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EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

URGENT

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Legislative Reference Division  
Economic, Science, and General Government Branch

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From: Jill Gibbons  
Legislative Reference Division  
Room 7116  
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Date: 3/4/98 Number of Pages: 5

Comments: Attached is a draft Justice letter supporting the  
Burton substitute amendment to Solomon's English language  
amendment to HR 856 - Puerto Rico Political Status. Please  
provide comments or sign-off as soon as possible.

Julie reviewed  
\* DOS is sending the letter



**U.S. Department of Justice**  
**Office of Legislative Affairs**

Office of the Assistant Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

March 4, 1998

The Honorable Newt Gingrich  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

The House will shortly have under consideration H.R. 856, a bill that would call for a plebiscite to decide whether the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will retain its current legal status or move towards Statehood or independence. We understand that Congressman Solomon intends to offer an amendment that would establish English as the official language in all States of the United States, including Puerto Rico, should the voters of the Commonwealth choose that option. We further understand that Congressman Durton, Miller, Young, and McCollum may offer a substitute for the Solomon amendment. The key feature of the substitute amendment would provide that, in the event that Puerto Rico becomes a State, the "official language requirements of the Federal Government shall apply to Puerto Rico in the same manner and to the same extent as throughout the United States." The Administration supports the Durton substitute amendment and urges its adoption.

If we may be of further assistance in connection with this matter, we trust that you will not hesitate to call upon us. The Office of Management and Budget has advised that there is no objection from the standpoint of the Administration's program to the presentation of this report.

Sincerely,

Andrew Foia  
Assistant Attorney General

cc: The Honorable Richard Gephardt  
Minority Leader

**SUBSTITUTE OFFERED BY MR. BURTON  
OF INDIANA,  
MR. MILLER OF CALIFORNIA, AND  
+ McClellan of Florida  
MR. YOUNG OF ALASKA TO  
THE AMENDMENT OFFERED BY MR. SOLOMON OF  
NEW YORK**

In section 8, amend subsection (b) to read as follows:

1 In the event that a referendum held under this Act  
2 results in approval of sovereignty leading to Statehood,  
3 upon accession to Statehood, the official language require-  
4 ments of the Federal Government shall apply to Puerto  
5 Rico in the same manner and to the same extent as  
6 throughout the United States.

Add at the end of section 8 the following new subsection:

7 (c) **ENGLISH LANGUAGE EMPOWERMENT.**—It is in  
8 the best interest of the Nation for Puerto Rico to promote  
9 the teaching of English as the language of opportunity and  
10 empowerment in the United States in order to enable stu-  
11 dents in public schools to achieve English language pro-  
12 ficiency by the age of 10.

2

In section 4(a), in the referendum language for Statehood, amend paragraph (7) to read as follows:

1           “(7) Official English language requirements of  
2           the Federal Government apply in Puerto Rico to the  
3           same extent as Federal law requires throughout the  
4           United States.”.

In subparagraph (C) of section 4(B)(1), strike “(C) Additionally,” and all that follows through “(ii) the effective date” and insert the following:

5           (C) Additionally, in the event of a vote in favor  
6           of continued United States sovereignty leading to  
7           Statehood, the transition plan required by this sub-  
8           section shall—

9           (i) include proposals and incentives to in-  
10          crease the opportunities of the people of Puerto  
11          Rico to expand their English proficiency in  
12          order to promote and facilitate communication  
13          with residents of all other States of the United  
14          States and with the Federal Government, in-  
15          cluding teaching in English in public schools,  
16          awarding fellowships and scholarships, and pro-  
17          viding grants to organizations located in various  
18          communities that have, as a purpose, the pro-  
19          motion of English language skills;

1 (ii) promote the use of English by the  
2 United States citizens in Puerto Rico in order  
3 to ensure—

4 (I) efficiency in the conduct and co-  
5 ordination of the official business activities  
6 of the Federal and State Governments;

7 (II) that the citizens possess the lan-  
8 guage skill necessary to contribute to and  
9 participate in all aspects of the Nation;  
10 and

11 (III) the ability of all citizens of Puer-  
12 to Rico to take full advantage of the oppor-  
13 tunities and responsibilities accorded to all  
14 citizens, including education, economic ac-  
15 tivities, occupational opportunities, and  
16 civic affairs; and

17 (iii) include the effective date

▶ Julie A. Fernandes  
03/02/98 08:10:40 PM  
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Record Type: Record

To: Elena Kagan/OPD/EOP  
cc: Laura Emmett/WHO/EOP, Michael Cohen/OPD/EOP  
Subject: Puerto Rico

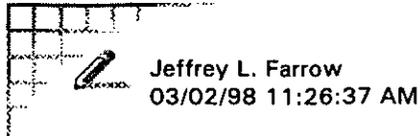
Elena,

Mike and I both attended the meetings today with Maria re: Puerto Rico. To summarize: there is a bill going to the house floor on Wednesday that would authorize the citizens of Puerto Rico to vote on whether they want statehood, commonwealth status or Independence (the "status choice" bill). Congressman Soloman has proposed an amendment to this bill that would: (1) make English the official language of the U.S. as presently constituted; (2) require all communications between Puerto Rico (individual and govt.) to the U.S. to be in English; (3) require all federal activities in P.R. to be in English; and (4) provide that only English would be used in the public schools. All agree that this language is worse than that contained in the "English Only" bill that the President threatened to veto in 1996.

