



MULTILINGUAL AMERICA

People who speak foreign languages at home are a fast growing group that is now found throughout the country.

BY WILLIAM H. FREY

America's identity as a melting pot now extends beyond multiple races and cultures to also include numerous languages. Ours is an increasingly multilingual nation, due to a new wave of immigration.

The number of individuals who speak a language other than English at home is on the rise. This population is also on the move: No longer restricted to traditional port-of-entry cities, such as New York and Los Angeles, foreign-language speakers are now sprouting up in certain Southeastern

and Western states.

For the first time, thanks to Census 2000 long-form data, we are able to identify these new locations where residents who speak a foreign language are making their presence felt. Although relatively small, this population is beginning to constitute a critical mass in many communities—reason alone for businesses seeking new markets to take note.

Nationally, Americans age 5 and older who speak a language other than English at home grew 47 percent in the past

decade. According to Census 2000, this group now accounts for slightly less than 1 in 5 Americans (17.9 percent). About three-fifths of this group speak Spanish at home (59.9 percent), another fifth speaks another Indo-European language (21.3 percent) and almost 15 percent speak an Asian language.

Overall, foreign-language speakers grew by about 15 million during the 1990s, with new Spanish speakers contributing about 11 million people and new Asian speakers almost 2.5 million. Con-

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tinued immigration from Latin America and Asia has increased the number of people who speak languages native to those regions.

Foreign-Language Havens

These foreign-language speakers are concentrated in 10 states, each where 20 percent or more of the residents speak a language other than English at home. Led by California (40 percent), this group includes several other Western states as well as New York, New Jersey, Florida and Rhode Island. (See maps, page 22.) The concentration is even more evident when one looks at individual metropolitan areas. (See tables, page 23.)

In six metros, including Miami and Laredo, Texas, those who speak only English at home are in the minority. In five Mexican border towns in this category, Spanish accounts for more than 96 percent of non-English languages spoken.

Other areas where more than one-third of the population speaks a language other than English at home include Los Angeles, San Antonio, San Francisco, New

York and San Diego.

By far, the two largest metros that house the most foreign-language-speakers are Los Angeles and New York, with more than 7 million and 6 million foreign-language speakers, respectively. Together, these two gateways increased their foreign-language speaking populations by 3.5 million between 1990 and 2000, accounting for 24 percent of the country's total gain.

Eight metropolitan areas with the largest populations that speak a foreign language accounted for almost half (46 percent) of the nation's total gain. Others include Phoenix, Atlanta, Las Vegas, Seattle and Denver—cities that became secondary magnets for new immigrant groups during the 1990s.

Multilingual Expansion

Although many immigrant gateway metros still hold the lion's share of inhabitants who speak a foreign language, the 1990s was a decade of extensive redistribution of foreign-born residents and hence, of foreign-language speakers. Areas that had little prior familiarity with

Spanish-speaking residents or those who speak an Asian language gained exposure to cultural as well as linguistic differences in their communities.

The 1990s was a decade of redistribution of foreign-born residents, and hence, foreign-language speakers.

States that now have the fastest growing non-English-speaking populations are not typically those with the highest percentages of such people. (See maps, page 22.) Most are Southeastern and Western states that began to attract new immigrants, often in response to an increased demand for services due to an influx of migrants from other states.

In the Southeast, this includes Georgia, North Carolina, Arkansas, Tennessee and Virginia; in the West, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Colorado. Several interior states with small foreign-born populations, such as Nebraska, are also attracting new non-English-speaking residents to take a variety of service jobs.

Similar geographic patterns are evident in metropolitan areas with the fastest growth of foreign-language-speakers. For example, Fayetteville, Ark., increased its non-English speaking population by a

SPANISH AND ASIAN LANGUAGE MAGNETS

There is some overlap between the lists of communities forming new, fast-growing enclaves for speakers of Spanish and Asian languages. The areas below all have at least 5,000 Spanish-speaking or Asian-speaking residents.

