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FEAR OF A MULTILINGUAL AMERICA? LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES

A Linguistic Melting-Pot

Ever since Senator S. I. Hayakawa introduced to Congress, for the first time in American history, a bill to make English the official language of the United States by a constitutional amendment (ELA), in 1981, a number of proposals have been presented, ranging from symbolic declarations to bills that, if passed, would end all services provided by the Federal government in languages other than English, and in particular bilingualism in ballots, health and education. Several lobbying organizations, such as *U.S. English*, *English First* and the more explicitly nativist *ProEnglish*, have been founded to urge Congress to defend English by making it the official language of the nation and to repeal legislation protecting minority speakers' rights. Attacks on bilingual education and the legislation protecting the rights of minority language speakers have gained widespread support in the last decades. Several states, like California, have adopted a one-year transitional program on request, after which students are mainstreamed to English-only classes, and many more have declared that English is their official language.[2]

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[2] The so called "English for the Children," sponsored by California entrepreneur Ron Unz. As for the number of states that have adopted a constitutional amendment concerning language, *US English*, *English First* and other groups lobbying for "official English" always mention 30 states as an evidence of the fact that a majority of Americans are worried about the fate of English: Alabama (1990), Alaska (1998), Arizona (2006), Arkansas (1987), California (1986), Colorado (1988), Florida (1988), Georgia (1986 & 1996), Hawaii (1978), Idaho (2007), Illinois (1969), Indiana (1984), Iowa (2002), Kansas (2007), Kentucky (1984), Louisiana (1811), Massachusetts (1975), Mississippi (1987), Missouri (1998), Montana (1995), Nebraska (1920), New Hampshire (1995), North Carolina (1987), North Dakota (1987), South Carolina (1987), South Dakota (1995), Tennessee (1984), Utah (2000), Virginia (1981 & 1996), and Wyoming

In short, while sociolinguists and language planners all over the world worry about the possibility of survival of other languages under the unrelenting expansion of global English, many Anglophone Americans worry about the fate of their language, in spite of the fact that immigrants in the United States have always learnt English and will continue to do so, while their children rapidly become English monolingual. Why, then, are Americans afraid that English might lose its dominant position? The contemporary debate on language is, in fact, not about language, but rather about national identity. The question is not "What is the national language of America?" but "Who are we as Americans?" As Ronald Schmidt writes in his book on the connections between language policy and identity politics, in the discussion on language issues in the United States two groups confront each other, the assimilationists, who interpret the genealogy of the country in terms of immigration, and the pluralists, who have a more complex idea of the historical forces that shaped the nation and include imperialism, conquest and racism in the picture (Schmidt, 2000, chpts. 4 and 5).

The most common arguments in the propaganda in favor of the ELA are pragmatic: English is necessary to achieve integration, economic success and full citizenship, so immigrants should be encouraged to learn the language of the country. Yet, as many sociolinguists have remarked, since everything in their daily life encourages immigrants to learn the language of the country – and they do learn it in spite of the fact that English fluency and job opportunities do not seem to be as correlated for all ethnic groups as the English-Only movement maintains – the real fuel feeding the debate is not "English as tool" but rather "English as symbol" (Heath, 1977; see also Heath, 1976). From this perspective, American English is not simply the dominant language in the United States: it is also and above all the most important avenue to Americanization. It is the language of American democracy and as such it is the one thing that can turn immigrants coming from despotic countries into citizens of a modern republic. Not surprisingly, president Theodore Roosevelt, a staunch believer in the melting pot, is often quoted by English-Only supporters, especially his wartime appeal "Children of the Crucible" (1917), where speaking other languages is presented as an act of national disloyalty[3]:

(1996). Yet Hawai'i is officially bilingual, Louisiana never adopted a constitutional amendment concerning English and was de facto bilingual, since government documents were published in English and French, and the laws of Alaska and Arizona have been ruled unconstitutional. Four states, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island and Washington have adopted English Plus laws, that is to say they explicitly encourage proficiency in English and one or more other languages. Concern over the consequences of the adoption of an English language Amendment led to formation of an English Plus language advocacy coalition, that in 1987 established the English Plus Information Clearinghouse (EPIC), aimed at fighting restriction of minority language speakers' rights and at protecting language diversity in the U.S. as a national asset.

