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## **Entre Mundos y Fronteras: An Exploration of Linguistic Visibility and Value in Libraries**

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## Entre Mundos y Fronteras: An Exploration of Linguistic Visibility and Value in Libraries

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1 ***Entre Mundos y Fronteras: An Exploration of Linguistic Visibility***  
2 ***and Value in Libraries***

3 ***Denisse Solis and Jesus Espinoza***

4  
5 “Conciencia cósmica  
6 De herencia mágica  
7 Buscando en la sombra  
8 Los rasgos de mi alma  
9 Aprendiendo a convertirme en animal como un nahual  
10 Soy un cuerpo transitando el camino espiritual  
11 No es lineal  
12 Mi lenguaje es ancestral  
13 Viajo en un espiral  
14 Entre mundos y fronteras  
15 Cuestionando lo real  
16 El bien y mal  
17 Lo desigual  
18 Lo heredado, lo adquirido y lo impuesto por igual”  
19 - Rebeca Lane, “Alma Mestiza”  
20

21 ***Introduction***

22 In *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library*, author and  
23 library historian Wayne A. Wiegand describes how the mass migration of seven million southern  
24 and eastern European migrants between 1893 and 1917 shaped public libraries. “As  
25 neighborhoods changed ethnic and racial profile, the public library – main or branch- often  
26 became a place where newcomers assimilated.”<sup>1</sup> This assimilationist praxis, specifically when it  
27 comes to the conscription of the English language, is problematic for library workers and patrons  
28 for whom English is not their first or only language and who want to see themselves reflected in  
29 library collections, services, and the workforce. Library and Information Science literature rarely  
30 mentions language or linguistic diversity despite the globalization of information and the  
31 increasing diversity of the United States. Many studies include language as a subsidiary as  
32 opposed to salient point. Even so, language is often framed in problematic ways, reflecting how  
33 libraries have historically functioned as places where immigrants learn the English language and  
34 assimilate to American culture.

35 We sought to answer the research question, “To what extent are languages visible and  
36 acknowledged among library workers?” To provide context, this chapter will briefly discuss the  
37 history of language in the Americas before and after the creation of the United States to provide  
38 foundational knowledge and trace the impact of language legislation, specifically the English-

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne A. Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

39 Only movement. Next, we introduce the concepts of linguistic imperialism and linguisticism,  
40 which are relevant for comprehending the structural and cultural inequalities often faced by  
41 bilingual and multilingual library workers and patrons. Furthermore, we explore this topic  
42 through a pilot study conducted among Spectrum Scholars, recipients of the American Library  
43 Association's Spectrum Scholarship Program, in which participants were asked about their  
44 language skills, use, and experiences. To close, we expound upon some of the findings to discuss  
45 how language can be used as a form of self-care, decolonization, and community-building  
46 between library workers and our communities of color.

### 47 ***Historical Context***

48 "All spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms."<sup>2</sup>

49

50 The U.S. has had a long history of using language to disempower and target specific  
51 identities or cultures, such as indigenous or native people, enslaved people, and early colonists  
52 who spoke languages other than English. Hundreds of indigenous languages spoken in the  
53 Americas have been lost due to colonization, genocide, and policies created for linguistic  
54 assimilation. Perceiving indigenous languages to be a threat and their customs to be wild, John  
55 DeWitt Clinton (J.D.C.) Atkins, the Indian Affairs Commissioner in 1887, imposed English with  
56 the goal of subjugating the community's language.<sup>3</sup> Atkins argued that "only through English  
57 can one comprehend the U.S Constitution and the duties of being a U.S Citizen," banning native  
58 languages in schools, emphasizing that languages other than English were "barbarous" and that  
59 English was the language of the "civilized."<sup>4</sup> Atkins further suggested that, "teaching an Indian  
60 youth in his own barbarous dialect is a positive detriment to him. The first step to be taken  
61 toward civilization, toward teaching the Indians the mischief and folly of continuing in their  
62 barbarous practices, is to teach them the English language."<sup>5</sup> This policy was created with the  
63 intention of linguistic eradication as a means of eliminating native tribal identities, after all,  
64 language is more than a means of communication; it is part of one's identity and heritage.<sup>6</sup>  
65 Children were taken to indigenous boarding schools to override their communal values, attitudes,  
66 and behaviors. The result was widespread loss of language, culture, and self.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this  
67 engrained both the idea of English language education as a form of salvation and the assumption  
68 that non-English speaking ethnic groups were sub-human.<sup>8</sup> This Anglocentric bias was also  
69 extended to European immigrants.<sup>9</sup> For most of early American history, multiple languages were  
70 tolerated as many colonists spoke various languages such as Spanish, French, German, and  
71 Dutch. Additionally, some negatively equated the establishment of English as the official

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<sup>2</sup> Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Tamasi and Lamont Antieau, *Language and Linguistic Diversity in the US: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2014), 257-258.

