



# Demographics of Adult Heritage Language Speakers in the United States: Myths and Data

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# Roadmap of Today's Talk

## Roadmap of Today's Talk

- Definitions of Heritage Language Speakers
- Myths and Data
- Discussion Topics

# Who are the heritage speakers? I

- Who are the heritage speakers?
  - **Ethnic background:** HL speakers can be classified based on the ethnic and ancestral connection to the language (Fishman, 2001)
  - **Language proficiency:** Language proficiency in the HL and parents' native language (Valdés, 2001; Montrul, 2015; Scontras et al., 2015).
  - **Identity & sociopolitical circumstances:** HL speakers can also be defined by their psychological and sociopolitical circumstances (i.e., self-identity) (Hornberger and Wang, 2008; Leeman, 2015).
  - **Age of arrival / country of birth / parents' native language:** HL speakers often have parents who speak a language other than English. If they are not born in the United States, HL speakers typically arrived in the United States in their youth, before puberty (Carreira and Kagan, 2011).
- So, who are the heritage language speakers? Everyone in the United States? 1.5 generation and/or 2nd generation immigrants?

## Who are the heritage speakers? II

- There is no one-size-fits-all definition for HL speakers. The definition should be carefully constructed depending on the context, purpose, and resources available for each study/project.
- This study uses the *Integrated Public User Microdata Series* (US Census & ACS) (Ruggles and Sobek, 1997) and the definition for HL speakers is constrained by the availability of data.

### HL speakers for this study

1. those who are age 18 or older at the point of data collection
2. those who speak a language other than English at home
3. those who are bilingual (i.e., did not select “Do not speak English” in the question regarding English proficiency), and
4. those who have immigrated before 18 yld if they are foreign born.

# Purposes of this study

1. Geographical and chronological comparisons among different groups of adult HL speakers
2. Integrated Public User Microdata Series (Ruggles and Sobek, 1997)
  - From 1980 to 2010 (the U.S. Census data)
  - Nearly 60 different languages
  - Nearly 2,000 counties

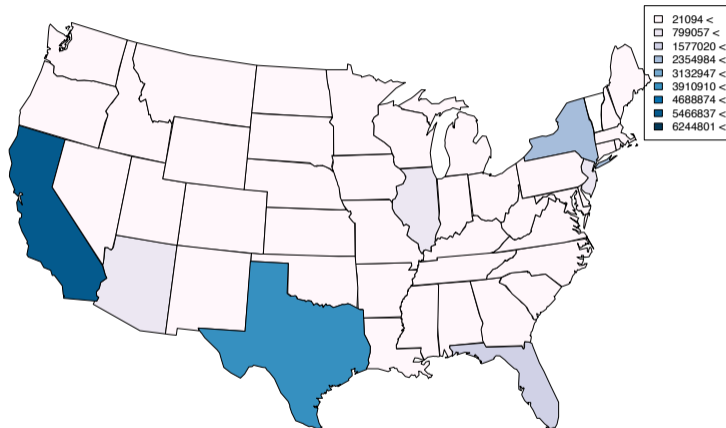
## Myth 1

- The United States is rapidly becoming a monolingual country with strong assimilation force into the Anglophone population.



- No, because ...
  - The number of HL speakers grew at a considerably faster rate (26.98% per decade during 1980-2010) than the average growth of the U.S. population (10.88% per decade during 1980-2010).
- Yes, because ...
  - The growth rates of HL speakers radically differ from state to state. In some states, there was even a decline in the number of adult HL speakers.
  - Languages such as French, German, Italian, Greek, Yiddish, and Dutch are experiencing rapid declines.
  - Using the term *linguistic graveyard* (Rumbaut, 2009), Rumbaut noted an extremely strong pressure for linguistic assimilation in the United States, which practically extinguishes almost all HLs within the three generations of immigration.

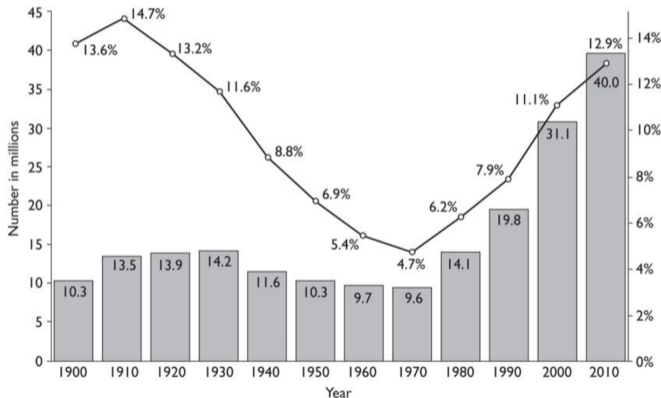
Numbers of HL Speakers in the United States (2010)





