

Bryson, Bill. Mother Tongue. (313 WORDS)°

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DICTIONARY VOCABULARY: *percent - Hispanics - convenience*

Mother Tongue

In 1787, when representatives of the new United States gathered in Philadelphia to draw up a constitution, they apparently did not think that it was necessary to decide upon a national language. They assumed that people would speak English. But by the 1980s the spread of Spanish, Vietnamese, and other immigrant languages was worrying many Americans.

According to the Census Bureau, 11 **percent** of people in America speak a language other than English at home. In Los Angeles, the proportion of Spanish speakers is more than half and New York City has 1.5 million **Hispanics**. There are in America 190 Spanish-language newspapers, 200 radio stations, and 300 television stations.

In many areas, English speakers are afraid that they will become a minority group. A former U.S. senator founded a pressure group designed to promote English as the official language of the country. By late 1988, seventeen states, among which Colorado, Florida and California, had made English their official language.

It is easy to understand why Americans feel so strongly about this issue. A law in California requires schools where more than twenty pupils speak a language other than English to provide bilingual education. This sometimes causes problems. At one Californian high school, every speech on parent's night had to be translated from English into several foreign languages. In 1986, California was employing 3,364 Spanish-speaking state workers in order to help non-English speakers in matters concerning courts, social services, and so on. Critics insist that this law does not encourage non-English speakers to learn English.

Despite all this, there is little evidence to suggest that people are refusing to learn English. According to a recent study, 95 percent of the children of Mexican immigrants can speak English. By the second generation, more than half can speak *only* English. After all, learning the dominant language is necessary in terms of **convenience**, culture, and employment.

Vocabulary

psychology
independent
literature
life-threatening
salmon
overweight

accommodation
slaughterhouse
pneumonia
symmetrical