[3] During WWI, for example, German was targeted as the language of the enemy and was removed from the curricula in many states. Cfr. Baron, 1990, pp. 108-110.

> We cannot tolerate any attempt to oppose or supplant the language and culture that has come down to us from the builders of this Republic with the language and culture of any European country. The greatness of this country depends on the swift assimilation of the aliens she welcomes to her shores. Any force which attempts to retard that assimilative process is a force hostile to the highest interests of our country (in Crawford, ed., 1992, p. 85)

Behind the urge to make immigrants speak English, in other words, is what Michael Kramer, in a study on the images of language in nineteenth-century American culture, called a "mythology of American English," where the manifest destiny of America and its exceptional history as a mingling of peoples reverberate on the language, making it different from other historical languages (Kramer, 1992). In his 1919 magnum opus *The American Language* Henry Louis Mencken offered a description of American English that summarizes this mythology:

> The characters chiefly noted in American speech by all who have discussed it, are, first, its general uniformity throughout the country, so that dialects, properly speaking, are confined to recent immigrants, to the native whites of a few isolated areas and to the negroes of the South; and, secondly, its impatient disregard of rule and precedent, and hence its large capacity (distinctly greater than that of the English of England) for taking in new words and phrases and for manufacturing new locutions out of its own materials. (Mencken, 1921, p. 40)

In Mencken's view the U.S. variety, as compared to British English, is a democratic tongue, characterized by uniformity across geographic areas and classes, pliability and refusal to defer to the past. It reflects its speakers' innate rugged individualism and democratic *weltanschauung* and at the same time it is a melting pot turning immigrant tongues into materials for American English, and immigrants into American citizens.

Mencken's words echo countless celebrations of the democratic English language of America that in the nineteenth century called writers and intellectuals to rally for cultural independence from Europe. One such ode to American English was Whitman's *An American Primer*, notes for a lecture on language that he took for years with the intention of turning them into a book and were finally published posthumously by Horace Scudder in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1904:

> This is the tongue that spurns laws, as the greatest tongue must. It is the most capacious vital tongue of all – full of ease, definiteness and power – full of sustenance. An enormous treasure-house, or range of treasure

> houses, arsenals, granary, chock full with so many contributions from the north and from the south, from Scandinavia, from Greece and Rome – from Spaniards, Italians and the French, – that its own sturdy home-dated Angles-bred words have long been outnumbered by the foreigners whom they lead – which is all good enough, and indeed must be. (Whitman, 1904/1970, p. 30)

Whitman was probably the writer who most consistently developed an isomorphic relation between American national identity and its language, that is, the idea that American English, like its speakers, was democratic, direct, informal, pragmatic, and inclusive. But that American English mirrored or better embodied the principles, ideals and characteristics of the country was a popular notion in Romantic America. For example, an anonymous essay published in the April 1855 issue of the *United States Democratic Review*, entitled "Our Language Destined to Be Universal," emphasized the assimilative capacity of the national tongue and foretold that the problem of the multitude of languages would be solved not by a "mongrel universal speech," but by the spontaneous adoption of the English language by the whole world, since its pliability towards other tongues made it the perfect language for universal use (Anon., 1855, p. 312). Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in his "Letter to a Young Contributor" (1862), which would prompt an epistolary exchange with Emily Dickinson, also imagined American English as a linguistic treasure house: "Thus the American writer finds himself among his phrases like an American sea-captain amid his crew: a medley of all nations, waiting for the strong organizing New-England mind to mould them into a unit of force" (Higginson, 1862, p. 406).

