

BALKANIZATION, BILINGUALISM, AND COMPARISONS OF LANGUAGE SITUATIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I address the “balkanization argument” made by conservatives for English-Only legislation and against bilingualism. The argument here is that the United States faces the sort of linguistic divisions found in other countries. Most frequently invoked are the cases of Canada and Belgium. The claim that the United States should take warning from these countries and avoid the promotion of bilingualism has been made by a number of people, including Linda Chavez, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Newt Gingrich. I argue that this claim is alarmist, at best. Data from Canada and Belgium indicate that the linguistic situations in these two countries are far too different to make reasonable comparisons to the United States. I make my case by using data of language shift, language demographics, and language prestige. These data indicate just how far the United States is from being on the same road towards linguistic division. This is not to say, however, that linguistic division cannot occur, and I point out the lessons we *should* draw from the cases of Canada, Belgium, and other multilingual nations.

The real fear of Americans is that Hispanics will one day be a group large and powerful enough to insist that the U.S. adopt a bilingual policy. That fear is not so far-fetched, as Canada’s example demonstrates. French-Canadians make up only about one-quarter of the Canadian population, but they have succeeded in forcing the entire country to recognize and use French as an official language. Will something similar happen with Spanish when nearly one-third of the U.S. population is Hispanic? The mere possibility drives some Americans to make sure that day does not come. (Chavez, 1991, pp. 88-89) ¹

BALKANIZATION AND BILINGUALISM

In the above quotation, Linda Chavez encapsulates the alarmist response to the increased immigration from Spanish-speaking countries that began in the mid-1980’s. The primary response was the Official-English movement. Supporters of this movement argued that “[f]ailure to [make English our official language] may well lead to institutionalized language segregation and a gradual loss of national unity” (U.S. English, 1992, p. 144). In 1984, S.I. Hayakawa claimed that “[f]or the first time in our history, our nation is faced with the possibility of the kind of linguistic division that has torn apart Canada in recent years; that has been a major feature of the unhappy history of Belgium,

split into speakers of French and Flemish; that is at this very moment a bloody division between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations of Sri Lanka” (Hayakawa, 1992, p. 99).

More recently, Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama reiterated these beliefs claiming “[w]hat we’re [U.S. English] really trying to do is prevent the balkanization of this country down the road ... just as sure as life, if we have more and more diversity in this country without the English language unifying us, we’re going to have trouble and we’re going to have splits.”² This is because, claims Schlesinger (1992), bilingualism will corrode our national unity. For bilingualism is just another part of what Schlesinger abusively calls the “cult of ethnicity.”³

The primary assertion in the rhetoric above is that countries in which the government recognizes in some official way languages other than the national or primary language fall apart, i.e. they “balkanize.”

Certainly the situations in Canada and Belgium--the two nation-states that are used most frequently in the balkanization argument--are serious. However, they hardly qualify as the “clear warning to Americans about the threat that bilingualism poses to unity in the United States” as Newt Gingrich claimed in regard to Canada (The Denver Post, 1995, p. A1). In this article, I make two basic arguments. First, Gingrich and others grossly exaggerate the comparability of the linguistic state of affairs in the United States and these other nation-states. Second, the purported connection between bilingualism and balkanization ignores both counter-examples of peaceful bilingual nation-states and other potential causes of national division.

As a point of departure for my first argument, I review Lawrence Fuchs’s much earlier take on the question of comparing the United States and Canada. I follow this with descriptions of the linguistic situations in both Canada and Belgium and then point out the major differences between the situation of language minorities in these two countries and those in the United States.

STRETCHING COMPARISONS: PART ONE

Some years ago, Lawrence Fuchs (1983) addressed the issue of making comparisons between the linguistic situations in Canada and the US. Given the concern about the numbers of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries, especially Mexico, Fuchs presented five major differences between Mexican Americans and French-Canadians.

Fuchs’ first point was one specifically related to language. He argued that Mexican American leaders, while arguing in favor of culture and language maintenance, have never made arguments in opposition to the acquisition of English.

Second, territory, political memory, and geographic mobility each play a role. Fuchs observed that most Mexican Americans now in the United States are immigrants or descendants of immigrants who came after changes in

sovereignty. Thus, the historic memory is nowhere near as powerful as that of the French in Quebec who to this day drive with license plates with the admonition “I remember!” in reference to the humiliation suffered at the hands of the English.

Third, while it may no longer wield the same influence today, the Catholic Church in Quebec historically has been a strong force in promoting French nationalism. The Catholic Church in the United States, on the other hand, promotes assimilation, indeed Americanization.

The fourth difference is the role of politics. On the one hand, Mexican American politicians work within the same body of rules and use the same liberal rhetoric concerning freedom, cultural diversity, and equality of opportunity as all “American” groups. On the other hand, the Quebecois governments have begun to demand separate consideration of the Quebec situation. They now claim a special status that gives them far greater power than other groups in Canada.⁴ As we shall see, these demands were exacerbated after the failure of a proposed agreement called the Meech Lake Accord.

The final difference between Mexican Americans and the Quebecois is the role of founding myths. The central myth in Canada is based on the idea of two nations forming a federal union in which distinct cultures, languages, and religions are officially recognized. The American myth has been based on “rugged individualism” and one nation.