<sup>4</sup> David Cassels Johnson, *Language Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2013), 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Tamasi and Antieau, *Language*, 258.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>8</sup> William D. Davies and Stanley Dubinsky, *Language Conflict and Language Rights: Ethnolinguistic Perspectives on Human Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 212-218.

<sup>9</sup> James Crawford, *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of "English Only"* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992), 38-43.

72 language with the European monarchy and aristocracy.<sup>10</sup> Despite the variety of languages spoken  
73 in the colonies, one of the founding fathers still looked toward Great Britain as the standard.  
74 Benjamin Franklin, in speaking of the founding of Pennsylvania, expressed his concerns about  
75 Germans not adopting Anglo language or culture. He said, “Why should Pennsylvania, founded  
76 by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us  
77 instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than  
78 they can acquire our Complexion.”<sup>11</sup> These concerns continued throughout history, especially  
79 during and after World War I.

80 The Louisiana Purchase, Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and Treaty of Paris of 1898  
81 between Spain and the U.S. are examples of lands acquired by the United States that contained  
82 large Hispanic and francophone (in the case of Louisiana) populations. Spanish speakers who  
83 held lands in present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and  
84 Wyoming, were promised that their language rights were protected, as is stated in the Treaty of  
85 Guadalupe Hidalgo which guaranteed Mexican Americans “the right to their property, language,  
86 and culture.”<sup>12</sup> However, many of these agreements were not honored, and they became  
87 “extranjeros en su propia patria,” strangers in their own land.<sup>13</sup> Historian James Crawford  
88 argues that these promises implied recognition of the Spanish language but not equality of the  
89 two languages further stating, “in practice, however, Mexican-Americans would rarely enjoy the  
90 language rights or political status accorded to Creoles, or even to nineteenth-century immigrants  
91 from Europe. As a racially mixed, culturally distinctive, and above all, conquered people,  
92 Spanish speakers bore a weight of history that speakers of French, German, and Norwegian did  
93 not.”<sup>14</sup> Language and culture are intertwined and, ultimately, since compliance never results in  
94 social inclusion, even when English is learned other forms of nativism and xenophobia persist.  
95 Language discrimination is deeply ingrained in U.S. society, although, the targets of this  
96 prejudice shift according to changes in immigrant populations.

### 97 ***Linguistic Imperialism***

98 Chinese, Hindi-Urdu, Arabic, Spanish, and English are among the most widely-spoken  
99 world languages.<sup>15</sup> Yet, as a result of colonialism and neocolonialism on the part of Britain and  
100 the United States, respectively, English disproportionately remains the dominant language in  
101 many countries.<sup>16</sup> Whether de facto or de jure, legal, financial, educational, communication,  
102 social, and medical institutions in the U.S rely upon an inherently colonialist language.<sup>17</sup> To

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<sup>10</sup> Rachele Lawton, “Speak English or Go Home: The Anti-Immigrant Discourse of the American ‘English Only’ Movement,” *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* 7, no. 1 (January 2013): 104.

<sup>11</sup> Carla J. Mulford, ““People in the Colonies . . . better Judges”: Observing Empire at Midcentury,” in *Benjamin Franklin and the Ends of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199384198.003.0006.

<sup>12</sup> Digital History, “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,” Digital History, accessed August 3, 2019, [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=1141](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=1141).

<sup>13</sup> Crawford, *Hold Your Tongue*, 63-64.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Rick Noack and Lazaro Gamio, “The World’s Languages, in 7 Maps and Charts,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/23/the-worlds-languages-in-7-maps-and-charts/>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 6.

103 comprehend and deconstruct this phenomenon, we use Phillipson’s working definition of  
104 linguistic imperialism from *Linguistic Imperialism*, in which Phillipson addresses the dominance  
105 of English that “is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of  
106 structural and cultural inequities between English and other languages.”<sup>18</sup> Phillipson further  
107 explains that “structural and cultural inequalities ensure the continued allocation of more  
108 material resources to English than to other languages and benefit those who are proficient in  
109 English, and clarifies, “structural inequities refer broadly to material properties such as  
110 institutions or financial allocations while cultural inequalities consist of immaterial or ideological  
111 properties such as attitudes and pedagogic principles.”<sup>19</sup> Phillipson views English linguistic  
112 imperialism as a sub-type of *Linguicism*, or “ideologies, structures, and practices which are used  
113 to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both  
114 material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.”<sup>20</sup> This  
115 concept of linguistic imperialism frames our discussion around language and libraries and  
116 provides a structure by which to examine the English-Only sentiment, or the Official English  
117 movement.

### 118 ***The English-Only Movement***

119 The English-Only movement, also known as the Official English movement, aims to  
120 legalize English as America’s official language and permit government-funded institutions,  
121 including state and local governments, to prohibit the use of other languages. Such legislation  
122 would limit the services available to immigrants in other languages such as tax forms, voting  
123 information, and driver license exams; services that affect social inclusion.