PERSONS SPEAKING SPANISH AT HOME: METRO AREAS WITH GREATEST GROWTH, 1990-2000

Metro Area	% INCREASE, 1990-2000
Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR MSA*	609%
Elkhart-Goshen, IN MSA	403%
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	381%
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	376%
Greensboro-Winston-Salem-High Point, NC MSA	367%
Green Bay, WI MSA	354%
Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir, NC MSA	338%
Atlanta, GA MSA	314%
Fort Smith, AR-OK MSA	310%
Sioux City, IA-NE MSA	306%

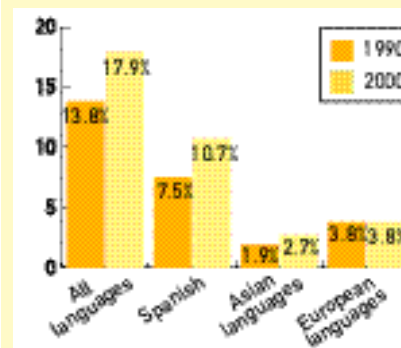
PERSONS SPEAKING ASIAN LANGUAGE AT HOME: METRO AREAS WITH GREATEST GROWTH, 1990-2000

Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir, NC MSA	467%
Las Vegas, NV-AZ MSA	220%
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	182%
Lincoln, NE MSA	172%
Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson, SC MSA	170%
Atlanta, GA MSA	157%
Greensboro-Winston-Salem-High Point, NC MSA	156%
Austin-San Marcos, TX MSA	156%
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	128%
Grand Rapids-Muskegon-Holland, MI MSA	127%

Source: William H. Frey analysis, 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census
*MSA= Metropolitan Statistical Area as defined by the Office of Management and Budget

WHO SPEAKS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT HOME?

About 1 in 5 Americans (17.9 percent of the population) over age 5 spoke a foreign language at home in 2000.

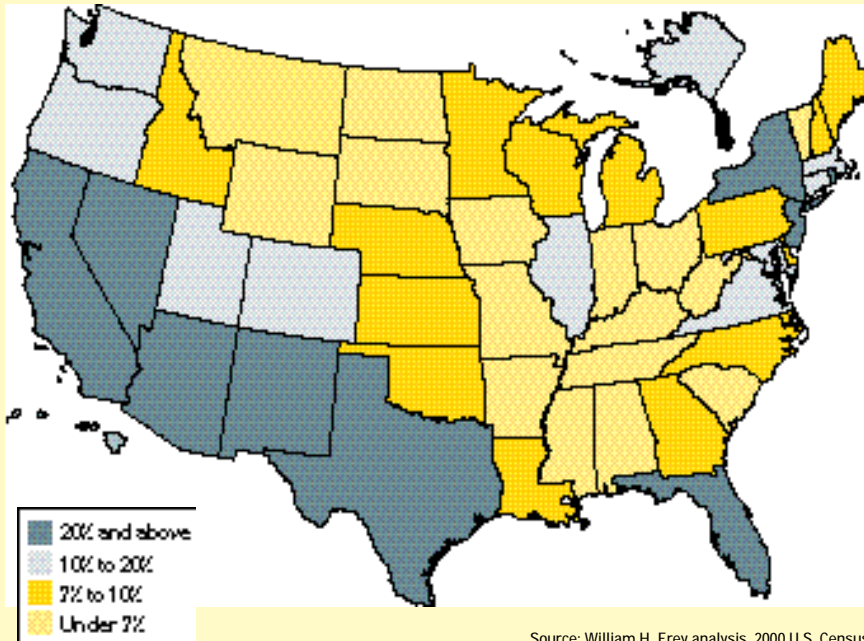


Note: All groups are not shown.