In the next two sections, I present the linguistic situations in Canada and Belgium. I focus at the end of each section on Fuchs’ first category of difference, language, and divide it into three additional specific categories: language demographics, language shift, and language prestige. Language demographics refers to the number of speakers of a given language and their concentration in a territory. Language shift is the process of losing one’s first language and replacing it with another. Language shift can also refer to the process of making the second language the language of choice or dominance and need not mean complete loss of the first language. By language prestige I mean the extent to which a language promotes or is needed for economic advancement. In other words, a prestigious language positively affects the economic mobility of its speakers.

After presenting the two cases, I compare the data within these three categories to the situation in the United States. My conclusion is that seeing in Canada and Belgium a threat that is imminent, or even remotely possible at this point, is alarmist at best and deceitful at worst.

THE SITUATION IN CANADA

In 1987, the premiers of the ten Canadian provinces and the Prime Minister met at Meech Lake to hammer out a constitutional agreement that would recognize Quebec as a distinct society and require the government to promote that status. Approval of the agreement would have resulted in Quebec’s

ratification of the new Constitution of Canada written five years earlier. However, two of the ten Canadian provinces (Manitoba and New Brunswick) refused to ratify the agreement.⁵ Ratification had to occur by June 23, 1990; it did not. It was the non-ratification of the Meech Lake agreement that, according to Stéphane Dion (1991), triggered such strong secession sentiment in Quebec.

Signs of the ramifications of the failure at Meech Lake were clear as early as 1989. Robert Bourassa, then leader of Quebec's liberal party and premier of Quebec, noted that non-ratification would be "an intolerable humiliation for Quebec ... weakening our attachment to Canada and creating a serious constitutional crisis" (Lewis, 1989, p. 4). Bourassa also warned that failure to ratify would only help the Parti Québécois (PQ), the party leading the secessionist movement. On June 23, 1990, the ratification deadline came and went. As if cued by Bourassa's warning, Jacques Parizeau, leader of the PQ, declared, "Meech is dead, long live a sovereign Quebec" (Francis, 1990).

Bourassa, having favored the Meech Lake accord and now feeling the pressure from the PQ, refused to attend an August 1990 meeting of the premiers and the Prime Minister. He further signaled Quebec's recalcitrance by saying that Quebec would negotiate constitutional matters with the federal government alone. If other provinces would not recognize Quebec as a distinct society, Quebec would assert this status herself.

The fallout from Meech Lake became quickly visible among the general population of Quebecers. In 1980, Quebec voters rejected a referendum promoting an idea of sovereignty-association by a 60-40 margin (Stevens, 1990). The idea was to give Quebec sovereignty in many areas while maintaining a political and economic union with Canada. Sixty six percent of Quebecers came to support this idea by 1990, up from 40 percent a decade earlier. Furthermore, a majority of Quebecers (58%) also supported independence for the first time. Among francophones, the support for independence was 70 percent.

The result of the strong support for sovereignty was the demand by political leaders in Quebec that a new constitution be written that would recognize Quebec as a "distinct society." In 1992, the 11 other Canadian provinces rejected Quebec's demands for greater decentralization of certain federal powers. With this, Bourassa's prediction proved accurate and the Parti Québécois and Jacques Parizeau were elected to lead Quebec in 1994. The newly elected Québécois government demanded and got a vote on a referendum for independence. The referendum was defeated by only the narrowest of margins: 50.4% against separation.

LANGUAGE DEMOGRAPHICS

The most obvious difference between the United States and Canada concerns minority language demographics. In Canada, sixty percent of the population claim English as their mother tongue. This percentage has remained

fairly constant over the past forty years. However, another figure that has remained constant over the past forty years is the eighty percent of Quebecers who are Francophones (Wood, 1993). Thus, of the nearly seven million Francophones in Canada, some five and a half million live in Quebec. Three quarters of these Francophones report only French origins.

This last fact is important in that, by claiming the same national origin, Francophone Quebecers are more likely to speak with one voice about their concerns. As a numerical majority in Quebec, such a unified voice has power. In the United States there exists no such unified voice.

LANGUAGE SHIFT

I noted that the percentage of Francophones in Quebec has remained relatively stable over the past forty years. Such a high, stable percentage entails several things: 1) French-speakers continue to use French throughout their lives, 2) they teach successive generations the language, 3) there is little Francophone emigration from Quebec,⁶ and 4) societal supports for the French language, such as availability of services--educational, commercial, financial--are strong. Thus, language shift--shifting from the first language (French) to the second language (English)--tends not to occur.

LANGUAGE PRESTIGE

By the end of 1980, the income gap between English-speaking and French-speaking Quebecers had decreased from 44.7% to only 16.3% in favor of English-speakers. By 1990, a bilingual French speaker was earning more than a bilingual or monolingual English speaker (Dion, 1991). Also, Quebec has witnessed an increase in the number of Francophone-owned businesses. By 1987, nearly 62% of Quebecers were employed by these firms. A similar growth among French-speakers also occurred in level of employment. In other words, more French-speakers are now hired for higher-level positions than they once were. Dion points out that only 30.5% of managers of enterprises were French-speaking in 1959. This percentage had risen to 50.8 by 1988. These statistics demonstrate that French has become, even if only fairly recently, a "prestigious" language in Quebec.