124 To some, English-only mandates may appear to be harmless due to the prevalence and  
125 dominance of English, but the movement is rooted in xenophobic and nativist sentiments that  
126 have, indeed, existed long before the country’s founding.<sup>21</sup> The English-Only movement  
127 operates through the belief that a uniform language will solidify American values and preserve  
128 American nationhood, which is perceived to be under threat by foreigners.<sup>22</sup> This notion of  
129 allegiance through language was cemented in 1906 when the English language requirement was  
130 added to obtain U.S Citizenship.<sup>23</sup> Proponents of the movement often describe English as an  
131 extension of national identity which obligates immigrants to assimilate by mastering it and  
132 relinquishing their native language.<sup>24</sup> Proponents also consider it economically sound in that  
133 government entities could save money by limiting document translation.<sup>25</sup> However, empirical  
134 evidence demonstrates that eliminating translation and language services would increase  
135 unemployment benefits and decrease consumer spending and tax revenue.<sup>26</sup>

136 One of the key rulings regarding language legislation took place after World War I in  
137 1923 in the case of Meyer v. State of Nebraska involving the prosecution of a school instructor

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca S. Borden, “The English Only Movement: Revisiting Cultural Hegemony,” *Multicultural Perspectives* 16, no. 4 (October 2014): 229–33, doi:10.1080/15210960.2014.956607.

<sup>22</sup> Crawford, *Hold Your Tongue*, x.

<sup>23</sup> Tamasi and Antieau, *Language*, 326.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 326-329.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 341-342.

138 for teaching a collection of biblical stories in German.<sup>27</sup> At the time, Nebraska law stated no  
139 person shall teach in any language other than English. The ruling was overturned when the U.S  
140 Supreme Court held that the law unfairly targeted language minorities and conflicted with the  
141 Fourteenth Amendment which, relying on the due process clause, stated that an individual has  
142 substantive rights, values, and traditions in that “it was within Meyer’s rights to pursue his  
143 calling as a language teacher and German parents’ right to engage him to instruct their  
144 children.”<sup>28</sup> Other laws have been ruled unconstitutional because they violate free speech  
145 rights.<sup>29</sup>

146 The English-Only movement gained traction again in the 1970s and 80s leading English-  
147 only proponents to concentrate at the state level; as a result, 32 states adopted English as its  
148 official language, although two of them, Alaska and Hawaii, have multiple official languages.<sup>30</sup>  
149 The movement gains momentum during periods of mass immigration, creating negative reactions  
150 and biases towards foreign-born groups. To quote Crawford in Tamasi & Antieau, “language-  
151 restrictionist laws are never just about language. Inevitably they reflect attitudes towards - and  
152 authorize discrimination against – speakers of certain languages.”<sup>31</sup> This is evident in the current  
153 political landscape in which there are daily media reports of Spanish speakers being harassed,  
154 usually by a White person demanding something along the lines of, “speak English or go back to  
155 where you came from.” A recent example entails that of Harris County Judge, Lina Hidalgo of  
156 Texas, who gave a press conference in both English and Spanish only to be later face statements  
157 like, “She is a joke. Speak English. This is not Mexico” by Mark Tice, a commissioner in a  
158 neighboring county.<sup>32</sup> The dynamics of a White man, also in a position of power, criticizing  
159 another public figure’s use of both English and Spanish, show how far the country is from  
160 accepting bilingualism. Tice’s insult reifies stereotypes that all Spanish speakers are Mexican.  
161 However, by communicating in both English and Spanish, Hidalgo promoted equality and  
162 accessibility. Hidalgo considered the needs of the community, of the citizens of Harris County,  
163 which includes Houston and is comprised 1.6 million foreign-born individuals, 50% of which are  
164 estimated to have limited English language proficiency.<sup>33</sup> Language policing, in both  
165 professional and public spaces, are structural and cultural inequalities that contribute to linguistic  
166 imperialism which in turn promote the idea that being American means being proudly  
167 monolingual.

## 168 ***The English-Only Philosophy Within Libraries***

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<sup>27</sup> Crawford, *Hold Your Tongue*, 182-183.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-185.

<sup>29</sup> For additional court cases see *Ibid.*, 294, Chapter Seven, “Language Rights and Wrongs,” in *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of “English Only* and Chapter Eight, “Language ideology in the workplace and the judicial system,” in *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*.

<sup>30</sup> Tamasi and Antieau, *Language*, 331.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>32</sup> “She’s 28. She’s an Immigrant. She’s in Charge of Texas’ Most Populous County. Get Used to It.,” *The Texas Observer*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.texasobserver.org/shes-28-shes-an-immigrant-shes-in-charge-of-texas-most-populous-county-get-used-to-it/>.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Trovall, “Emergencies En Español: Is Crisis Information Reaching Houston’s Language-Diverse Communities?,” *Houston Public Media*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/in-depth/2019/04/04/327877/emergencies-en-espanol-is-crisis-information-reaching-language-diverse-communities/>.

