was practically raised in this country,” he said, speaking in a soft lilting accent. “But I have this accent. Does that mean I’m not an American? I don’t know.”

(Hernandez 1993)

It is crucial to remember that it is not *all* foreign accents, but only accent linked to skin that isn’t white, or which signals a third-world homeland,

that evokes such negative reactions. There are no documented cases of native speakers of Swedish or Dutch or Gaelic being turned away from jobs because of communicative difficulties, although these adult speakers face the same challenge as native speakers of Spanish, Rumanian, and Urdu.

Immigrants from the British Isles who speak varieties of English which cause significant communication problems are not stigmatized: the differences are noted with great interest, and sometimes with laughter. A student asks to speak to a professor after class. "Fine," says the native of Scotland, a long-time resident of Ireland and England. "You can call tomorrow afternoon." The student is perplexed: having asked to *see* this professor, she is told to *telephone*. When the confusion is cleared up (in the professor's variety of English "to call" means "to stop by") they laugh about it. Another professor, a native of India and a bilingual, life-long speaker of English, is met with a colder reception when similar difficulties arise.

"Because you love French accents," proclaims a large advertisement for pottery by an upscale New York department store. "Better get rid of your accent," sings an angry Puerto Rican youth in response to more hopeful dreams of a better life outside the imaginary barrio of *West Side Story*.

There are many people who must cope, day by day, with the fact of stigmatized foreign accent. Some of them have other currencies – political and economic power, social preeminence, artistic excellence, other public achievements – with which to offset the disadvantages an accent brings with it and to disarm the prejudiced listener. In face-to-face conversation, most listeners, no matter how overtly negative and hostile, would be hard-pressed to turn away and ignore Cesar Chavez or Derek Wolcott, Butros Butros Ghali or Liu Xiaobo, Benazir Bhutto, or Corazon Aquino.⁷

But most do not have these resources. People have always come to the United States because in the mind of the world it is a place of real opportunity. The hidden costs of democracy, of assimilation, are not spelled out in the papers they must file to live here, but in the stories of people like Henry Park. The narrator of *Native Speaker* draws a vivid picture of himself and all immigrants: "They speak . . . not simply in new accents or notes but in the ancient untold music of a newcomer's heart, sonorous with longing and hope" (Lee 1995).

What the newcomer must learn for him or herself is the grim reality of limitations imposed by a standard language ideology.