THE SITUATION IN BELGIUM

Since the creation of Belgium in 1830, following the region's secession from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, it has been divided primarily by two language groups: the Flemish in the north (Flanders) and the Walloons in the South (Wallonia). There is also a small region, to which I occasionally refer, which is German-speaking. German-speakers, however, represent less than 1% of the population, so I deal mainly with the Dutch-speaking Flemish and the French-speaking Walloons.

For more than a century, the French-speaking elite ruled the country, even though they were a numerical minority. The country, especially the South, prospered during this “reign.” However, this prosperity peaked just after the Second World War. During the 1950’s, Belgium became the country with the lowest growth rate in the Common Market (Kidel, 1971). In the 1960’s, modernization in industry and foreign investment began an economic revitalization that affected Flanders more than Wallonia. The result has been a slow but steady reversal of the power relationship between the two regions. This economic turn-about is partly to blame for political infighting over the language division. In fact by 1971, an opinion was that “[t]he myth that Belgium constitutes a single nation with two different languages has been finally abandoned” (Kidel, 1971). So it seemed that the decade of the 1970’s would be a pivotal one for Belgium.

Since 1970, the Belgian response to its linguistic problem has ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime. As an example of the former, the University in Louvain (in Flanders) was divided into two universities, one Dutch and one French. This meant that many of the University’s assets also had to be divided, including library holdings. In this instance, it was decided that the books with even numbers would go to the Flemings and those with odd numbers to the Walloons (Kidel, 1971).

As for the sublime, we might consider the Sisyphean reformation of the Belgian constitution. Between 1962 and 1970, prolonged and intricate negotiations took place, which culminated in a series of substantial amendments to the Constitution significantly altering the unitary character of Belgium (Murphy, 1988). This reform continued with administrative compromises in 1971, which made the de facto language division de jure, giving Flanders and Wallonia cultural autonomy in which the protection of language was fundamental. These compromises included granting separate ministries of education, culture, and economics in Flanders and Wallonia.

Carrying the administrative compromises achieved in 1971 into further constitutional division was far from simple.⁷ From the summer of 1976 through May of 1977 an agreement called the Egmont Pact was hammered out by a committee of 36 government delegates. And “although the Pact was never fully implemented, it was very influential in shaping the direction of future reforms” (Murphy, 1988, p. 147).

The decentralization plan in the Egmont Pact hit various barriers, including the Prime Minister’s own “feet dragging” - according to some in Parliament (Cultural divisions, 1978). In fact, while four-fifths of the Parliament supported the Pact, Tindemans had indicated his reservations about regional status for Brussels, deferring to large Flemish sentiment and resistance to the Plan due to the provisions over Brussels (Klass and Slavin, 1978). The Plan, they feared, would result in the “Francophone domination of Brussels (Browning, 1978a). The plan for Brussels, which King Baudouin called “a typical Belgian compromise,” called for Brussels to maintain its bilingual status with

concessions that French-speakers in Flemish communes outside the city would have the same civil rights as Dutch-speakers. French-speakers would be entitled to education, tax forms, identity cards, and other bureaucratic forms in their own language (Battye, 1977). French-speakers in the surrounding communes of Brussels would also be allowed to vote in Brussels. Thus, the fear among Flemings was that the French would take over the running of Brussels, which was already 80 percent French (Browning, 1978b).

In the summer of 1979 the new Prime Minister, Wilfried Martens, tackled the language issue. Almost immediately, observers expressed their doubts that Martens' plan would survive the three years scheduled for its implementation (Seeger, 1979b). However, Martens was able to achieve a significant agreement in July in the form of a law extending the competence of the community councils (in Flanders and Wallonia) to matters such as public health and scientific research, and establishing the power of the regional representative bodies over such matters as employment, housing, water, and energy (Murphy, 1988, p. 148).

Martens' coalition began to disintegrate after about nine months. In January 1980, three members of the Brussels French-speaking party resigned over Flemish rejections of additional safeguards for the French French-speaking population in Belgium (Three quit, 1980). While this did not immediately endanger the government, it was a sign of things to come. Martens offered his resignation to the King (King accepts, 1980). Within months, Martens was reappointed to try his hand with a new government. Thus, the decade ended just as it had begun, with political upheaval and elections that would change the political balance of power little.

This brief review of a decade of Belgian history demonstrates the rocky road that has been caused in great part by the language conflict. From the end of World War II to 1980, twenty-four governments fell in Belgium. From 1980 to 1988 eleven more governments were added to this list. Wilfried Martens alone was asked to form and to lead nine different governments from 1979 through 1991 (Havemann, 1991). But is the United States really "faced with the possibility of the kind of linguistic division ... that has been a major feature of the unhappy history of Belgium," as Hayakawa suggests?

First, it is necessary, again, to address the comparability of the Belgian and American situations. Before doing so, however, I would like to address Hayakawa's other contention that Belgium has had an "unhappy history" caused by its linguistic division. Perhaps giving an "unhappy" perception is the danger of having a democracy that represents a myriad of views, as reflected in the nearly thirty political parties represented in Belgian elections. (But, then, our own recent government shutdowns, caused by a mere two parties, are no call for celebration!) Nevertheless, the Belgian state continues to function, the state prospers, and elections are held without violence. Indeed, violent clashes have occurred over the language issue (I've read of two). However, such clashes are no more frequent than in any other state over any other issue. In

fact, when it comes right down to it, a large majority of Belgians--French, Dutch and German German-speaking--would rather stay together than have their country split apart over the language issue. Experts believe that separatists represent less than 10% of the population (LaFranchi, 1993). As the co-director of the Center of Socio-Political Research and Information remarked, "Belgium is not Yugoslavia. There is no animosity between people" (Havemann, 1991).