169 Libraries, as public-facing institutions, have perpetuated linguistic imperialism in that  
170 their collections and practices have championed English language superiority by ensuring the  
171 allocation of material resources to English and benefiting those proficient in English.<sup>34</sup> The result  
172 has been the exclusion, misrepresentation, and erasure of non-English speaking communities.  
173 Historically, libraries were agents of the Americanization propaganda wherein the assimilation of  
174 immigrants became an imperative. For example, in 1918 during World War I, the American  
175 Library Association (ALA) created the Committee on Work with the Foreign-Born as a response  
176 to military reports stating that “one-quarter of the entire male population old enough to vote had  
177 been born abroad and fewer than half of them had become citizens,” many of whom “could  
178 neither speak nor understand English well enough to respond to instructions or orders.”<sup>35</sup>  
179 Accordingly, the committee printed guides urging immigrants to learn English and become  
180 “good” citizens.<sup>36</sup> Often times, these guides sensationalized and caricatured immigrant  
181 communities. Later, in 1983, the American Library Association passed a resolution supporting  
182 “the provision of equitable levels of library service to all members of the community regardless  
183 of ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the RUSA (Reference and User  
184 Services Association) Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual  
185 Collections and Services indicate that services and collections for non-English speakers should  
186 not be seen as auxiliary or supplemental but “an integral part of every library’s services.”<sup>38</sup>  
187 Given these philosophical and organizational changes, libraries began to critically examine  
188 collections and services. For instance, in 1986, the Monterey Park Library System in Monterey  
189 Park, California took a bold stance against Proposition 63 which made English the official state  
190 language.<sup>39</sup> At the time, Monterey Park had a population that was three-quarters Asian, and a  
191 Chinese collection that made up less than 10% of the library’s holdings.<sup>40</sup> The library board  
192 accepted a donation of ten thousand Chinese books, despite the pressure from the city council to  
193 decline the donation.<sup>41</sup> In retaliation, the city council dissolved the board. This move was  
194 supported by the Mayor who stated that the library does not need to cater to foreign languages  
195 and that “if people want a foreign language, they can go purchase books on their own.”<sup>42</sup> After  
196 lawsuits and litigation, the library board was eventually reinstated. This incident prompted state  
197 and national library organizations to re-examine policies and improve services to diverse (and  
198 tax-paying) groups.<sup>43</sup>  
199 Nevertheless, language remains a contested issue within libraries. Take, for instance, a  
200 November 2007 *American Libraries* article entitled, “English is spoken here,” in which MLS

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34 Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 47.

35 Plummer Alston Jones Jr., *Still Struggling for Equality: American Public Library Services with Minorities* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), 16-17.

36 Ibid.

37 Ingrid Betancourt, “‘The Babel Myth’: The English-Only Movement and Its Implications for Libraries,” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 66 (February 1992): 38.

38 “Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services,” Reference & User Services Association, September 29, 2008, <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidemultilingual>.

39 For additional context on the City of Monterey Park see Crawford; Chapter One, Guardians of English, in *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of “English Only.”*

40 Betancourt, “Babel,” 38.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

201 student Julia Stephens declared that “by creating bilingual libraries, librarians are undermining  
202 the American democracy that has created one nation for all. Librarians have a duty to uphold the  
203 American way-of-life and save their English book and journal collections for Americans in the  
204 future.”<sup>44</sup> Stephens draws a false equivalence between American identity (democracy and way-  
205 of-life) and the English language. Stephens represents a section of the library workforce that  
206 devalues America’s many cultures and idolizes a homogeneous society. Linguistic imperialism  
207 and anti-immigrant sentiment are more alive under the current Trump administration; libraries  
208 continue to wrestle with the idea of English as the one and only language appropriate for  
209 America, which is ultimately xenophobic and disparaging. This prejudice remains entrenched  
210 despite articles such as “Spanish Spoken Here” and letters to the editor defending multilingual  
211 collections.<sup>45</sup>

## 212 *Gaps in Literature*

213 The U.S. Census Bureau states that foreign born persons make up 13.4% of the U.S. total  
214 population, and of the total population, 21.3% speak a language other than English at home.<sup>46</sup>  
215 Yet, no attempt has been made by the American Library Association or LIS researchers to  
216 acquire information on language demographics within the library profession. Few articles focus  
217 on language skills in recruitment, hiring, or in LIS programs. Despite being scant, the research  
218 reveals an array of practices.