Some on the Hill supporting the Soloman amendment are doing so in order to kill the plebiscite. An alternative to the Soloman amendment is being drafted ("Soloman lite") that will hopefully give the pro-English/pro-plebiscite folks a place to go (i.e., they can vote for Soloman lite to express their support for English, while not voting for a pro-English amendment that would kill the bill).

Tomorrow, the Admin. will issue a SAP that endorses the "status choice" bill. We will then issue a separate SAP that states that if the President is presented with a bill that includes the Soloman amendment, he will veto it. We should be getting a draft of the latter soon.

Julie



Record Type: Record

To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message

cc:

Subject: Solomon English Language Amendment

The Solomon English Language amendment to the Puerto Rico status choice bill would:

- make English the official language of the U.S. as it is presently constituted;
- under Puerto Rican statehood, require all Puerto Rican individual and government communications with the Federal Government to be in English except in cases already excepted from such a requirement and require all Federal activities in Puerto Rico to be in English; and
- tell Puerto Rico status referendum voters that English is the language of all Federal business and that under statehood Puerto Rico would promote English as its language of government and use English exclusively in all public schools.

The President threatened to veto an English as the language of government activities bill, citing the problem of communicating with citizens in Puerto Rico among other things. The President has also opposed erecting barriers to statehood based on Puerto Rico's Hispanic culture. (He is for a choice among all the status options and favors none over the others.) I am working with Justice on a veto threat in the SAP on this bill.

The bill was not voted on by the full House in 1996 because of a Solomon amendment to require English as the exclusive language of public instruction in Puerto Rico under statehood.

### **Bilingual State Precedents**

The New Mexico constitution approved by Congress provided for laws to be published in Spanish as well as English, teachers to be trained in Spanish, and Hispanic students to not be denied an education. New Mexico's pledge of allegiance and song have Spanish as well as English versions.

The Hawaii constitution makes Hawaiian as well as English an official language.

The original California state constitution provided for all official proceedings to be conducted in Spanish as well as English.

### **English Requirement Precedents**

Louisiana was required to keep records in English in 1812.

Oklahoma (1907) and New Mexico and Arizona (1912) were required to use English in public instruction. New Mexico and Arizona legislators were also required to be proficient in English.

These requirements were in statehood enabling acts. This bill is not an enabling act; it merely provides for a vote and contemplates an enabling act in the event of a vote for statehood. Polls

indicate a plurality for continued Commonwealth, although it is widely believed that statehood would win a vote if the vote is sanctioned by the Federal Government. Another law would have to be enacted after this one to serve as an enabling act.

### **Puerto Rico Language Policy**

Puerto Rico has two official languages.

Federal law requires the Federal court in Puerto Rico to use English.

Federal agencies generally use English in Puerto Rico.

English is taught at all levels of education in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Ricans who have English ability are approaching 50% although only about half of these claim fluency.

32 professional associations in Puerto Rico examine members in English.

Puerto Ricans opposed early Federal efforts to teach in English only, repealing the law when they had the power to.

#### **Message Sent To:**

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Fred DuVal/WHO/EOP  
Maria Echaveste/WHO/EOP  
Mickey Ibarra/WHO/EOP  
Janet Murguia/WHO/EOP  
Maritza Rivera/WHO/EOP  
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Angelique Pirozzi/WHO/EOP  
Julie A. Fernandes/OPD/EOP  
Emory L. Mayfield/WHO/EOP

Ed- English only

▶ **Julie A. Fernandes**  
03/02/98 08:10:40 PM  
.....

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Julie

Raheem / BReed

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

Need them really - to actually 3-3-77  
then receive a portrait of you - Bc

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Chen

http://www.usatoday.com

THE NATION'S NEWSPAPER



**SUGAR RAY POISED FOR COMEBACK 4**  
FIGHTS CAMACHO SATURDAY, 1-20C

Sugar Ray Leonard

By Scott Wechter

**SPRING TRAINING GAMES START, 1,7-8C**



**USA TODAY**

NO. 1 IN THE USA . . . FIRST IN DAILY READERS

FRI.- SUN., FEB. 28 - MARCH 2, 1997

# NEWSLINE

A QUICK READ ON THE NEWS

**WALL STREET:** Dow Jones industrial average drops 58.11 points to 6925.07; Nasdaq index falls 27.89 to 1312.66; 30-year Treasury bond yield rises to 6.80%, 1,4B.  
▶ January is record for stock fund buys. 1B.



**Shooting for tourney berths**  
College weekend preview, 1,12C  
Kentucky's Ron Mercer  
by Michael S. Green, AP

**ABORTION:** Abortion-rights opponents plan to march outside high schools across USA starting Monday; campaign targets 150 cities through May. 3A.

**SNOWMOBILING DEATHS:** Jump in deadly snowmobile accidents is prompting states to toughen laws, penalties for reckless and drunken driving. 3A.

**EX-PARATROOPER CONVICTED:** North Carolina jury convicts former 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper James N. Burmeister, left, of killing two black people as part of skinhead initiation in 1995. 3A.



**RIGHT TO DIE:** Court rules Oregon can enforce its first-in-nation law allowing doctor-assisted suicide; law no immediate threat to patients' rights. 2A.

**PENTAGON WASTE:** The military is buying more items that it doesn't need, a General

Burmeister: Sentenc

SPECIAL REPORT

The politically incorrect question of the 1990s:

# Can't anyone here speak English?

Exploring the hidden costs of the nation's language gap

File English-only

COVER STORY

# Consumers frustrated by verbal gridlock

By Gary Strauss  
USA TODAY

▶ Language and life 8A  
▶ English real intimidating for some 9A

Suzanne Schirmer nearly hit the roof the other day when her son Timmy left the barber shop near their Long Beach, Calif., home. Timmy had asked for a trim. Instead, a barber who spoke poor English misunderstood the 12-

year-old and shaved his head. "Everywhere I go — the doctor's office, the eyeglass shop, fast-food restaurants — I'm getting more frustrated," Suzanne Schirmer says. "It's hard to buy anything when you can't communicate with people who aren't from here."