Thanks to its assumed ductility and assimilative power, the language of the United States was perceived as the linguistic equivalent of the national melting pot, a language where contributions from the whole world were welcome, provided that they were ready to submit to its superior rules. Brander Matthews, who served as first chairman of the Simplified Spelling Board, an organization founded in 1906 for reforming the spelling of American English that was supported by president Theodore Roosevelt, wrote of linguistic borrowings, in an even more explicit blending of language- and nation-making processes, as aliens that need to assimilate to the mainstream identity:

> Foreign words must always be allowed to land on our coasts without a passport; yet if any of them linger long enough to warrant a belief that they may take out their papers sooner or later, we must decide at last whether or not they are likely to be desirable residents of our dictionary: if we determine to naturalize them, we must fairly enough insist on their

> renouncing their foreign allegiance. They must cast in their lot with us absolutely, and be bound by our laws only. (qtd in Jones, 1999, p. 32)

The confidence in the assimilative power of American English, and of American mainstream culture, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, somewhat paradoxically coexisted with a puristic attitude towards other languages, which appeared potentially corrupting. "[I]f we desire the future of our destiny to be as great and glorious as it promises," continued the anonymous writer of the *United States Democratic Review*,

> we should never cease to discourage all attempts to introduce any other language into our midst as the medium for either business or education. [...] Nay more, though it may sound illiberal until examined carefully, we verily believe that none but newspapers printed in the Anglo-American tongue should be allowed amongst us. (Anon., 1855, pp. 311–312)

And Walt Whitman, in the same notes where he praised the inclusiveness of the English language of America, also advocated a radical renaming in the toponymy left on the Continent by French and Spanish settlers (Whitman, 1904/1970, p. 35). The mythology connecting American English with individualism, freedom and democratic virtues is still at work today behind the pragmatic arguments in favor of English-Only language policies: many Americans who support the English-Only movement believe that immigrants, by learning the language, will imbue American values and adopt the American way of life, thereby becoming useful, productive citizens.

American English and Democracy

This brief overview of the linguistic ideas that prevailed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has pointed out the ethnocentric and exclusionary aspects that are behind the apparently inclusivist language ideology of English-speaking America. But to focus only on the linguistic purism of American ideologies of language would mean to hide a part of the story, and one that is equally important to understand the current debates on language policies in the United States. Interestingly, behind the linguistic suprematism of Anglophone Americans in the nineteenth century lay a double concern over the functioning of democracy (see Gustafson, 1992). On the one hand, a common language appeared instrumental for the making of a truly national and democratic identity and the main unifying tool of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. On the other hand, with language being the only possible instrument of political discourse and an expression of power in a democracy, where consent must be won by persuasion and not by coercion, it became a highly critical site of identity. The national language became the repository of American democratic values, which would transfer to newcomers together with their acquisition of linguistic competence. At the same time it represented the citizens' most powerful weapon in the exercise of their rights. As such, it was perceived as in continuous need of scrutiny and reformation on the part of the citizens, so as to ensure that it was used for democracy and not against it.

How can the represented be sure that they are well represented? Who controls the words and actions of representatives? How will the citizen know whether he is being conned by someone who is pursuing his self-interest and not the common good? Who can speak on behalf of the people? These concerns produced a tension toward the enlarging of political and social communication and the inclusion of larger audiences in the semiotic circuit that had democratizing effects on language. Paradoxically, they also strengthened the link between American English, democracy and identity that today makes multilingualism appear an act of disloyalty towards the nation to many Americans.

Interestingly, both sides of the contemporary "national discussion" on language look back to the past and try to legitimate their stance by grounding it in the language ideology and politics of the Founders. But, even allowing that the past can authorize policies in the present, unfortunately the archives seem to lend themselves to contradictory interpretations. Both pro- and anti-ELA factions assume that the absence of an official language in the American Constitution was an explicit act of language planning on the part of the Founders. While one side reads the constitutional silence on the issue as an evidence of the linguistic tolerance of Early American Republic leaders and intellectuals, the other side maintains that the Founders did not bother to designate English as the official language of the United States simply because multilingualism was not a problem *then*, since newcomers understood that leaving behind their old alliances, language included, was part and parcel of their covenant with America.