219 Winston and Walstad conducted a study of the recruitment of bilingual librarians based  
220 on a survey of the membership of REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library  
221 Services to the Spanish Speaking.<sup>47</sup> The data reflect the factors that influenced the career  
222 decision making of current library and information professionals who are bilingual and Hispanic,  
223 as well as the factors influencing potential retention decisions. The research results indicate the  
224 importance of factors, such as entering a service profession and the desire to serve the Spanish-  
225 speaking community, noting that those who are fluent in Spanish are more likely to work in  
226 public libraries than those who are not.<sup>48</sup> They stress the importance of employing those who are  
227 bicultural and/or bilingual based on factors such as a “heightened awareness of the difference  
228 between Latino culture and the dominant White culture, a common heritage that engenders trust,  
229 immediate visibility to Latino patrons, a knowledge of local, vernacular Spanish, and status as  
230 role models for local Latino youth.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, they remind us that Spanish-speakers are not  
231 a monolith and considerations should be made for country of origin and race.<sup>50</sup> As is the case  
232 with the prior (and limited) recruitment research in the profession, this article provides insights

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<sup>44</sup> Julia Stephens, “English Spoken Here,” *American Libraries* 38, no. 10 (November 2007): 41,43-44,3.

<sup>45</sup> Lois Markiewicz et al., “¿Libros En Español?,” *American Libraries* 38, no. 11 (2007): 8–9. For additional responses by REFORMA, The National Organization to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking see REFORMA’s Position on Language Rights. <https://www.reforma.org/content.asp?pl=51&sl=8&contentid=65>

<sup>46</sup> “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: UNITED STATES,” accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/POP815217>.

<sup>47</sup> Mark D. Winston and Kimberly Walstad, “Recruitment and Diversity: A Research Study of Bilingualism and Library Services,” *Library & Information Science Research* 28, no. 3 (September 2006): 390–406, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2006.06.006>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

233 in terms of recruitment and retention strategies for bilingual and bicultural librarians who serve  
234 this segment of the population.<sup>51</sup>

235 More recently, the role of cultural competence has been identified as a significant factor  
236 for public librarians to enhance services for Latino children in the U.S. with the continuous  
237 increase of young Spanish-speaking Latinos in the country, the importance of readers' language  
238 in developing literacy, and significance of understanding children's cultural differences being  
239 noted.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, in a study looking at LIS curriculum, Charlotte Ford suggests that students  
240 in graduate LIS programs are interested in learning foreign languages when the courses are  
241 targeted to the students' specific interests and professional needs.<sup>53</sup> Her findings provide a  
242 curricular enhancement model that could be adopted at other universities, with key  
243 considerations focused on customizing language courses to the LIS context, required and elective  
244 course offerings, course delivery formats, and student motivation.

245 While language or linguistic diversity may not be the focus on some articles, they still  
246 provide insight on conducting such studies, as is the case with the 2009 study conducted by  
247 Charlene L. Al-Qallaf and Joseph J. Mika assessing library services to the Arab-speaking  
248 community in Michigan public libraries.<sup>54</sup> Their survey includes questions about the language  
249 abilities of staff. Results stressed the importance of leadership to plan, conduct needs  
250 assessments, and recruit bilingual or multilingual library workers.<sup>55</sup>

251 Zhang's 2008 study examines academic and research librarian positions that require  
252 foreign language skills.<sup>56</sup> The study found that technical and public services are most likely to  
253 require language knowledge, with the top six positions most frequently requiring a foreign  
254 language skill being in cataloging, collection development, serials, bibliographer and area studies  
255 librarians, reference and instruction, and special collections, while administrator and system  
256 librarian positions are the least likely.<sup>57</sup> They also observed that employers did not limit  
257 qualifications to a specific language or define the level of language skill, although European  
258 languages like German, French, and Spanish, are in high demand.<sup>58</sup> Zhang also noted that  
259 members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and libraries in the northeast and west  
260 accounted for the largest numbers of job announcements requiring foreign language skills.

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<sup>51</sup> For additional resources on Latinx recruitment and retention strategies see Chapter Seven, "May I Help You? The Important Role of Library Personnel" in Camila Alire and Orlando Archibeque, *Serving Latino Communities: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1998), and Salvador Güerená, ed., *Library Services to Latinos: An Anthology* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> Patricia Montiel Overall, "Developing Cultural Competence and a Better Understanding of Latino Language and Culture through Literature," *Children and Libraries* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 27–31.

<sup>53</sup> Charlotte Ford et al., "The Significance of Language Study in Library and Information Science: A Comparison of Two Programs in the United States and Honduras," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 77–93, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12783/issn.2328-2967/58/2/3>.

<sup>54</sup> Charlene L. Al-Qallaf and Joseph J. Mika, "Library and Information Services to the Arabic-Speaking Community: A Survey of Michigan Public Libraries," *Public Library Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (June 2009): 127–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616840902892390>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-152.