LANGUAGE DEMOGRAPHICS AND SHIFT

Just as is the case in Canada, the language populations in Belgium have remained large and constant over several decades. In fact, in Belgium the populations have remained relatively constant since the country's artificial birth in 1830. In 1846, approximately forty two percent of the population spoke French, fifty seven percent Dutch, and one percent German. In 1910, these percentages were similar, albeit with a drop among Dutch-speakers. The percentages were forty-three, fifty-two, and one, respectively. There was little change some fifty years later (Murphy, 1988). At present, there are nearly 6 million inhabitants in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium--approximately 58% of the population. The population in French-speaking Wallonia is about 3.3 million (33%) of the total population. The bilingual (dominated by French-speakers) capital of Brussels has almost a million inhabitants (9% of the total population). Finally, there are about 70,000 residents in the German-speaking region (.6%) (Belgium National Institute for Statistics, 1998). About 10% of the Belgium population is foreign; thus, these figures do not exactly represent the linguistic breakdown of Belgium. But, they do follow it very closely, i.e. the bulk of the population is Dutch-speaking in Flanders and French-speaking in Wallonia.⁸ Thus, as is the case in Canada, linguistic groups in Belgium are not only large and stable but also concentrated in specific areas. Also, similar language supports are in place that make language shift rare.

LANGUAGE PRESTIGE

Figures that directly connect language and income, provided in the section on Canada, are not available in the case of Belgium. However, we can extrapolate the equality of prestige of Dutch and French in Belgium from other figures . We can take, for example, figures for higher education - enseignement du troisième niveau. In Belgium "the right to education in one's native tongue is a fundamental freedom and a basic human right" (Vanbergen, 1990, p. 382). And the bulk of university students take advantage of this freedom by choosing to attend university in their own language. In addition to the traditional university, higher education in Belgium also includes non-university programs which are very specialized, offering higher degrees in agriculture, art, economics, and teacher-training to name a few (cf. Van Geen, 1990). For the 1990-1991 academic year enrollment by Dutch-speaking students in institutions of higher education was 137,316. French-speakers in university numbered 110,190 (*Annuaire*

statistique de la Belgique, 1991). These numbers are in proportion to the populations generally.

We can also look at the average income in the two regions. Historically, French has been the more prestigious language in Belgium. It has, however, lost ground recently--as measured by economic indicators. Even so, users of the two languages are on fairly equal economic footing. The average taxable income for 1993 was 881,100BEF in Flanders and 826,500BEF in Wallonia (Ministry of Flanders, 1996). If we include the average income for francophone-dominated Brussels (852,900BEF), the equality of income for the two language groups is even closer.

STRETCHING COMPARISONS: PART TWO

I noted in the section on Canada that by claiming the same national origin, Francophone Quebecers are more likely to speak with one voice. As a numerical majority in Quebec, such a unified voice has power. Taking Spanish-speakers, who comprise the largest linguistic minority in this country (fifty four percent of those whose home language is not English speak Spanish), as an example, we can note that they speak with many voices.⁹ They have a Mexican American voice, a Latino voice, a Cubano voice, a Puertorriqueño voice. Furthermore, even within these groups there tend to be even more voices. For example, among Puertorriqueños there is a debate as to whether Puerto Rico should remove itself from its near-state status or seek full statehood. The former group tends to favor Spanish as a national language. The latter favors bilingualism (cf. Morris, 1996). Similarly, Mexican Americans did not vote with once voice on proposition 227 in California. A third of the Hispanic population, mainly Mexican Americans, voted in favor of the proposition. But the three primary areas I have raised were language demographics, language shift, and language prestige.

LANGUAGE DEMOGRAPHICS

The argument might be made that even though Spanish-speakers do not speak with one voice, there are high enough concentrations with similar backgrounds in certain states to cause concern: Mexican Americans in California and Texas, Puertorriqueños in New York, and Cubanos in Florida. The population of Spanish-speakers in these four states (the states with the highest concentrations of Spanish-speakers in the country) is approximately 5.5 million, 3.4 million, 1.8 million, and 1.5 million respectively (Waggoner, 1993). Based on total population figures by state, Spanish-speakers represent 9.8% of the population in New York, 10.9% in Florida, 17.6% in California, and 18.8% in Texas--a far cry from the 80% of Francophones in Quebec.¹⁰

LANGUAGE SHIFT

The regional languages in Canada and Belgium are quite stable. This is not so in the United States. The most cited work on language shift among Spanish-speakers in the US is that of Calvin Veltman (1989, 1990). Veltman demonstrates that language shift to English among Spanish-speakers in the U.S. is very rapid. Second generation Spanish-speakers in the United States tend to make English their preferred personal language. Only some twenty percent of immigrants remain essentially monolingual in Spanish. This shift is especially true for children. Veltman (1989, p. 559) notes that “[a]fter an average period of residence of four years, nearly all [children aged 5 to 9 upon arrival in the US] will speak English on a regular basis and 30 percent will have adopted English as their usual language.” After having been in the country for fourteen years, eighty percent of these children have become English dominant bilinguals. The same occurs to a similar percentage of Spanish-speakers arriving in the United States between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four.