Many sociolinguists fighting against the ethnocentric monolingualism advocated by ELA supporters as the only viable linguistic policy for Babelic America, such as Shirley Brice Heath and Elliot Judd, have asserted that the Founders held "a belief in tolerance for linguistic diversity within the population, the economic and social value of foreign language knowledge and citizenry, and a desire not to restrict the linguistic and cultural freedom of those living in the new country" (Judd, 1987, p. 115). In their view, since the Founders were steeped in Enlightenment cosmopolitanism and culture, were articulate in other contemporary languages such as French, German and Italian, and had a good knowledge of classic languages, they valued foreign tongues as expressions of cultural diversity and wished to preserve them. Writing about the debate on a national language academy – a proposal made, among others, by John Adams – Heath argued that in rejecting the setting up of institutions aimed at regulating language because "[d]irect manipulation of the national identity in language through a national academy could not be reconciled with the democratic political theories of the United States," "national political leaders and state and local agencies promoted respect for diversity of languages" (Heath, 1976, p. 58).

In fact, it is possible to find many passages in the works of the Founding Fathers that explicitly counter this claim, or at least throw an ambiguous light on their supposed linguistic tolerance, which often seems more an opportunistic move to encourage immigration that a real appreciation of linguistic diversity. Diversity, at all levels, appeared threatening for a nation that, after declaring itself one, could only resort to a sameness of language to negotiate differences and was profoundly divided about its future political order. In spite of the efforts of "America's political fantasists" (Looby, 1996, p. 250), such as John Jay, to represent the nation as a "one connected country" given by Providence "to one united people, a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language" (qtd in Looby, 1996, p. 249), the Founders were aware that sameness was yet to be built by a stronger central government, even though some leaders were profoundly troubled by the prospect of a federal republic, and were afraid that it might evolve into a monarchy in disguise. The same passages, on the other hand, also refute the arguments advanced by the English-Only movement, since they reveal that multilingualism was perceived as a problem at the founding of the United States by the nation's political leaders and intellectuals as much as it is now. Thomas Jefferson, for one, is said to have contemplated sending three thousand Anglophone settlers to Louisiana to ensure that the "empire for liberty" would be an English-speaking one. While he valued foreign tongues and considered Spanish a language of special interest for Americans, recommending its study to the youth, Jefferson instructed Lewis and Clark to measure, catalogue and give English names to the new land (see Simpson, 1986, pp. 118–121).

A telling example also came from Benjamin Franklin's well-known anti-German invectives. Germans in eighteenth-century Philadelphia had much in common with today's Hispanics in the Southwest – they kept arriving in masses and were a thriving minority which in some settlements outnumbered Americans of English ancestry, they spoke another language and were committed to the preservation of their traditions and language in their offspring. As a consequence, they aroused fears in the political elite. In 1751 Benjamin Franklin wrote "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," where he had harsh words for the German immigrants threatening the survival of English culture in the colony:

> [W]hy should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion. (Franklin, 1751a/1961, p. 234)

In the same year he wrote to fellow Philadelphian printer James Parker, then based in New York, describing the colony as besieged by German throngs:

> This will in a few Years become a German Colony: Instead of their Learning our Language, we must learn their's, or live as in a foreign Country. Already the English begin to quit particular Neighbourhoods surrounded by Dutch, being made uneasy by the Disagreeableness of disonant Manners; and in Time, Numbers will probably quit the Province for the same Reason. (Franklin, 1751b/1961, p. 120)

Two years later he wrote to the English scientist Peter Collinson in even more worried tones:

> I am perfectly of your mind, that measures of great Temper are necessary with the Germans: and am not without Apprehensions, that thro' their indiscretion or Ours, or both, great disorders and inconveniences may one day arise among us; [...]Few of their children in the Country learn English; they import many Books from Germany; and of the six printing houses in the Province, two are entirely German, two half German half English, and but two entirely English; They have one German News-paper, and one half German. Advertisments intended to be general are now printed in Dutch and English; the Signs in our Streets have inscriptions in both languages, and in some places only German. (Franklin, 1753a/1962, pp. 483–485)