<sup>56</sup> Li Zhang, "Foreign Language Skills and Academic Library Job Announcements: A Survey and Trends Analysis, 1966-2006," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34, no. 4 (July 2008): 322–31.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

261 Overall, the requirements of foreign language skills showed a continued rise until the mid-1980s  
262 and a declining trend after this point.<sup>59</sup>

263 One of the few, more recent, studies available on linguistic demographics was written by  
264 Ean Henninger who conducted a pilot study of three U.S. public libraries related to staff  
265 language skills and representation.<sup>60</sup> Henninger states some similar issues within the literature,  
266 describing multilingualism itself as not the focus of articles but rather subordinated and used in  
267 place of terms such as ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘immigrants’ and stresses that users and non-users  
268 alike may still have difficulty expressing their wants and needs due to language barriers and  
269 libraries may have difficulty communicating with them due to a lack of organizational  
270 capability.<sup>61</sup> Henninger also expands on linguistic diversity by considering the linguistic  
271 privilege that comes with a midlands dialect of North American English and the linguistic  
272 discrimination often faced by speakers of African American Vernacular English.<sup>62</sup> Overall  
273 however, Henninger states, the lack of literature on linguistic diversity is “either not a problem or  
274 not viewed as a problem.”<sup>63</sup>

275 Two main questions were explored in the survey; does the linguistic diversity of library  
276 workers reflect that of the library’s service population and how do credentialed librarians  
277 compare to uncredentialed library workers in terms of linguistic diversity?<sup>64</sup> Language use,  
278 position title, education level, and some qualitative data were gathered. Results showed that 25%  
279 of non-MLIS holders who knew another language used it on the job compared to 10.5% of MLIS  
280 holders who did.<sup>65</sup> Language fluency was also difficult to assess due to variation between  
281 language knowledge, use, and fluency.<sup>66</sup>

## 282 ***Purpose***

283 As previous literature indicates, there is little to no knowledge of the linguistic  
284 demographics or language skills of the library workforce. We conducted a pilot survey of  
285 Spectrum Scholars, one of the most diverse groups in librarianship, to investigate language use  
286 and analyze aspects of their lived experience in relation to the RUSA Guidelines for the  
287 Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services.<sup>67</sup> We focused specifically  
288 on section 4.0 that pertains to staffing.<sup>68</sup> That section states:

289 4.1 Library staff working with patrons who have limited English abilities should  
290 be multilingual in order to provide effective service.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ean Henninger, “Do Languages Represent?: A Pilot Study on Linguistic Diversity and Library Staff,” *PNLA Quarterly* 82, no. 3/4 (September 2018): 73–92.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>67</sup> “Apply for Spectrum,” Text, Advocacy, Legislation & Issues, March 30, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/spectrum/apply>.

<sup>68</sup> Reference & User Services Association (RUSA), “Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services,” 2008.

291 4.2 Offer continuing education or staff development programs that promote  
292 sensitivity and cultural, ethnic, and linguistic awareness of the staff and enhance their  
293 abilities in dealing with ethnically different patrons.

294 4.3 Library staff with expertise in languages and cultures should share their  
295 expertise with other staff and other libraries and be recognized and financially  
296 compensated for these abilities.

297 4.4 Schools of library science should advertise the need for multicultural and  
298 multilingual librarians and actively recruit people of linguistic and ethnic minorities.  
299 They should offer courses that deal with the issues involved in serving an ethnically,  
300 culturally, and linguistically diverse society.<sup>69</sup>

### 301 ***Methodology***

302 Through survey research, we investigate language use among our respondents and  
303 analyze aspects of their lived experiences in relation to professional guidelines and practices. We  
304 asked questions related to language proficiency, language use, hiring practices, and professional  
305 development. All questions were optional, and each section left an open-ended question where  
306 participants can add comments. To ensure anonymity and privacy, participants were not asked to  
307 disclose any identifying demographic information such as name, race, ethnicity, gender, nor  
308 library school. After receiving IRB exemption, the survey was created in Qualtrics and  
309 distributed to the Spectrum list-serv by e-mail in May and June of 2017. We used the  
310 Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale, the standard scale for federal-level service as a  
311 means for participants to self-report their level of proficiency. We found the ILR scale to be most  
312 objective and applicable to all languages.<sup>70</sup> Respondents were asked to fill in languages that they  
313 are fluent in based on the ILR scale. We included the following description of the ILR levels in  
314 the question:

315

316 ILR Level 1 – Elementary proficiency

- 317 • able to use questions and answers for simple topics within a limited level of experience;  
318 the native speaker must strain and leverage contextual knowledge to understand what is  
319 said
- 320 • writes in simple sentences or sentence fragments with continual spelling and grammar  
321 errors
- 322 • The majority of individuals classified as Level 1 are able to perform most basic functions  
323 using the language; this includes buying goods, reading the time, ordering simple meals  
324 and asking for minimal directions

325

326 ILR Level 2 – Limited working proficiency

- 327 • can handle with confidence most basic social situations including introductions and  
328 casual conversations about current events, work, family, and autobiographical  
329 information
- 330 • can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or  
331 difficulties; can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Martha Herzog, "History of the ILR Scale," Interagency Language Roundtable, accessed July 31, 2019, <https://www.govtilr.org/Skills/IRL%20Scale%20History.htm>.