While French in Quebec is retained through language loyalty, this does not seem to be true for Spanish in the US. As Veltman (1990, p. 121) observes, “[t]he data show that the increase in the size of the Spanish language group and its various linguistic components depends entirely on continued immigration rather than upon an imagined resistance to the adoption of English.”

LANGUAGE PRESTIGE

Finally, I considered the prestige of the various languages in Canada and Belgium. I pointed out, for example, the high percentage of managerial positions occupied by francophones. Consider, on the other hand, the jobs that have been marked as “hispanophone” in El Paso, Texas: construction, assembly line, janitorial services, yard work, house cleaning, and farm work (Teschner, 1995). In fact, while Hispanics make up only about 9% of the total US population, they comprise 12% of the agricultural work force. In the West and Southwest, this figure is an astonishing 40% (Schick & Schick, 1991). Additionally, less than 2% of business enterprises are owned by Hispanics.

Considering the work they are able to acquire, the economic data concerning Hispanics is bleak at best. More than twice as many male Hispanics are considered low wage earners as white males.¹¹ White men are also more than three times as likely as Hispanic men to be high wage earners; white women are more than twice as likely to be in this group as Hispanic women (Bureau of the Census, 1994a).¹² It is not surprising then that the median measured net worth of White households is over \$45,000; whereas, the figure for Hispanic households is just over \$4,600 (Bureau of the Census, 1995; cf. Bureau of the Census, 1994b).¹³

Since data similar to that collected in Quebec relating primary language and economic mobility are not available in the United States, we must deduce the prestige of Spanish in this country from the data just given. Even though

seventy-eight percent of Hispanics age five and over speak Spanish (Bureau of the Census, 1990), we cannot infer a direct link between language, specifically, and socioeconomic mobility as is possible in the case of Quebec. In other words, it is impossible to conclude from the data alone that Spanish is not a prestigious language and therefore its speakers suffer as a result. However, we can infer from the data that Spanish is not a prestigious language. We can infer it from the types of employment that Spanish-speakers are forced to take. In Quebec, recall, monolingual French-speakers and French dominant bilinguals were hired into higher level, higher paying positions than their English-speaking peers. The data concerning Hispanics demonstrates that this does not happen, at least very often, to monolingual Spanish-speakers in the United States. Furthermore, were this to occur, it seems most likely that it would occur via Hispanic owned businesses, which tend to deal more with the Spanish-speaking population. As I noted, however, very few Hispanics own businesses.

Obviously, other factors contribute to the plight of Hispanics in the United States. "More education," for example, "means higher career earnings" (Bureau of the Census, 1994c). However, it is not a secret that most education takes place in English and that to achieve educational success one must also master English. As education is concerned, then, Spanish, is not a very prestigious language. Most of our bilingual programs are transitional in nature, using Spanish for three years at most, and even in that time Spanish tends to be used sporadically. Also, only some 16% of students eligible for such programs actually receive bilingual services. Finally, there are no bilingual universities. Given this situation, "educational and economic advance by members of the Spanish origin population are purchased at the cost of maintenance of the ancestral language" (Bills, et. al. 1995).

LANGUAGE OPPRESSION OR PROTECTION?

Making the balkanization argument requires its proponents to cleave to comparisons that are often quite frail. They must also disregard other factors that cause language divisions and discount nation-states that represent counter-examples of their argument.

Clearly Canada and Belgium are divided by language. On the one hand, they were designed that way. On the other hand, problems and friction between the various language groups persist. But what is to be done about it? Baron (1990) argues, "Generally speaking, linguistic friction and violence occur around the globe not where language rights are protected, but where they have been suppressed (p. 180)." We find support for this conclusion in the protests by the Ainu in Japan, who resent the centuries of Japanese denial of their existence (cf. Siddle, 1996). We find support for this in the Native American reaction to the inherent threat to their languages in the English-Only movement promoted by groups like U.S. English. Many Native American nations have pre-empted English-Only by adopting their own language policies that recognize the tribal

language is the official language and English as the second language (cf. Zepeda & Hill, 1991).

As concerns Canada, Guy (1989) points out, “French Canadian separatism comes from two centuries of second-class citizenship in their own land” (p. 52). Belgium has a similar history of one group discriminating against another. Perhaps the democratic provisions for language rights came too late in Canada and just in time for Belgium. It is difficult to say.

It is clear that opponents of bilingualism and bilingual education choose to focus on the negative lessons that, I admit, are very real. But this one-sided focus ignores the positive lessons provided in the promotion of language rights. It has been democracy in which all citizens can see their identities expressed and represented that is the glue that has kept Belgium together. Similar cases can be found in the region of Cataluña in Spain and Friesland in Holland.