Yet, to Collinson's proposal to force Germans to learn English, even by forbidding the importation and the printing of books in foreign languages, he more soberly replied that "Methods of great tenderness should be used, and nothing that looks like a hardship be imposed. *Their fondness for their own Language and Manners is natural: It is not a Crime*" (Franklin, 1753b/1962, pp. 158).

In other words, Benjamin Franklin was undoubtly convinced of the superiority of the English colonists' culture and of the necessity to defend its supremacy, yet he was also confident that assimilation should and would be achieved by peaceful means, such as the education of children, while language discrimination might foster conflict. In the following years he never returned to the problem in his writings, possibly because he was aware that the assimilation process he had predicted was well under way. As a propagandist for the new nation, he was aware that restrictions regarding language and religion would discourage immigration and in his 1784 pamphlet "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" he accordingly emphasized that the United States was a country of opportunities and freedom. He himself did not disdain printing in the German language, not only because the Germans were a profitable market but also because he believed in what we might call with a contemporary expression "outreach programs."

Manufacturing American Citizens through Language

In the essay "Information to Europeans Who Are Disposed to Migrate to the United States" (1790), Benjamin Rush similarly underlined that American space was large enough to accommodate cultural diversity: "One great advantage attending this mode of settling is, a company may always carry with them a clergyman and a schoolmaster of the same religion and language with themselves" (Rush, 1790, p. 551). Like Franklin, however, he eagerly worked to persuade the wealthier citizens of the Republic that free schools were instrumental in securing the well-being of the nation, since education was the only viable means to control the lower classes and implant republican principles in the children of the poor. In an essay devoted to the principles of a democratic education, Rush further argued that the construction of a common national identity out of the plurality of national origins that made up the country had to rely on the institution of a national system of education:

> Our schools of learning, by producing one general, and uniform system of education, will render the minds of the people more homogeneous, and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government.
> […]
> Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught, at the same time, that he must forsake, and even forget them, when the welfare of his country requires it. (Rush, 1806, pp. 7–11)

Many federalists looked to the intensive study of the English language since primary school as a solution against the conflicts menacing the United States. As Noah Webster put it, "Small causes […] have actually created a dissocial spirit between the inhabitants of the different states, which is often discoverable in private business and public deliberations. *Our political harmony is therefore concerned in a uniformity of language*"

(Webster, 1789/1967, p. 20; my emphasis). In July 1788 he took part in the New York parade organized to encourage the ratification of the Philadelphia Constitution on the part of the state, marching at the head of the members of the New York Philological Society that he had just founded. Their theme was language, and the report he wrote for the *New York Packet* reveals how ideologically charged language was for the new nation:

> The standard bearer, Mr. William Dunlap, with the arms of the society, viz. – Argent three tongues, gules, in chief; emblematical of *language*, the improvement of which is the object of the institution. Chevron, or, indicating firmness and support; an *eye*, emblematical of *discernment* over a pyramid, or rude monument, sculptured with Gothic, Hebrew, and Greek letters. The Gothic on the *light* side, indicating the *obvious* origin of the American Language from the Gothic. The Hebrew and Greek, upon the reverse or *shade*, of the monument, expressing the remoteness and *obscurity* of the connection between those languages and the modern. The *crest*, a cluster of cohering magnets, attracted by a key in the centre; emblematical of *union* among the society, in acquiring *language* the *key* of knowledge; and clinging to their *native* tongue in preference to a *foreign* one. (qtd in Read, 1934, pp. 133-134)

Webster regularly marketed his works on the English language as politically useful for the nation because they were aimed at making all Americans speak – and think – alike, that is, like their enlightened leaders. His *American Spelling Book*, he explained, was