332 which require no specialized knowledge), and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to  
333 respond simply with some circumlocutions  
334 • can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough  
335 or confident control of the grammar  
336

#### 337 ILR Level 3 – Professional working proficiency

- 338 • has a general vocabulary which is broad enough that he or she rarely has to search for a  
339 word
- 340 • Individuals classified at level 3 are able to use the language as part of normal professional  
341 duties and can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers;  
342 examples include answering objections, clarifying points, stating and defending policy,  
343 conducting meetings, and reading with almost complete comprehension a variety of prose  
344 material on familiar and unfamiliar topics such as news reports, routine correspondence,  
345 and technical material in trained fields of competence.  
346

#### 347 ILR Level 4 – Full professional proficiency

- 348 • can handle informal interpreting of the language
- 349 • Individuals classified at level 4 are able to understand the details and ramifications of  
350 concepts that are culturally or conceptually different from their own language and can set  
351 the tone of interpersonal official, semi-official and non-professional verbal exchanges  
352 with a representative range of native speakers; examples include playing an effective role  
353 among native speakers in contexts such as conferences, lectures and debates on matters of  
354 disagreement, as well as advocating a position at length. While proficiency may match  
355 that of an educated native speaker, the individual is not necessarily perceived as  
356 culturally native due to occasional weaknesses in idioms, colloquialisms, slang, and  
357 cultural references.  
358

#### 359 ILR Level 5 – Native or bilingual proficiency

- 360 • has a speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker
- 361 • has complete fluency in the language, such that speech on all levels is fully accepted by  
362 educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom,  
363 colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.  
364

365 At the time of the study, there were about 1,000 Spectrum Scholars.<sup>71</sup> We received 117  
366 responses achieving an 11.7% response rate. Through open, axial and thematic coding, we  
367 pinpoint derivative themes to develop based quantitative and qualitative responses. Since  
368 participation was not random and entailed a convenience sample, the results are not generalizable  
369 to the entire library workforce. However, in the future, the authors plan to conduct a similar  
370 study on a larger scale.

## 371 ***Results***

### 372 ***Demographics***

373 Participants reside in 35 states and one Canadian province.  
374

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<sup>71</sup> While the authors are also Spectrum Scholars, we did not participate in the survey.

State	Frequency
California	18
Illinois	8
Texas	8
Florida	6
Massachusetts	5
Nevada	5
Ohio	5
Washington D.C	4
Michigan	4

375 *Figure 1. Top 10 States in Which Participants Work*  
376

377 We defined an immigrant as a foreign-born citizen or a resident who immigrated to a new  
378 country of residence. Participants were asked whether they identify as immigrants (N=103), of  
379 which 21% (n=22) answered yes. Among those who identified as immigrants, nearly all (95%;  
380 n=21) are fluent in two languages or more. When asked if they were children of immigrants  
381 (N=81), about half (49%; n=40) identified answered yes, and of those, 47.5% (n=19) of  
382 respondents identified as bilingual and 20% (n=8) as multilingual.

383 Participants shared the type of institution they currently work in (N= 104). Ninety-  
384 percent (n=94) of respondents are currently working in a library, archive, or museum. Forty-eight  
385 (51%) respondents work in academic libraries; 31 (33%) worked in public libraries; seven  
386 (7.5%) worked in school libraries and eight (8.5%) work in archive/museum/special libraries.  
387 Participants held a range of titles, some unclear, which prevented us from creating categories  
388 from the findings; however, they reflect the vast variety of work being done in libraries.

### 389 *Language Use in Libraries*

390 When asked if they identified as monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual (N=111), about  
391 65% (n=73) of respondents identified themselves as bilingual (n=46) or multilingual (n=27).  
392 Participants indicated varying proficiencies in 31 different languages, languages with IRL level 5  
393 proficiency which include: Spanish, English Creole, Haitian Creole, French, Tagalog, Chinese –  
394 Cantonese, Cebuano/Bisaya, Dakotah, and Patois. Languages listed twice are included below,  
395 other languages mentioned include: Nahuatl, German, Swedish, Cree, Gujarati, Indonesian,  
396 Vietnamese, Greek, American Sign Language, Kiswahili, Kapampangan, Palauan, Zapoteco,  
397 Lao, and Thai. When asked whether they were raised speaking another language at home  
398 (N=94), over half (54%; n=57) answered yes.  
399  
400

Language	Frequency
Spanish	45
French	16
Chinese - Cantonese	5
Japanese	5
Korean	4
Italian	4
Tagalog	4

Chinese - Mandarin	2
Chinese	2
Portuguese	2
Hmong	2

Figure 2. Languages Listed at Least Twice by Participants

Thirty-six percent (n=38) of respondents never use a non-English language at work, while 28% (n=29) use another language daily or weekly. Six percent (n=7) use another language monthly and 28% (n=9) do so less frequently. Participants who reported using another language at work primarily use their language skills with patrons such as students and community members. Nearly all respondents reported that speaking another language has allowed them to connect with others; among respondents who identified themselves as immigrants, all felt this way.