In Cataluña, support for the Catalan independence party has hovered between 4.2% and 8% since the late 1980's (Shafir, 1995). Similarly, Balcells (1996) points out that “Catalonia has no separatist party, like Herri Batasuna in the Basque Country, that is able to win votes in elections. Nor has terrorism in support of the separatist cause succeeded in taking root in Catalonia ...” (p. 192).¹⁴

The Fries in Holland enjoy a similar linguistic situation. Frisian is recognized and supported by both the regional government of Friesland and the federal government of Holland. There exists an official language policy framework in the form of a contractual agreement between the state and the provincial government. In a process of legal codification, provisions have been made for the use of Frisian in dealings with the federal government. Given the stability of Frisian--a large majority of Fries use the language regularly--and its official recognition, we would expect based on the balkanization argument that Holland should be in a state of linguistic chaos. However, there has never been a separatist movement in Holland. Even the Frisian Nationalist Party (which does not have much popular support) has never called for independence.

A final point that stands out in these case studies is that while language is a powerful force, it often becomes the shibboleth for a myriad of other factors complicating national sentiments. As one example, Williams (1984, p. 215) notes in his studies of Wales, Euskadi, and Quebec that “... language promotion was not mere cultural attachment, but often a rational and instrumental attempt to reduce socio-economic inequality...” In this vein, Nelde (1994), observes that

in the recent past, both [Canada and Belgium] possessed a dominant language group --French-speakers in Belgium, English-speakers in Canada - who had control of the areas of administration, politics, and the economy, and who gave employment preference to those applicants with command of the dominant language. The disadvantaged group was then left with the choice of renouncing social ambition, assimilating, or resisting (p. 168).

Perhaps it was the combination of a lack of social mobility and coerced assimilation that has led to the seeming extremism in Quebec. Perhaps the present policies encouraging the economic mobility of francophones and promoting their language came too late. This does not seem to be the case for Belgium and Catalonia and is certainly not the case for Friesland.

Finally, language demands are also often attempts to increase the amount of the ethnic group's role in the wider political structure. In other words, through the promotion of their language rights, language minority groups are often seeking greater involvement in and not necessarily separation from the nation-state. This seems to be the case of Spanish-speakers in the United States.

REVIEWING BALKANIZATION ARGUMENTS

The linguistic situations in Canada and Belgium are indeed complex and serious. But there are significant differences between those two countries and the United States that must be taken into account. Many other factors, such as the suppression of language rights, must be considered among the causes of national divisions. Finally, we must consider the examples demonstrating that the support of more than one language within a single nation-state does not necessarily lead to its downfall. Given these three considerations, the balkanization arguments presented at the beginning of this article beg review.

Claim #1: Our nation is faced with the kind of linguistic division that exists in Canada and Belgium (as argued by Hayakawa and Gingrich).

Clearly minority languages are an issue in the United States. Language minority groups are asserting their rights to certain types of primary language services and, in many cases, language preservation. But there is little evidence to support the alarmist predictions of the types of divisions found in Belgium and Canada. It is important to remember that these nation-states were born with their linguistic divisions intact. Apropos of this, Mackey (cited in Romaine, 1995, p. 24) observed, "there are fewer bilingual people in the bilingual countries than there are in the so-called unilingual countries. For it is not always realized that bilingual countries were created not to promote bilingualism, but to guarantee the maintenance and use of two or more languages in the same nation." Canada has always been a Confederation of two distinct language groups. Belgium was an artificially created state that put together previously separate peoples. What is astonishing is not that they may be falling apart but that they have managed to stay together so long as nation-states comprised of distinct linguistic nations. Perhaps this is evidence of the willingness and ability of different linguistic and cultural communities to remain unified within a larger nation-state.

The other fact of the matter is that both Canada and Belgium are bilingual primarily because, following Mackey's observation, they are comprised of regions whose residents are predominantly monolingual in

different languages. But, this sort of bilingual nation-state is not being proposed in the United States by most language minority groups. They are calling instead for individual bilingualism. George Ramos, who has been labeled by many as one of those “Chicano militants,” points out that Spanish-speakers in the United States “accept the speaking of English as an essential tool for success.” He goes on to note “the aspirations of Chicanos and other Latinos are in no way similar to those of the separatists in Quebec. We don’t want to secede” (Ramos, 1995).

Claim #2: Making English the official language (and, just as importantly, making it the sole official language) of the United States is necessary to prevent institutionalized language segregation, a gradual loss of national unity, and arrival at another Tower of Babel (as argued by U.S. English and Shelby).

This claim is based on the presumption that having an official language helps to unify a nation. This indeed is what Senator Shelby has argued in defense of his English-Only Bill. With this claim Shelby and others seem to assume that by having a de jure official language we will also have a common language. But attaining English proficiency is not a discrete event that will occur magically upon passage of a law. An Official English amendment will not change human linguistic behavior overnight or even over years. Even if it could accomplish such a deed, it is not needed.

Immigrants around the country are swamping English language classes, which are full beyond capacity and have waiting lists of thousands. Furthermore, language minority children quickly make English their language of choice, which is unlikely to change. Schmidt (1993) emphasizes,

most U.S. language minority group members--in contrast, say, to the Quebecois of Canada--do not support a language confederation policy under which they would have their own largely monolingual non-English-speaking territories. Both geodemographic intermingling and the English language are viewed as such overwhelming political and economic realities in the United States that virtually all language minority group members seek mastery of the dominant language for themselves and their progeny.(p. 83)

The Official English movement could very well be counterproductive to the goal of unity. If there is one thing that we should learn from the cases of Canada and Belgium, it is that the dominance of one group over another has bred resentment. In the case of Canada, the practices of coercive language policies have historically been the providence of English Canada (cf. Endleman, 1995; Richler, 1991). While the British North America Act of 1867 created a Confederation, which recognized the important role of the French in Canada, the Confederation had to develop “in an era of English superiority and bigotry and of British imperialism, a time in which the rights of the French outside Quebec were trampled on with impunity” (Wardhaugh, 1983, p. 62). Thus, we

must consider the idea that the “bilingual problem” in Canada is the result of generations of extreme anglocentrism.