If the Schirmers have complaints over foreign-born employees in the workplace, they've got plenty of company. A recent USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll found growing verbal gridlock across the country: Nearly one of four consumers encountered problems in the past year because a business person or retail employee spoke poor English. So far, the nationwide frustration over language has remained relatively private. Many native-born Americans try to be understanding of immigrants, whether out of compassion or fear of seeming insensitive, even racist. But this collective consumer pathos underscores a huge language gap with a widening scope and far-reaching impli-

Please see COVER STORY on Page 8A ▶

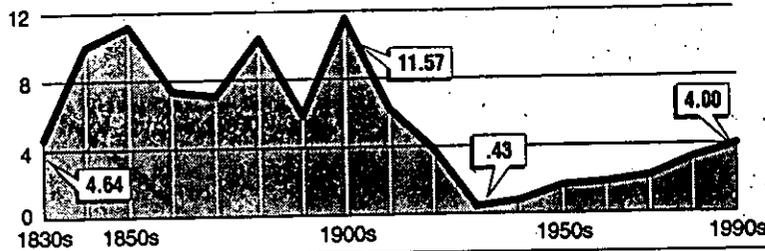
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**SPECIAL REPORT: EXPLORING**

# Immigration is on the rise, again

The immigration rate reached a high just after the turn of the century, when 11 of every 100 U.S. residents were immigrants. Today the rate is higher than at any time since the 1910s. The immigration rate per 100 U.S. residents:



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

## COVER STORY

# Language and accent bias cases are growing

Continued from 1A

ations, particularly as the country's 24 million foreign-born residents move beyond major urban areas and become a greater proportion of the workforce.

Economists say the lack of language proficiency costs businesses billions of dollars.

Disputes about language in the workplace, where immigrants represent about 11% of the labor force, are expected to mushroom now that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has begun separately categorizing language complaints.

And with nearly a quarter of the USA's doctors graduates of foreign medical schools, there are plans to test for verbal English competency.

**"I've had experiences at fast-food drive-throughs. You're sitting there trying to order McNuggets. How can someone not understand that? You just get fed up and drive off."**

— Gina Canfield, Zanesville, Ohio

While economists, corporate America and the courts are just beginning to grapple with verbal gridlock, those who've studied the USA's biggest immigration wave since the

## Top 50 foreign languages

The 1990 Census found that nearly 32 million of the 230 million people in the USA older than 5 spoke a language other than English in their homes. Nearly 21% of those people said they did not speak English well or at all. The 50 most common foreign languages spoken in the USA, the number of speakers and the percentage of foreign-language speakers who say they do not speak English well or at all:

Rank	Language	Number of speakers	Don't speak English well/at all
1	Spanish	17,339,172	26%
2	French	1,702,176	9%
3	German	1,547,099	7%
4	Italian	1,308,648	12%
5	Chinese	1,249,213	30%
6	Tagalog	843,251	7%
7	Polish	723,483	14%
8	Korean	626,478	30%
9	Vietnamese	507,069	28%
10	Portuguese	429,860	23%
11	Japanese	427,657	21%
12	Greek	388,260	11%
13	Arabic	355,150	11%
14	Hindi (Urdu)	331,484	9%
15	Russian	241,788	27%
16	Yiddish	213,064	8%
17	Thai (Laotian)	206,266	28%
18	Persian	201,865	12%
19	French Creole	187,658	22%
20	Armenian	149,694	26%
21	Navajo	148,530	15%
22	Hungarian	147,902	9%
23	Hebrew	144,292	6%
24	Dutch	142,684	4%
25	Mon-Khmer	127,441	43%
26	Gujarati	102,418	12%
27	Ukrainian	96,568	14%
28	Czech	92,485	6%
29	Pan Dutch	83,525	6%
30	Miao (Hmong)	81,877	46%
31	Norwegian	80,723	5%
32	Slovak	80,388	7%
33	Swedish	77,511	4%
34	Serbo-Croatian	70,964	13%
35	Kru	68,448	3%
36	Romanian	65,265	17%
37	Lithuanian	55,781	9%
38	Finnish	54,350	6%
39	Punjabi	50,005	15%
40	Formosan	48,044	21%
41	Croatian	45,206	9%
42	Turkish	41,876	14%
43	Hocano	41,131	20%
44	Bengali	38,101	8%
45	Danish	35,839	3%
46	Sriliac	35,146	15%

and drive off.

— Gina Canfield,  
Zanesville, Ohio

While economists, corporate America and the courts are just beginning to grapple with verbal gridlock, those who've studied the USA's biggest immigration wave since the turn of the century say the reasons are easy to explain.

The USA's population of legal and illegal immigrants, foreign nationals, refugees and temporary workers is at an all-time high.

About 14 million foreign-born U.S. residents told the Census Bureau in 1990 that they had limited or no English-language proficiency — the last official query of language skills.

But more than 5 million legal immigrants and foreign nationals have arrived since then, most of them Hispanic or Asian. And the population of illegal immigrants is now up to 5 million, a 28% jump since 1992 alone, says the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The bottom line: many people who don't speak English well are coming ear-to-ear with increasingly exasperated consumers, especially in the labor-starved, low-wage, low-skill tier of the service sector.