Source: 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census

NATIVE TONGUES

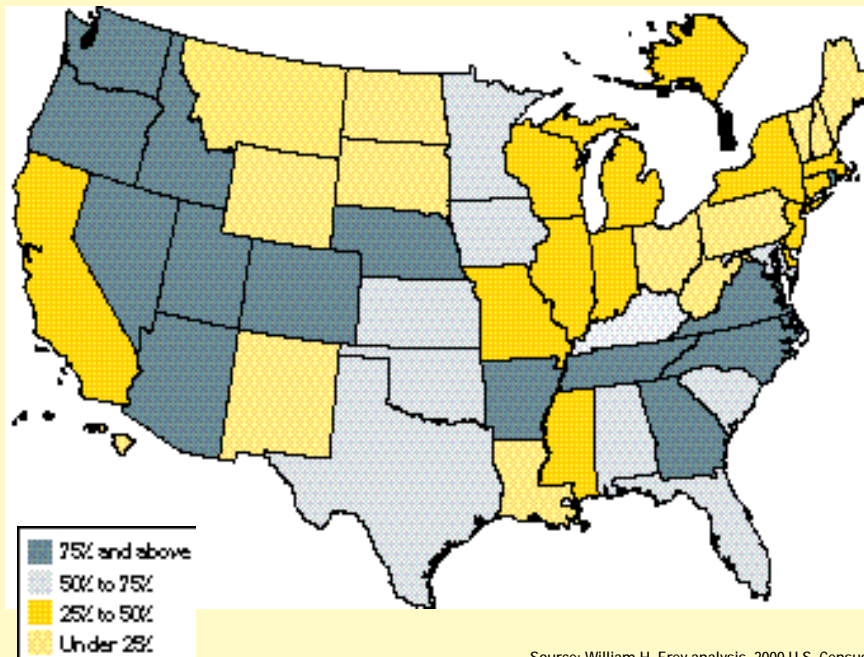
Ten states have the largest shares of foreign-language speakers (more than 1 in 5 speaks a foreign language at home). These include several Western states, New York, New Jersey, Florida and Rhode Island.



Source: William H. Frey analysis, 2000 U.S. Census

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE GROWTH, 1990-2000

The states with the fastest growing non-English speaking populations are not typically those with the highest percentages of foreign-language speakers. Such states include Georgia and North Carolina as well as Nebraska and Washington.



Source: William H. Frey analysis, 2000 U.S. Census

whopping 368 percent during the 1990s. Six of the seven fastest growing areas (Las Vegas being the exception) are in the South, including the North Carolina metros of Hickory, Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, Charlotte and Greensboro.

Although in many of these enclaves foreign-language speakers account for only a small percentage of the area's total population, this is not the case for all. Las Vegas, for example, increased its share of residents who speak a foreign language to 24 percent, from 13 percent, between 1990 and 2000. Similar increases can be seen for Orlando and Naples, Fla.; Phoenix and Dallas. Significant gains also occurred in small Iowa cities, such as Sioux City, Waterloo and Des Moines.

Spanish and Asian Language Magnets

While Spanish dominates the foreign languages spoken at home on the national level, this is not true for all parts of the United States. For example, fewer than half the foreign-language speakers in San Francisco and New York City speak Spanish. In the former, nearly as many speak Asian languages; in the latter, a large number of residents continue to speak other European languages at home.

Spanish represents more than half the foreign languages spoken at home in only nine states. These are located mostly on the Mexican border and in the West. Metro areas with the largest Spanish-speaking shares of their populations reflect the same geographic pattern.

In contrast, metropolitan areas that house large shares of Asian populations are fewer and farther between. Honolulu tops the group, with Asian languages spoken by almost 9 out of 10 people who speak a non-English language at home, followed by San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Stockton, Calif.

Considerable overlap exists between communities forming new, fast-growing enclaves for Spanish speakers and those who speak an Asian language. (See tables, page 23.) Of the 15 metro areas with the fastest growing Spanish-speaking populations, six are on the list of fast growing, Asian-language-speaking areas. These include Atlanta and Las Vegas, as well as North Carolina metros Raleigh-Durham, Charlotte, Greensboro and Hickory.

These areas are attracting new resi-

dents as a result of local universities or the labor market pulls associated with general population growth and the fast-growing economies of the “New Sun Belt.”

English Proficiency

One issue raised when people who speak a foreign language become new residents of a community is how well they can conduct their lives in English. While it’s no surprise that immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for a long time become fluent in English, Census 2000 reveals that this may not be the case with new arrivals.