The extent of this anglocentrism can be seen in the number of provisions necessary in the Official Languages Act of 1969. This Act came as a response to what has been called the “Quiet Revolution,” which slowly developed during the early 1960’s (cf. Brooks, 1996). This Quiet Revolution consisted of a number of political reforms and social changes that increased the role of the Quebec state in Canada. In response to this “revolution,” the Official Languages Act gave statutory expression to a policy of bilingualism. The Act set out, according to Brooks, “the public’s right to be served by the federal government in the official language of their choice; the equitable representation of Francophones and Anglophones in the federal public service; and the ability of public servants of both language groups to work in the language of their choice” (p. 310). The provisions were made in order to rectify the underrepresentation of francophones in the federal state and the situation of English monolingualism for the most part that existed in federal services. Without such measures the claims of the central government in Ottawa to represent francophones clearly lacked credibility. In other words, the Quiet Revolution made clear the generations of hypocrisy practiced by having English as the lingua franca of the central government in a bilingual nation-state.

Thus, dominance by one group over another bred not only the resentment resulting in the Quiet Revolution but also resulted in the current situation of groups fighting for power instead of sharing it. The Official Languages Act which was meant to counteract the historical dominance of English in Canada by officially recognizing French. But, and here is another lesson for English-Only proponents in the United States, the Official Languages Act was not particularly helpful in Canada. For it was irrelevant in Quebec by the time it passed; the rest of Canada found it unrealistic; it did little to prevent the decay of French outside Quebec; and it angered other linguistic groups who felt neglected and suddenly cast as second-class citizens (Wardhaugh, 1983). In sum, the official language policies that have been adopted in Canada seem to result not in increased unity but in further resentment, backlash, and division. If we take any warning from the situation in Canada, this should be it.

Claim #3: “On every side today ethnicity is the cause of the breaking of nations” (Schlesinger, p. 10).

Here Schlesinger offers the examples of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Belgium as nation-states that have broken up or are in crisis. Indeed, given the break up of the of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the ethnic cleansing taking place in Myanmar, it is easy to simplify the situations to fit Schlesinger’s assertion.

This is not to say that “ethnicity” is not a challenge to democracy; it is. But the lesson that Schlesinger would have us learn from other countries (that ethnicity, including language, is the cause of the breaking of nations) is not

always an accurate one. Even Schlesinger must admit that in the cases that he cites coercion has been a main ingredient. Surely Schlesinger recognizes that the Afghans, the Lithuanians, the Latvians, and the Kazakhstani resented the Soviet nation-state. Thus, the warning that we should heed here is where coercion is used by governments, strife occurs.

But ethnolinguistic challenges do not necessarily lead to “the breaking” of nation-states, especially where democracy is more thorough. For example, Irving (1980) points out that “none of the main regionalist parties in the post-war period have ever demanded the break-up of Belgium” (p. 13). This still rings true today.¹⁵ The only separatist party in Belgium, the Vlaams Blok, currently holds only 11 seats in the 150 member House of Representatives, as of the 1995 elections. This is a loss of one seat from the 1991 elections. Their representation of 3 in the 71 member senate is even more insignificant (National Institute for Statistics, 1998).

The lack of a strong separatist movement in Belgium can be attributed not to coercion but to increased democracy through the number of political moves that the Belgians have made, such as increased linguistic and cultural regional autonomy and proportional representation. Irving (1980) points out that the moderation and compromise that has been encouraged by proportional representation since its introduction in 1900 has been a key decision in the maintenance of Belgium. Without such representation through coalition governments “the language issue might well have destroyed Belgium in the 1960’s or 1970’s” (Irving, p. 7).

Increased democracy via linguistic and cultural autonomy has also helped to hold Belgium together. Between the World Wars and well into the 1960’s attempts to “frenchify” the administration of Belgium created great dissatisfaction among the other language groups. Limited autonomy within the 3 language regions has tempered that dissatisfaction. This is why the German-speaking population of Belgium is

satisfied with their place in the state and define themselves proudly as German-speaking Belgians ... In East Belgium, federalization does not imply separation or retreat into a cocoon like ghetto, but quite the contrary. The federalization process has given Belgium’s German-speakers an enhanced feeling for their national identity and common destiny by rendering them politically responsible” (Schiffers, 1998).¹⁶

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Much of the criticism of bilingual education stems from the idea that the promotion of bilingualism will cause the balkanization of the United States. The most frequently cited examples to support this alarmist prediction are Canada and Belgium. But engaging in international voyeurism to predict our own domestic affairs is sketchy business. I have argued that the great differences in the linguistic situations between Canada and Belgium and the

United States make comparisons very tenuous. Furthermore, if a conclusion can be drawn, it should be that the linguistic situation in United States does not even approach the level of concern warranted in these other countries.