"We're irritated by people who don't speak English or have an accent," says Rutgers University professor Nancy DiTomaso, who studies language competency in the workplace. "Americans tend to be particularly ethnocentric and intolerant. We presume other people should know our language."

Critics say most employers don't realize they have a consumer relations problem. Many who do say it's too costly to provide language training, particularly for low-paid workers who are likely to move on as they become more proficient in English on their own.

But as more and more commerce is fouled by fast-food clerks who mistake orders, taxicab drivers who misunderstand directions and telemarketers who can't explain why they called, sociologists and consumer behaviorists detect a palpable, collective complaint that's evolved into one of the most politically incorrect questions of the '90s: "Can't anyone here speak English?"

**“You'd look around the class (taught by an Indian graduate student) . . . and people's faces would be all scrunched up. It was amusing to a point, but then it became very painful. People would yell at her to slow down. Some compared notes after class.”**

— Vivienne Wildes,  
Penn State University

Beyond inconvenience, broader issues are being raised by limited English-language proficiency.

► **Growing costs.**

Poor English skills among foreign-born residents cost more than \$175

36	Romanian	65,265	17%
37	Lithuanian	55,781	9%
38	Finnish	54,350	6%
39	Punjabi	50,005	15%
40	Formosan	48,044	21%
41	Croatian	45,206	9%
42	Turkish	41,878	14%
43	Hocano	41,131	20%
44	Bengali	39,101	8%
45	Danish	35,839	3%
46	Syriac	35,148	15%
47	Samoan	34,914	10%
48	Malayalam	33,949	8%
49	Cajun	33,670	7%
50	Amharic	31,505	11%

Source: Census Bureau



Seeking a new home: Immigrants crowd the Ellis Island dining room after their arrival. The island was an examination center for immigrants to America.

billion a year in lost productivity, wages, tax revenue and unemployment compensation, says Ohio University economist Lowell Gallaway, who's studied the financial impact of English language proficiency skills among immigrants since the 1970s.

Since limited English keeps many immigrants in low-wage jobs, immigrants' median income is about 30% below that of native-born workers. The shortfall in federal and state taxes amounts to about \$90 billion a year. Gallaway says lost productivity — time delays, poor output and mistakes by workers who can't understand or speak English — costs another \$40 billion.

"I'm not an immigrant-basher, but I strongly favor doing whatever we can to increase language capabilities of immigrants," Gallaway says.

The fallout is particularly acute in urban areas.

"In some big labor markets, language problems are an increasing source of frustration," says Cornell University labor economist Vernon Briggs. "It's accentuated because 80% of the workforce is employed in service jobs. A lot of these jobs are filled by immigrants. But by definition, service means communication. . . . If workers can't communicate, it certainly affects quality of life."

That isn't likely to change, especially as immigrants — many with

little education in their own countries — fill low-skill jobs.

"They take care of your house, your yard, your children, your parents," says Stanford University economist Clark Reynolds. "They do jobs most native-born American workers don't want — at wages that make things affordable. They'll continue to be an important part of the economy. The problem is there's no bridge between economic need and cultural dissonance."

► **Linguistic litigation.**

Legal disputes over English-language proficiency and heavy accents are rising. Discrimination lawsuits — ranging from rejecting job applicants to on-the-job harassment — may become as common over the next decade as sex discrimination cases are now, experts say.

"The courts are just beginning to struggle with language-based discrimination cases," says American Civil Liberties Union attorney Ed Chen. "There's going to be conflict between economic interests and equal rights. People who look and sound different make for increasing discrimination."

The New York-based Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund has three lawsuits pending on behalf of workers who were fired for speaking Spanish on the job. "These people are being told, 'This is Ameri-

ca, speak English,'" says attorney Ken Kimerling.

One case involves Iralda Calderon, a 33-year-old Brooklyn, N.Y., resident who says her civil rights were violated by Damon House, a New York City drug treatment center. Calderon says she was told not to speak Spanish to other employees or even clients, some who were Hispanic and with limited English-speaking ability. After continuing to speak Spanish, Calderon says she was fired from her \$23,000-a-year job. In that case and the others, employers say the workers were terminated for other reasons.

Faced with increased complaints of discrimination, the EEOC last year began separating language and accent discrimination complaints from other discrimination cases, such as gender and age disputes.

Many of the 32 language cases investigated by the EEOC involve "blanket English-only policies by employers that are not justified," says EEOC chairman Gilbert Casillas.

While language discrimination violates the U.S. Civil Rights Act, proving cases has been difficult, so the legality of English-only workplace policies is unsettled. But Casillas expects more complaints, especially from Asian immigrants who are skilled professionals.

"There's a subtle form of discrimi-

nation — a glass ceiling — involving highly educated Asians and Pacific-Americans who speak with a heavy accent," he says.

#### ► Medical foulups.

Experts fear medical malpractice claims may also increase, given the flood of foreign-born health care professionals practicing in the USA.

"It's a growing issue. If a physician has difficulty with English and can't communicate with a patient, it can cause problems," says Washington, D.C., attorney Jack Olender.

From 1970 to 1995, the number of physicians educated at foreign medical schools practicing in the USA surged 190%. They now represent 23% of the nation's physicians, according to the American Medical Association, which supports boosting English-language skills of foreign-born physicians. About 80% of the USA's doctors with degrees from another country are foreign born.

Beginning in July 1998, the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates will require an oral English exam, including how well doctors communicate with patients, as part of its certification process.