> calculated to extirpate the improprieties and vulgarisms which were necessarily introduced by settlers from various parts of Europe; to reform the abuses and corruptions which, to an unhappy degree, tincture the conversation of the polite part of the Americans; to render the acquisition of the language easy both to American youth and to foreigners; and especially to render the pronunciation of it accurate and uniform by demolishing those odious distinctions of provincial dialects which are the subject of reciprocal ridicule in different states. (Webster, 1783/1953, p. 5)

Robert Ross, the author of a spelling book that he advertised as adapted to the new political order of the United States, also promoted his work in terms that underlined its political and cultural usefulness:

> *Dilworth*'s Spelling Book recommending Subjection to a foreign Power has a Tendency to promote Disaffection to the present Government, and must therefore be very improper for the Instruction of the *Freeborn* Youth of *America*, since we have become an INDEPENDENT NATION.

> There are many DUTCH and GERMANS in the States of New-York, New-Jersey, and Pennsylvania, who by their Industry and Frugality have become wealthy and respectable. They have their Reasons for Speaking the Language of their native Countries, and teaching it to their Children. Yet since all the Proceedings at Law, and the Courts of Justice, on which Mens' Lives [sic], Liberties and properties so greatly depend on are in English, it must be much Advantage to them to learn it; so that this Book may be greatly serviceable to their Children. (Ross, 1785, p. 116)

The Founders were worried about the linguistic unity of the country and actively tried to discourage immigrants from retaining their native languages and cultures. In the belief that language and state were in a relationship of analogy and a well-ordered tongue reflected a well-ordered nation, they made efforts to erase class and ethnic differences from the people's accents and turn America into an harmonious-sounding nation, not through laws limiting individual rights but by means of the largest system of public education of the times (see Gustafson, 1992). The Founders' concern about the national language found support in a network of intellectuals, who produced a large corpus of writings dealing with the proper system of education for the youth of a Republic. In their view, efforts to assimilate the diverse population of the United States were to focus less on Old World parents than on their American children, whom a Republican education could mold into disciplined, enlightened citizens able to perform their role as guardians of the State. "Since education is of so great importance," asked in the *New York Magazine* someone writing under the pen-name of Asterio,

> is it not the duty of every American to countenance and contribute as much as is in his power to the promotion of learning in these United States? It is this which will render us an enlightened and happy people. It is this in reality which alone can secure the continuance of our liberty, and preserve inviolate the rights of mankind. Despotism will not dare to raise her tyrannical head among an enlightened people; but *Liberty* and *Equality* shall forever reign in our happy land! (Asterio, 1794)

And an anonymous writer in the *Boston Magazine* emphasized that education was the tool that middle-class parents were to use to protect their children's future and prevent the corruption of the republic into an aristocracy by the higher classes:

> Can you, ye inattentive parents! see the more enlightened part of the community, with all their assiduity procuring the necessary instruction for their children, to render them eminent, and useful, and perhaps (though

> at present it may be foreign to their views) to make their children tyrants of your heirs; and masters of that property which you have procured with labour and toil? and will you not take the only step to prevent the consequences, which naturally attend such exertions? (Anon, 1784, p. 176)

Far from promoting respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, it was precisely the belief in American democracy and the natural democratic virtues of American English that made the linguistic Americanization of immigrants such a vital concern for the political leadership. Speaking the national language became an index of the immigrants' ability and will to become American exactly when American English was associated with American freedom and participatory democracy. While the meaning of the Founders' silence about linguistic matters is open to debate – after all, as some scholars have argued, they often resorted to silence or ambivalent language, for example in dealing with slavery, as a strategy to defer conflict (see Ferguson, 1986) – in my opinion the mythology of American English that was formed in the Early American Republic can be useful to understand the complex ideological knots of current discussions. What Americans believed about the importance of a national language for the new nation at the turn of the eighteenth century still influences what Americans think now and can explain why, for example, the language divide does not simply run along party lines. Many Democrats are committed to making English the official language of the United States, in the belief that full citizenship and a participatory role in the public sphere can only be obtained through a fluent knowledge of the dominant language, while identity politics in language as well as culture threatens American democracy and immigrants' rights [an example is Schlesinger, 1993].