There are a number of indicators to support this conclusion. In no part of the United States are language minority groups concentrated to the extent that they are in Canada and Belgium. No language minority groups in the United States are successfully maintaining their languages to the extent seen in these other countries; nor do these groups have the resources or infrastructure to do so. Finally, even if the resources were available for language maintenance, there is no evidence to suggest that language minority groups in this country would abandon learning the lingua franca. Indeed, most language minority parents rate English language learning as one of the most important goals for the education of their children. Their only caveat is that it not require the abandonment of the ancestral language.

On the one hand, by not heeding this caveat, we risk the very division that we seek to avoid. Threats to the survival of minority languages, e.g. English-Only legislation, have resulted in the disaffection of minority groups in the United States and elsewhere. On the other hand, there are examples where minority languages have been accommodated without the destruction of the nation-state that we would expect were we to believe the balkanization argument.

In sum, two major points should be clear: (1) language can be a divisive issue for nation-states but need not be; and, (2) coerced loyalty and assimilation is divisive. Where does this leave us? On the one hand, nation-states can act democratically regarding language issues and still have no guarantee of stopping balkanization. On the other hand, nation-states can be more authoritarian and still have no guarantee of stopping balkanization (and, to my mind, probably increase its chances). Given the importance that people place on their languages, erring on the side of democracy and non-coercion by accepting minority language maintenance is ultimately the better choice. Attempts to erase or replace peoples' languages have in all parts of the world and throughout our own history failed. In the process, such attempts have also added to the "balkanization" that English-Only supporters seek to avoid.

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NOTES

¹ Chavez neither cites a reference for her one-third estimate nor does she explain how she arrives at it. At the time she was writing her *Out of the Barrio*, the 1990 census reported that Hispanics made up only about 9% of the total US population. On a more charitable interpretation of her statement, she may be claiming that Hispanics will one day in the future represent one-third of the population. But more than a decade and half later, Hispanics still only represent 11% of the population (Bureau of the Census, 1997). At this rate, it will be very long time before they represent a third. If and when they do, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that a Quebec-like situation would arise. Consider that in California where nearly 20% of the population is native Spanish-speaking, one-third of Hispanics voted in favor of proposition 227 which effectively eliminated bilingual education. The other two-thirds of the Hispanic vote was a vote for bilingual education not a vote against English. But I now have entered into arguments that appear in the main text.

²CNN, Both Sides Now w/ Jesse Jackson. 9/10/95.

³ To his credit Schlesinger does point out that making English our official language is a bad idea.

⁴ I am not arguing here that Quebec's demands are indefensible, only that they are different from Mexican American demands.

⁵ In early June of 1990, another document, intended to save the Meech Lake accord, was produced. New Brunswick ratified this new agreement, but Manitoba could not.

⁶ In further support of this assertion, Kaplan (1994) notes that the regional life expectancy (a measurement of the number of years an average person born in a region will live in that region) of Francophones in Quebec is nearly double that of Anglophones (50.3 and 27.8 years, respectively).

⁷ Being considered in further constitutional divisions were things such as the decentralization of the economy and the reorganization of districts (Masterman, 1971).

⁸ Karin Van Tulden, Information Officer, Belgium Consulate in LA, personal communication. Cf. Beyhedt, 1994.

⁹ Note here that the term "Spanish-speakers" is not synonymous with Hispanic. I use "Spanish-speakers" to refer to Spanish-speaking Hispanics.

¹⁰ The total proportion of "Hispanics" as opposed to "Spanish-speakers" is 28% in California, 13% in Florida, 13% in New York, and 27% in Texas (Bureau of the Census, 1998b)(While these data are taken from a 1998 Bureau

release, they are figures from 1993. More recent data may be slightly higher; but I present the 1993 figures to be consistent with the Waggoner data on Spanish-speakers.) The estimates of Spanish-speakers are based on the 1990 census data for people who indicated that they speak a language other than English at home. It is important to point at that more than half of these “Home Speakers of Non-English Languages” reported that they speak English well.

¹¹The percentages are 26.4 for Hispanics and 11.6 for Whites. A low wage earner is defined as someone earning less than \$13,091/yr. A high wage earner is defined as someone earning \$52,364/yr.

¹²The corresponding percentages for women were the following for low wage earners: 36.6% Hispanic and 21.1% White. High wage earner percentages were 1.8% Hispanic and 3.8% Hispanic.

¹³ Measured net worth is defined as the value of all assets covered in The Survey of Income and Program Participation) less any debts. Note that home equity constitutes the largest share of measured net worth and that most Hispanics do not own homes. Nearly 70% of Whites own their homes as opposed to just over 40% of Hispanics (Bureau of the Census, 1998c).

¹⁴This is not to say that separatist sentiments do not exist; they do. Balcells points out that a 1988 survey indicated that 60% of native Catalans would vote “yes” on a referendum (imaginary at this point) on gradual progress toward independence. But clearly there is more to this result than just plain “Catalanismo” since 33% of Spanish immigrants to Cataluña also would vote “yes.” The point is that the promotion of language rights has maintained the faith of Catalans in the Spanish democracy.

¹⁵Belgian Consulate in Washington, D.C., personal communication, February, 1998.

¹⁶While the author here writes of “federalization,” Belgium cannot strictly be called a federation given the regional lack of powers in certain administrative areas and the overlap in the membership of regional and national legislative bodies (cf. Murphy, 1988).