"Obviously, to provide the best protection to the public, we felt there's a need," says commission operations director Marie Shafron. "We believe they need to have good communications skills."

#### ► Political tension.

The issue of language is becoming increasingly politicized.

Already, 23 states have passed English-only laws for government agencies. Congress approved a similar measure to make English the official language of federal government last year, although it died in the Senate. Similar legislation was introduced two weeks ago by Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala.

But to some politicians, language and politics don't mix.

"We have a great phobia about language," says Rep. Jose Serrano, D-N.Y. "There's a belief that not having an official language is going to somehow destroy us. It's foolish that this is even a political issue."

**"You try to explain something to them and they don't understand a word. I don't know how many times I've tried to order something over the phone and this has happened to me."**

— Elmer Armstrong, Baraboo, Wis.

Clearly, the debate about language is polarizing — and conflicted.

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# Americans 'irritated' by non-English speakers

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Millions of native-born Americans still have strong ties to parents or grandparents who immigrated here. People understand that the pace of American life is vastly more intense than in most other countries, making rapid assimilation difficult. Moreover, immigrant-bashing minimizes the hardships many endured in their native countries, such as racial, ethnic and religious persecution.

So privately, even among friends, many find the language gap a tough subject to raise.

"Language is a touchy issue," says Stuart Anderson, director of trade and immigration studies at the Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank that supports legal immigration. "It's an issue people have a visceral reaction to. Everyone has a story. In some ways, it's like picking on the fat kid at school."

The mere mention of the language issue can smack of racism and xenophobia. But once people do start talking, the frustration pours out, spanning a range of immigrant groups, cracking the melting pot.

"I'm worried about how I come off — that I'm not tolerant of other people or anti-immigrant," says Jessica Haney, internet coordinator for the

Feminist Majority Foundation, a non-profit research group in Arlington, Va. "I'm a totally liberal person."

Still, says Haney, "I tried to buy a coffee table, but something that should have taken 10 minutes took 30 because I couldn't understand anyone and no one understood me. I do feel frustrated. There has to be some level of customer service."

**"T**here's a woman from Romania who takes X-rays at the hospital I work at. When you take them, the patient has to stay still. She'll say something to them and the patient won't understand her English and will step away and have to be exposed again to more radiation from the X-ray."

— Tom Jones, Burien, Wash.

Richard Alba, a sociologist at State University New York-Albany who's studied immigration patterns, isn't surprised by the reaction of many native-born consumers. "As ethnic communities build up and distribute beyond metropolitan areas, it's be-

come a phenomena that people notice in their everyday lives," he says.

Says Gerald Celente, who tracks consumer behavior as director of the Trends Research Institute: "Many people aren't sympathetic. One of the elements of our society is people want things fast, they want things easy and they want things now."

States with the heaviest concentrations of foreign-born workers — California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey and Illinois — have dealt with varying degrees of verbal gridlock for years.

Yet with foreign nationals continuing to pour into the country, this linguistic culture shock is not only intensifying in big cities, but in small towns and suburbs as well.

"In many parts of the U.S., the public isn't sophisticated about language issues, especially in places which have been relatively homogeneous in an ethnic sense," says James Crawford, author of *Hold your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of English Only*. "There's a feeling among a lot of people that English is being threatened."

The continuing geographic spread of immigrants — to places like Minneapolis, now home to more than 50,000 Southeast Asian refugees largely because of ethnic networking

and employment opportunities — will lead to more anger at immigrants, some experts say.

And things aren't going to get any better.

Says Peter Brimelow, author of the bestseller *Alien Nation*: "The social pressures to compel assimilation and learn English don't exist because immigrants are living in enclaves."

**"L**anguage difficulty? Try verbal insanity. On a recent trip to Miami, I couldn't find anyone at the airport to explain why my bags were damaged and I couldn't make clear at the (car rental) counter why I wanted a city map. For what it's worth, I speak three languages."

— Victor Czerkasij, Ooltewah, Tenn.

A smattering of government agencies and businesses are providing some solutions — or are about to.

The INS is evaluating how to standardize the oral language testing component of its citizenship application tests.

Currently, there's no standardized

testing of verbal English competency, although to pass citizenship requirements, immigrants are supposed to have proficiency.

"Now, it's a judgment call on the part of each examiner," says INS spokesman David Rosenberg. Municipalities also are taking action.

New York City is home to about 1.5 million immigrants who don't speak English well, the Census Bureau says. For the past few years, the city's Taxi and Limousine Commission has tried to make the service sector more efficient, requiring 45,000 licensed cab drivers — more than 90% foreign-born — to pass English proficiency tests. Cabbies who don't pass have to pay \$250-400 for 40-80 hours of classes that have a "strong component" of language training, says Commission spokesman Allan Fromberg.

Like many businesses that deal with the public, Southland Corp., owner or franchiser of about 5,000 7-11 convenience stores, tries to achieve a balance of staffing and customer service.

"Providing good customer service is what it's all about," says spokeswoman Margaret Chabris. "We are teaching many people on the job how to conduct business in this country."

But, she adds, "What you find is a disconnect between what some customers expect and what new Americans are comfortable doing or saying. They're an integral part of our workforce. Maybe they're English-language skills aren't where they need to be."

Some observers suggest a bit more tolerance on the part of native-born Americans — and bilingual education — also might help make life smoother.

Creative Hairdressers, the USA's largest privately owned hair salon chain with 600 Hair Cutters and Bubbles salons, says about 30% of its 8,000 employees are foreign born. But marketing chief Tammy Ebaugh suggests complaints such as Schirmer's are rare.