The Census Bureau asked people who speak a language other than English at home this question: How well does this person speak English? (The choices were: very well, well, not well or not at all). Between 1990 and 2000, there was a larger increase of Spanish speakers who could not speak English very well than of those who could. However, for Asian language speakers, there was a larger increase between 1990 and 2000 of those who could speak English very well.

To a great extent, Spanish speakers arriving in non-gateway areas are less likely to speak English very well. Among the metros with the lowest percentages of Spanish speakers speaking English very well are Greensboro, Raleigh-Durham, Charlotte and Hickory in North Carolina; Atlanta and other newer destinations for Spanish-speaking residents.

Among areas where Spanish speakers have high levels of English proficiency are university towns like Gainesville, Fla., and Lubbock, Texas, as well as locales with long-standing Spanish-speaking residents, such as Albuquerque, N.M.

The same pattern occurs among residents who speak an Asian language, with lower levels of proficiency where such settlers are relatively new (e.g., Lincoln, Neb.; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.; Greensboro, N.C. and Atlanta). High levels of proficiency tend to be in university communities such as Gainesville, Fla.; Raleigh-Durham and Chapel Hill, N.C.; Champagne-Urbana, Ill. and Colorado Springs, Colo.

These patterns of English proficiency mirror the national picture. States with the lowest levels of English profi-

ciency tend to be those that had the fastest growth of foreign-language residents during the 1990s. Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, North Carolina and Georgia are part of this group of states, which also includes some longer-term havens for foreign-born and foreign-language-speaking residents. For example, less than half (49 percent) of California’s foreign-born residents speak English very well.

The new census data provides insights into this fast growing group of Americans who speak a language other than English at home. It also highlights

the fact that if the U.S. is to continue to live up to its reputation as a melting pot, this influx of foreign-language speakers will require special efforts on the parts of schools, local organizations and grassroots groups to enable these new residents to become fully integrated members of their communities. ■

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METROS WITH HIGHEST SHARES OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS, 2000

Six metros, including Laredo and Miami, have populations where the minority speak only English at home. In five Mexican border towns in this category, Spanish is the non-English language spoken in more than 96 percent of homes.

NAME	PERCENT SPEAKING NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT HOME	PERCENT WHO SPEAK THESE LANGUAGES AT HOME			
		SPANISH	ASIAN LANGUAGE	EUROPEAN LANGUAGE	OTHER
Laredo, TX MSA	91.9%	99.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX MSA	83.1%	99.0%	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%
Brownsville-Harlingen-San Benito, TX MSA	79.0%	99.1%	0.4%	0.4%	0.1%
El Paso, TX MSA	73.3%	97.1%	1.0%	1.6%	0.3%
Las Cruces, NM MSA	54.4%	96.7%	0.7%	1.9%	0.7%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL CMSA	51.5%	80.0%	1.9%	16.7%	1.4%
Salinas, CA MSA	47.3%	83.5%	9.1%	6.5%	0.9%
Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County, CA CMSA	46.8%	70.7%	18.2%	9.1%	1.9%
Yuma, AZ MSA	45.5%	95.6%	1.5%	1.9%	0.9%
Merced, CA MSA	45.2%	77.7%	11.6%	10.4%	0.4%

Source: William H. Frey analysis, 2000 U.S. Census

METROS WITH LARGEST NUMBER OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS, 2000

The two largest metros with foreign-language speakers are Los Angeles and New York. Together, they increased their foreign-language-speaking population by 3.5 million during the 1990s—about 24 percent of the nation’s total gain.

LARGEST NUMBER OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS, 2000	NUMBER OF PEOPLE
Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County, CA CMSA	7,080,474
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA CMSA	6,614,354
San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, CA CMSA	2,368,377
Chicago-Gary-Kenosha, IL-IN-WI CMSA	2,116,043
Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL CMSA	1,869,966
Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, TX CMSA	1,372,010
Dallas-Fort Worth, TX CMSA	1,163,502
Washington-Baltimore, DC-MD-VA-WV CMSA	1,158,677
Boston-Worcester-Lawrence, MA-NH-ME-CT CMSA	1,042,727

Source: William H. Frey analysis, 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census