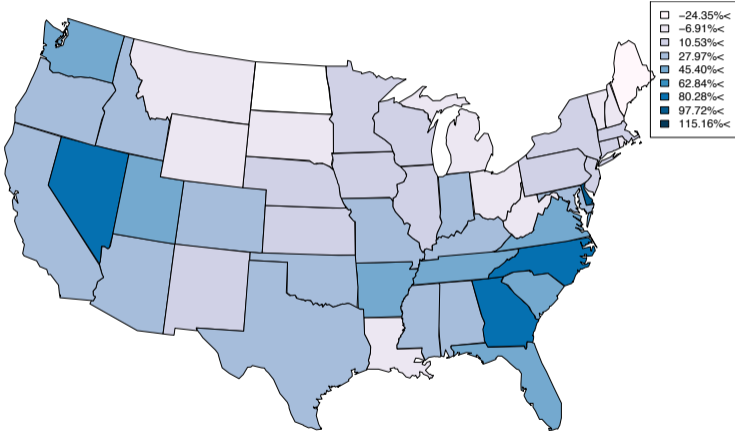
# Myths and Data 1 - IV

- The numbers and proportions of foreign born residents in the U.S. between 1900 and 2010 (from Portes (2014))



# Myths and Data 1 - V

Average Increase of HL Speakers per Decade from 1980–2010



## Myth 2

- Spanish speakers are by far the largest bilingual community in the United States.



## Myths and Data 2 - II

- Yes, because ...
  - Spanish and Chinese remain the two most common groups of HLs in the United States, and their prevalence has grown rapidly over the last 30 years (6.4 millions Spanish HL speakers in 1980 to 17.0 millions in 2010 (38.42% growth per decade))
- No, because ...
  - Although the absolute numbers are rather small, new HLs such as Arabic, Hindi, Dravidian, Vietnamese, Russian, Amharic/Ethiopian, and Tibetan, exhibited substantial growth (e.g., Dravidian 26,900 in 1980 to 423,649 (152% growth per decade)).
  - On the state level, there are quite a few exceptions, such as Alaska (Aleut Eskimo is the most common HL), Hawaii (Filipino/Tagalog and Japanese), Louisiana (French), Maine (French), New Hampshire (French), North Dakota (German), South Dakota (Siouan languages), and Vermont (French).

# Myths and Data 2 - III

- Data source: American Community Survey (Map from Blatt (2014))





## Myth 3

- Bilingual services (e.g., bilingual education and bilingual ballots) are critical primarily in the areas of major immigration hubs such as California, Florida, Illinois, and New York.



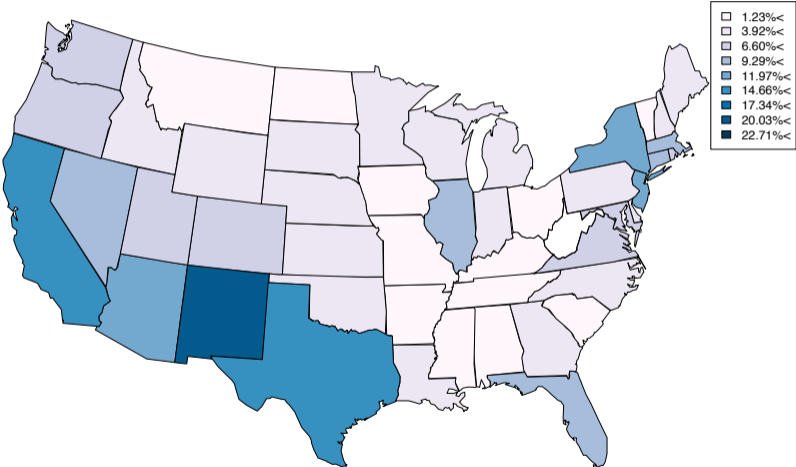
## Myths and Data 3 - II

- Yes, because ...
  - States that are typically considered immigration hubs have large numbers of HL speakers (e.g., California 15.2 M HL speakers, Texas 8.1 M, New York 5.4 M, Florida 4.8 M, and Illinois 2.6 M)
- No, because ...
  - In terms of the proportion of HL speakers in the state's population, some small states have large proportions of HL speakers (e.g., Arizona (12.7% of the state population are HL speakers), Hawaii (12.1%), Massachusetts (10.4%), Nevada (11.7%), New Mexico (22.7%), Texas (16.4%), and New Jersey (13.1%)).



# Myths and Data 3 - III

Proportion of HL speakers to the total population in each state (2010)



## Myth 4

- New immigrants and their children, who may need HL instruction, often settle first in urban, metropolitan areas.



- No, because ...
  - Gini index (a statistics for (in-)equity) shows that Spanish HL speakers are now settling in much wider range of counties than 30 years ago (Gini 0.828 in 1980 to 0.764 in 2010).
  - Ehrenhalt (2013) uses the term *demographic inversion* to describe this trend of new Hispanic immigrants such that first- and 1.5-generation immigrants directly settle in suburbs rather than in central cities.
- Yes, because ...
  - The Spanish HL speakers are the only HL group that exhibited such a pattern (the average Gini index actually increased by 0.026 between 1980-2010). The other HL groups such as Chinese, Filipino/Tagalog, Korean, Vietnamese, Korean, Dravidian, and Portuguese, still maintain the traditional outward migration model and reside in the ethnic enclaves with a high density of HL speakers.

# Discussion I

- Bilingual population has been on increase last three decades. Is it due to success of bilingual policies (e.g., bilingual education programs) or an influx of new immigrants?



## Discussion II

- Is *Demographic Inversion* real? What is the implication for urban community colleges like BMCC and LaGuardia?



# Thank you

- This study was published in *The Modern Language Journal* this winter (Vol. 99 (4)). Please contact me if you are interested in reading the full manuscript.



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