"They do master the basics of the language, and sometimes there's a heavy accent. But a lot of our stylists get along beautifully."

In the end, however people choose to deal with it, language gridlock is here to stay.

Based on projected immigration patterns and low birth rates among native-born Americans, experts say the nation's population will grow by about 130 million people by 2050. About one third of those people will be from somewhere else.

SPECIAL REPORT: EXPLORING THE USA'S LANGUAGE GAP

# Survival 101: Learning English

Immigrants continue to arrive in record numbers, and there aren't nearly enough English classes for all those who want to learn. The result? The nation's linguistic confusion can only grow worse.

By Gary Strauss  
USA TODAY

**A** GERMANTOWN, Md. s snow begins falling on a chilly February evening, about 100 adults slowly file into a sprawling high school 30 miles northwest of Washington, D.C.

Founded more than 150 years ago as a farm community, Germantown got its name because of the predominant language spoken by its merchants. But tonight at Seneca Valley High, there's no common tongue.

Afghans, Nepalese, Mexicans, Chileans, Greeks, Indians, Hmong and Armenians are among 30 nationalities clustered in five classrooms. The group reflects the diversity of the USA's growing immigrant population and immigrants' increasing shift from major urban centers to the suburbs and beyond.

"What day is it today?" Instructor Kay Douglas patiently asks her basic level class again and again as students take their seats.

"Tuesday," half her 10 students intone. It's actually Thursday, prompting an American-born, grade school-age girl who's accompanied her Salvadoran-born mother to burst into giggles. The girl will continue to giggle for the next two hours.

Asking about the snow, Douglas gets quizzical looks until she draws a snowman on the blackboard, eliciting nods and grins.

"At this level, language is real intimidating. I do lots of hand-holding," she says.

In an adjacent classroom, instructor Bonnie Frederick leads 29 beginner-level students. "The gratitude I get from these students is amazing," she says. "It's tough for them to be here. But they want to learn."

Douglas' and Frederick's students are among 12,000 foreign-born nationals who'll take free, 2½-hour, twice-weekly classes of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) sponsored by the Montgomery County school system this year.

It is Maryland's largest such program and one of dozens nationally that will provide language training to 1.4 million foreign-born adults in



They want to learn: Teacher Bonnie Frederick assists students Juying Lai, left, and Anh Ho of Vietnam during English class at Seneca Valley High.



Progress: Ala Kotowska, a native of Poland, values her English classes.

"People here think because you have a heavy accent, you don't know anything," he says. "They just auto-

ESOL teachers. "Imagine yourself plopped into a country where you had to survive. If more people did, there'd be less political rhetoric and short-term sound bites about immigration policy and more priority on language training."

For now, the federal government is looking at some cheap alternatives. It helped underwrite the \$3 million production cost of *Crossroads Cafe*, a television series that began airing on some of the nation's 350 Public Broadcast Service stations in September.

Each of the 26 *Crossroads* episodes, half-hour "dramedys," features actors who provide viewers language skills.

Some say cash-strapped state and federal agencies will never have the resources to boost English-language proficiency among foreign-born residents, and that corporate America must assume a far bigger role.

"Business seems loath to spend money on this. Many have the feeling (immigrants) are expendable workers," Burt says.

Increasingly, though, employers are providing language training out

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### Language is survival

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, about 14 million foreign-born U.S. residents don't speak English well or at all. To some native-born Americans, it seems as though they must not want to learn.

But these ESOL students and many like them across the country desperately want to understand and speak English. For them, it's one of the most important steps to economic and social survival.

"There's a political dimension to these issues and a reality," says Cecilia Munoz of the National Council of La Raza, an immigrant service organization.

"The assumption is immigrants don't want to learn English. The real issue is the capacity of programs to provide language training."

Nationwide, demand for ESOL classes vastly exceeds the available classes sponsored by local school districts, community colleges, labor organizations, church groups, immigrant-rights organizations and volunteers.

In New York City alone, there's a waiting list of about 50,000.

"Most groups don't even keep a waiting list because it's too frustrating," says Marjorie McHugh, executive director for the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella

...to arrive in record numbers, a  
who want to learn. The result? The nati



High hopes: Ghazina Khadrin, an Afghanistan native, studies English with hope organization for 120 immigrant groups in the New York City area.

Of the few classes available nationwide, most teach little more than basic survival English — far below the intensive, prolonged language training many immigrants need to prosper, says Miriam Burt of the Center for Applied Linguistics.

### Not easy to learn

English is not an easy language.

Stanford University linguist Kenji Hakuta, who studies immigrants' language-acquisition skills, says that for most foreign-born adults, it takes up to two years of instruction to progress beyond basic survival English and five to seven years to understand and speak English well.

ESOL instructor Lydia Trang is a Vietnamese refugee who took ESOL classes after arriving in the USA in July 1980. Ten years later, she graduated from Towson State College in Maryland. But she says she's still learning a lot about English.

"Slangs and idiom, singular and plural, it's enough to drive a lot of people crazy," Trang says. "It took me a long time to get my confidence up to speak in front of adults."

Genadi Maltinski, a native of Russia completing his medical residency at Pennsylvania's Reading Hospital and Medical Center, speaks Russian,

Italian, German and Hebrew. He came to the USA in 1993 and still finds English cumbersome.

"To be able to talk real well, it's a challenge. Pronouncing vowels, the intonation... the speed, is very difficult," he says. "I started learning English when I was 35. At my age, it is very challenging."