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Fear of a Multilingual America? Language and National Identity in the United States

Abstract

In the contemporary debate on language and national identity in the US, those who are in favor of a constitutional amendment declaring English the official language of the country believe that speaking the same tongue is crucial for the political and cultural unity of the nation. Those who are against the amendment claim that dictating by law the linguistic Americanization of immigrants is incompatible with American multiculturalism. Both sides ground their ideas in the language ideology and politics of the Founders and interpret in opposing ways the absence of a statement on language in the Constitution. What Americans believed about the importance of a national language for the new nation at the turn of the eighteenth century still influences what Americans think now and can explain why, for example, the language divide does not simply run along party lines. Yet the Founders' attitudes towards language were contradictory, as they combined descriptivism and prescriptivism. This article investigates writings by intellectuals and politicians who were instrumental in the nation-making process of the early American Republic, such as Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster. These writings show the complexity of the ideas coalescing in the mythology of American English which formed after the American Revolution and spread in nineteenth-century United States.

Key words: language, American English, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, United States

Anna Scacchi

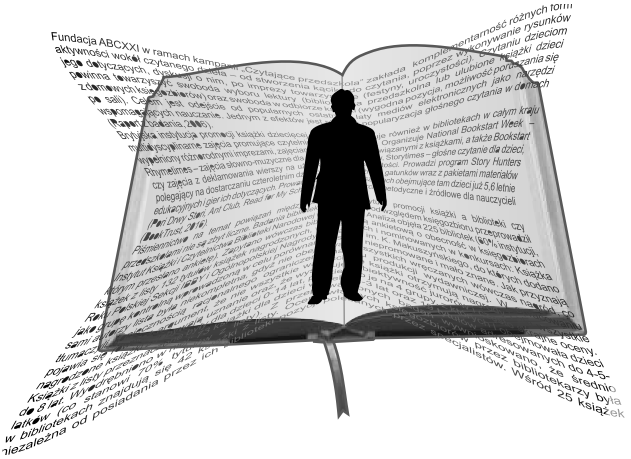
Strach przed wielojęzyczną Ameryką? Język i Tożsamość narodowa w Stanach Zjednoczonych

Streszczenie

We współczesnej debacie o języku i tożsamości narodowej w Stanach Zjednoczonych ci, którzy są za poprawką do konstytucji ustalającą angielski jako oficjalny język tego kraju wierzą, że porozumiewanie się w tym samym języku jest istotne dla politycznej i kulturowej

jedności kraju. Ci, którzy są przeciwko poprawce twierdzą, że dyktowanie przez prawo językowej amerykanizacji imigrantom jest niekompatybilne z amerykańskim multikulturalizmem. Obie strony opierają swoje idee na językowej ideologii i polityce założycieli oraz różnie interpretują brak fragmentu o języku w konstytucji. To, co Amerykanie na początku osiemnastego wieku myśleli o znaczeniu narodowego języka nowej nacji wciąż ma wpływ na to, co myślą dzisiaj i może wyjaśnić powody np. podziału językowego, który nie jest zwyczajnie związany z podziałem partii. Jednak nastawienia założycieli do języka były sprzeczne, ponieważ obejmowały deskryptywizm i preskryptywizm. W artykule badano pisma intelektualistów i polityków, którzy odgrywali główne role w procesie tworzenia nacji wczesnej republiki amerykańskiej, tj. Benjamina Franklina, Benjamina Rusha i Noaha Webstera. Ich pisma pokazują złożoność idei kojarzonych z mitologią języka amerykańskiego angielskiego, które formowały się po rewolucji amerykańskiej i rozprzestrzeniały w dziewiętnastowiecznych Stanach.

Słowa kluczowe: język amerykański angielski, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, Stany Zjednoczone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