# Bilingualism in the U.S.

 Bilingualism is a multifaceted terminology depending on the context in use. It is the ability of a person to express him/herself in two dissimilar languages. Bilingualism in the United States has been understood and appreciated differently by communities, cultures, state officials and households yet has elicited heated debate among those pro and against the introduction of bilingualism (Hayakawa 32). Although these beliefs and controversies may converge at some point, the divergent views have shaped the lifestyle and practices of individuals and states across America. The objectivity of the debates is aligned along cultural prejudices and subjectivity. In the context of Unite State of America, bilingualism is the official use of more than one language by government and its agencies in a bid to accommodate the large number of immigrants who may not be able to express themselves properly in English which is the primary official language of the United States. Therefore, the term is associated with communities within the Unites States who use English as their second language (Grosjean 15). The bilingualism debate in America has been shaped by the need to declare Spanish, the main language spoken by majority of immigrants, as an official language. Since the United State has a great number of immigrant, bilingualism will help them fit in the American society by improving their social life and uniting them with the native to build the economy of the country.
There are different schools of thought regarding bilingualism in the Unites States. Fallows claimed that bilingualism is beneficial to the American population (18). The reason is that America is already divided along different ethnic, racial, religious and political lines especially due to the many immigrants from various origins. Therefore, the adoption of bilingualism will ensure unity among the American people. Fallows also indicates that learning a second language is an enriching experience (18). He compares it to the situation of immigrant parents having children and raising them in a foreign country like the USA. The children can learn the language of their parents as well as that of the foreign country they residents to enhance their social environment. Therefore, bilingualism will help people of different origin to associate with the natives of American society. Using the case of Singapore, Fallows claims that learning a different language will enrich an individual’s knowledge of English (19). He claims that after the campaign dubbed “speak mandarin” in Singapore, the pass rate for English improved along with that of Mandarin. He also uses the example of Malaysians who speak three different languages and get along just fine hence the incentive to learn a second language is harmless.

Opponents of bilingualism such as Mujica have argued that it is expensive. He gives the example of Canada where the government spent a lot of money in order to fund official bilingualism yet the introduction of dual languages brought a lot of resentment among Canadian communities (Lang 584). He claims that the U.S may face similar issues if it decides to officialize a second language. Hayakawa, on the other hand, posits that America is divided along ethnic, racial, religious and political lines hence having one language serves as a unifying factor (Hayakawa 33). This is similar to Fallow’s arguments that one language would cause further division.

 Official bilingualism connotes an inclusive society that is accommodative of people from all cultures. The United States is a multi-cultural country or as Mujica calls it, an “immigrant society”. Mainly, this implies that there is a large group of people who cannot communicate properly in English and who learn English as a second language (ESL). A constant subject that has marred the bilingualism debate is the bilingual education (Drucker 25). The introduction of bilingual education was initialized in the 1960s and has existed in the American system since independence.

The first instance of bilingual education was by the colonial government who established bilingual schools for people who did not use English as their first language. Since then, there are several German, French, Polish, Spanish, Czech and Dutch schools all over the U.S (Crawford). Chiefly, this shows that there is a need for bilingual education in America. In fact, the introduction of bilingualism in the education system will no doubt improve the educational experience of children who are cognitively developed and driven towards other languages apart from English.

The United States has expended over $100 million to establish the effectiveness of bilingualism in the education system (Clinton 1124). Mujica claims that the taxpayers spend more than $4 billion annually to accommodate bilingualism in the education system (Mujica 36). Chiefly, this kind of expenditure may seem overwhelming but the immigrants comprise a huge part of the taxpayers and incur higher taxations than regular U.S citizens. Therefore, the money spent on accommodating bilingualism in the education system is justified as long as it is for the service of the American people and betters the educational experience of children.

Hayakawa argues that children can succeed in their studies regardless of the language of instruction as long as they grasp the concepts that they are taught. He claims that children are also allowed to compete equally for scholarships regardless of their status, immigrant or otherwise, hence they should be instructed in English just like the rest of the children across the world (Hayakawa 28). His ideas do not take into account that some states in the United States have a majority immigrant population and even government agencies may face trouble delivering services to the immigrants because of their difficulty in adapting to the English language.

Indeed, bilingualism is a matter of equality and diversity. It is a practice that asserts the equal rights and freedoms of the American citizens. Immigrants may bring with them certain unwanted and derogative practices such as female genital mutilation and animal sacrifice like is practised among Laos or Hmong people (Auster 19). Nonetheless, immigrants contribute to economic growth and cultural richness of America. Providing them with equal opportunities for success will only invigorate their contributions into the American economy (Clinton 1134). Therefore, the introduction of bilingualism works for the betterment of the entire American populace.

The reasoning behind bilingualism is deep-seated in the need to accommodate other cultures and ensure inclusivity and better communication within the American populace. The deliberate effort by the government to incorporate bilingualism in the education system is beneficial to immigrants with slow adaptability to the English language. Official bilingualism in other states has also made life easier for the citizenry and made the provision of government services more efficient. Indeed, official bilingualism connotes an inclusive society that is accommodative of people from all cultures and it should be encouraged by all means to ensure a balanced American society.

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