Many ESOL students don't have the inclination or ability to take classes much beyond the basic level. Even getting to class can be difficult. Of the Germantown ESOL students, many walk or take public transportation, so bad weather, like tonight's snowstorm, lowers attendance. Many students have families; many have full-time jobs.

As work and family responsibilities mount, attendance can drop 25% or more during the three-month course. The class focuses on teaching language for everyday life: dealing with neighbors, personal finance, workplace issues and health care.

Understanding this level of English, at a minimum, is crucial.

"If you want a good job, you must speak the language," says David Dolan, who was a teacher in Armenia but works now as a shoe repairman.

"Immigrants' upward mobility is limited by English proficiency," says Wayne Cornelius, research director for the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California at

STOWARDS HISTORIC

m's linguistic confusion can only grow worse.



By Mark Abraham

working for the Voice of America.

San Diego. "They tend to be slotted in jobs that are among the worst and it tends to keep them there."

Ghazina Khadim has master's degrees in political science and journalism from Pakistani colleges. He came to Maryland nine months ago.

With limited English skills, he works as a cashier for a fast-food hamburger chain. He hopes to improve his English so he might eventually work for the Voice of America radio network.

Khadim, 32, sits in the intermediate-level ESOL class taught by Trang, struggling to tell other students why driving is more complex here than in his native Afghanistan.

"There are no traffic lights in my country; there's no place to stop. Everything has been destroyed by war," he says. Khadim's classmates slowly mull this over and collectively respond with a soft, nervous laugh.

While many didn't experience war in their own countries, a lot of them have escaped political or religious oppression.

Some of these students are hoping that by becoming more proficient in English, they will encounter cultural biases less often.

Nektarios Kostaki, born in Crete, owns a floor-covering business in suburban Washington. But he says he lets his American-born secretary field his phone calls.



By Mark Abraham

They want to learn: Teacher Bonnie Frederick assists students Juying Lai, left, and Anh Ho of Vietnam during English class at Seneca Valley High.



By Judy Greenwood

Progress: Ala Kotowska, a native of Poland, values her English classes.

"People here think because you have a heavy accent, you don't know anything," he says. "They just automatically look at you different."

### Resources lacking

Educators and immigrant advocates say federal funding of ESOL courses is woefully inadequate.

Ron Pugsley, a director in the Department of Education's office of Vocational and Adult Education, says only about \$300 million in federal money is directed to state and locally sponsored ESOL courses each year.

"We're serving 1.4 to 1.5 million adults in classrooms," Pugsley says. "Clearly, there's not sufficient resources for the demand."

It's likely to get worse. Pugsley says that during the next 15 years, the USA could take in 17 to 20 million immigrants with limited English skills.

"Given how important everyone thinks it is to speak a common language and our preoccupation for the primacy of English, it's stunning how little we spend on English-language training," says Jeff Passel, a demographer with the Urban Institute.

Although President Clinton is pushing education as a cornerstone of his second term, educators say little additional federal funding is anticipated for ESOL programs. If anything, there are signs of cutbacks.

"We need more classes and more and better-qualified teachers," says Susan Bailey, executive director of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Inc., a service organization representing about 19,000

ESOL teachers. "Imagine yourself plopped into a country where you had to survive. If more people did, there'd be less political rhetoric and short-term sound bites about immigration policy and more priority on language training."

For now, the federal government is looking at some cheap alternatives. It helped underwrite the \$3 million production cost of Crossroads Cafe, a television series that began airing on some of the nation's 350 Public Broadcast Service stations in September.

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"Business seems loath to spend money on this. Many have the feeling (immigrants) are expendable workers," Burt says.

Increasingly, though, employers are providing language training out of necessity.

For example, Minneapolis' downtown Hilton Hotel had trouble finding workers after opening in 1992, partially because the massive Mall of America shopping complex had recently opened, tapping 8,000 workers from the area labor pool.

Hilton began turning to immigrants who spoke minimal English. Today, about 40% of hotel's 574 full and part-time workers are foreign-born, representing 18 countries.

"We wouldn't be able to staff the hotel without them," says human resources director Wendy Brockhoff.

The hotel has started to provide English-language training, initially to a half-dozen students, at a total cost of just \$300. As more foreign-born workers opt for classes, the hotel hopes the program will translate into better service for guests and simpler employee training, she says.

Ala Kotowska, a university-trained chemist at a baking company in Nysa, Poland, now works as a Hilton housekeeper. She came to the USA in 1992, hoping for a better life for her four children. Three months ago, at age 48, she began taking the Hilton-sponsored ESOL classes.

"It's hard to live in a country where you don't speak the language," says Kotowska, who used to just smile when people talked to her, not knowing what they said or how to respond. "Learning English makes communication better. And I feel better."

Result of miscommunication, a view, one says, that was a shambles after it was struck by a freighter.

were killed.

# The political climate

The USA is known as a melting pot. But anti-immigrant sentiment has simmered since the nation was founded, leapfrogging from group to group, shaping political debate.

In the past, native-born Americans railed against Germans, Italians, Russians, Poles and Scandinavians, to name just a few, sometimes using language to fuel resentment.

Those resentments in turn influenced politicians, political platforms and national policy.

Beginning in 1831 and continuing into the early part of the 20th century, political-party platforms took positions against immigrants and their threat to "the great parent stock," as the Democrats put it in 1876.

Even as early as 1751, Benjamin Franklin urged restricting immigration, complaining that in Pennsylvania there were too many Germans. These Germans, he scoffed, could never assimilate or acquire "our

complexion."

In the 19th century, loathing of the Chinese was so widespread that Congress slammed the door to Chinese immigrants. In 1917, Congress barred immigration by "Asiatics" — people from India, Indochina, Afghanistan and Arabia.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, scholars and policymakers regularly published articles in respected, popular magazines, explaining how "bad" immigrants (identified as Italians, Greeks, Poles and Hungarians) were poor, stupid, illiterate and breeders of crime and disease.

In the South, Italian immigrants were treated as badly as blacks. In the Northeast, "no Irish need apply" signs were common and unremarkable for decades.

Today, discrimination against immigrants is more subtle. But language differences are highlighted: In the past, language skills were not as

important because most immigrants took factory, farming, construction or mining jobs that didn't require an ability to converse with the public.

"We've never been pro-immigrant," says Thomas Espenshade of Princeton University's Office of Population Research. "Every time a new wave comes, people have been concerned the country would fall apart."

Political debate continues.

Last year, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, a bipartisan committee created in 1990 to make policy recommendations, suggested a 250,000 annual cut in legal immigrants. But Congress failed to act after lobbying and cross-lobbying by pro- and anti-immigrant groups.

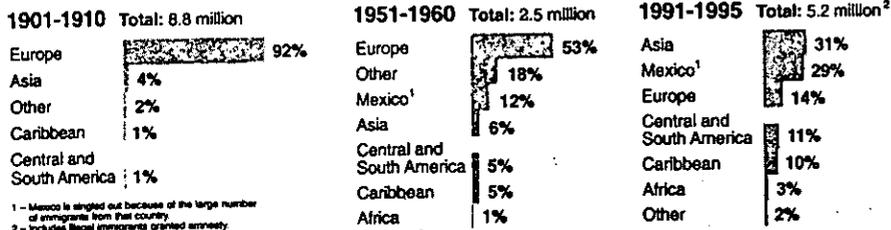
Meanwhile, English-only advocacy groups back the current effort by Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., to enact legislation that would mandate English-only in government offices. Similar laws have passed in 23 states.

ter their

# NG THE USA'S LANGUAGE GAP

## National origin of immigrants is changing

At the turn of the century, the greatest number of immigrants were Europeans. Now they are Asians and Latin Americans.



1 - Mexico is singled out because of the large number of immigrants from that country.  
2 - Includes illegal immigrants granted amnesty.

By Grant Jording, USA TODAY

## LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AFFECTS . . .

### The workplace

For some employers, immigrants are key to business — whether they can speak English or not.

Despite offering up to \$10 an hour, restaurateur Bill Hutchinson of Nantucket, Mass., has to recruit a half-dozen foreign workers a year under work visa programs. Without them "I'd be out of business," he says.

Often, they can't speak English. At San Francisco-based ABM Industries, the USA's largest provider of janitorial and maintenance services, half the 48,000 workers are recent immigrants.

"We'd have trouble filling jobs without them," says William Steele, the company's chief executive.

Plenty of immigrants hold high-end jobs as engineers, doctors and computer experts. But now in the U.S. economy, the crunch mostly comes in the service sector.

There, some jobs — particularly in fast food, janitorial and lodging — have especially high percentages of foreign-born workers. That's be-

cause these low-wage jobs are no longer desirable to many native-born Americans and because immigrants, especially those with limited English abilities, are the only workers available to labor-starved employers.

Consumer experts say many companies recognize why English-language skills are important. "Consumers are resentful and frustrated," says Judith Langer of retail consultant Langer & Associates. "There are real, practical issues when you can't understand people you're dealing with."

But even businesses where employees rarely encounter the public face verbal gridlock problems:

► Language deficiencies can cause erroneous messages, poorly worded memos and general miscommunication, says corporate consultant Katie Schwartz, author of *Talking on the Job: The World of Corporate Speech Pathology*.

► Poor language skills make workers reluctant to articulate thoughts,

which can crimp problem-solving and ideas, says Fordham University management professor Paul Beard.

► Poor language skills can lead to conflict, says Lynn McClure, author of *Risky Business, Managing Employee Violence*.

"Language problems on top of cultural differences in the workplace can be a volatile combination."

In the future, supply and demand are likely to muddy the debate over language and the workplace.

Stanford economist Clark Reynolds says that if the economy is to continue growing at 3% a year, the workforce must add up to 13 million more workers than the native-born population can provide. Those shortages will hit all areas.

"It's clear we're going to see substantial shortages in high-end jobs such as engineering and computer software programming. Immigrants are a way to address that," says Jerry Jasnowski, president of the National Association of Manufacturers.

### Transportation safety



Result of miscommunication? New Orleans' Riverwalk mall was a shambles after it was struck by a freighter.

English is the international language of aviation and shipping. But safety experts say poor English-language skills contributed to accidents that have killed and injured hundreds of people. Among the most recent:

► The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating whether the crash Dec. 14 of a freighter into a New Orleans mall along the Mississippi River happened because the Chinese crew couldn't understand the English-speaking pilot. More than 100 shoppers were injured.

► A controller who spoke poor English was not able to warn the pilots of an American Airlines jet bound for Colombia that they were heading in the wrong direction. The plane hit a mountain Dec. 20, 1995, killing 150.

► An Avianca jet approaching New York's Kennedy International Airport crashed Jan. 25, 1990, after running out of fuel. In spite of its predicament, the plane was not given immediate clearance to land because the crew did not use the word "emergency" in talking with controllers. The captain, who spoke little English, did not detect the error. Seventy-three of the 158 aboard were killed.