### ***Hiring and Position Requirements***

We asked whether speaking another language was part of their job descriptions or qualifications (N=102). Only 8% (n=9) of respondents answered yes - a sharp contrast to the number of respondents that indicated using said skills as part of their jobs. 25% (n=26) reported being asked about language skills during the hiring process; 40% (n=44) of respondents reported language skills listed under preferred qualifications) and 6% under required; 33% (n=34) of respondents were asked to use their language skills at work while 13% (n=14) were not asked but chose to do so. Only 11% (n=4; N=34) of respondents who have been asked to create or prepare library materials in another language receive extra compensation for using their language skills.

### ***Professional Development***

Two questions were asked related to professional development opportunities or MLIS courses on cultural, ethnic, or linguistic awareness. Answers were mixed because we did not properly define or provide examples of what those opportunities might look like. However, some responses clarified that while some opportunities are available, they are insufficient. For example, one respondent stated, "Some elective courses were offered like Services to Underserved Populations and cultural competency would come up periodically, but I think library schools need to do a better job of integrating these issues and concepts into the curriculum." Another respondent said: "No, there was a course on multiculturalism in libraries, but it examined literature that defined diversity rather than actual application of it to our work." This was echoed in other responses indicating that some of these opportunities only "scratch the surface" of these topics.

### ***Discussion***

#### ***Salary Compensation***

Compensation is a tangible form of assessing perceived value.<sup>72</sup> A third of the survey participants (N=101) have been asked to utilize their language fluency by their employer, yet

<sup>72</sup> Leona Tam and Peter Rex Massingham, "The Relationship between Human Capital, Value Creation and Employee Reward," *Journal of Intellectual Capital* 16, no. 2 (2015): 390–418, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIC-06-2014-0075>.

435 only 11% (n=34) of those who have been asked to use their language skills receive extra  
436 compensation for doing so. Among our immigrant respondents (N=22) over half (54%) have  
437 used their language skills as part of their work. However, only 22% (n=5) were asked if they  
438 spoke another language during their interview process and only 9% (n=2) have speaking another  
439 language as part of their job description. Libraries benefit from their multilingual staff's skills  
440 and yet these language skills do not appear to be outwardly valued. One recent county library  
441 position description in California indicated that "candidates who are able to speak, read and write  
442 in languages other than English are eligible for bilingual pay of \$0.55 or \$0.70 per hour worked,  
443 depending upon skill level." This is reflected in one respondents answer stating, "The public  
444 library I worked at paid people fluent in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese (or other common  
445 languages spoken by our patrons) got paid maybe like 50 cents more per hour for their language  
446 skills." The Denver Public Library system also has a bilingual stipend, detailed in their Career  
447 Service Rule 9 Pay Administration guidelines, that state they may only pay out the bilingual  
448 stipend of \$50 per pay period if: "The employee's supervisor has determined that the employee's  
449 position requires that the employee use bilingual skills regularly to perform their work; and the  
450 classification specification for the employee's classification does not require bilingual skills for  
451 all incumbents of that classification; and the employee demonstrates a proficiency in the second  
452 language, according to procedures established by the OHR Executive Director."<sup>73</sup> This is  
453 problematic as it is a form of gatekeeping by limiting the opportunities for bilingual pay and  
454 granting manager or administrators the power to determine what languages and when such skills  
455 have value. Further studies could explore the implication of states with English-only legislation,  
456 such as California and Colorado, on bilingual pay and financial compensation for language  
457 skills, especially when this may be an invisible or unseen labor taken on by multilingual library  
458 workers. Libraries are serving increasingly diverse communities and populations, this is nothing  
459 new, yet, if library workers are being asked to use these additional skills which greatly benefit  
460 their institutions, they should be compensated for their work and the additional value that their  
461 skills bring.<sup>74</sup> An outward facing expressed value of these skills by libraries would further  
462 demonstrate the importance of retaining a diverse workforce among library workers and create a  
463 sense of belonging between libraries and their communities.

#### 464 ***Value and Belonging***

465 The experiences of children of immigrants came to light in the responses to questions  
466 about feeling uncomfortable speaking a language other than English. Forty participants (n=84)  
467 identified as children of immigrants, 29 (72%) of whom responded to a question regarding  
468 whether they had ever felt discouraged or uncomfortable speaking another language at work. Of  
469 those who responded, ten (34%) answered yes, with several explaining that they did not feel  
470 comfortable or were discouraged from speaking another language. One participant shared: "Yes,  
471 but due to my lack of skill." Another noted: "I've felt uncomfortable or discouraged by my lack  
472 of proficiency in the language that my family speaks. It can be a nice surprise to hear it spoken

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<sup>73</sup> City of Denver, "Bilingual Stipend," City of Denver Human Resource Center, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/office-of-human-resources/employee-resources/Classification-and-Compensation/bilingual-stipend.html>.

<sup>74</sup> US Census Bureau Public Information Office, "U.S. Census Bureau Projections Show a Slower Growing, Older, More Diverse Nation a Half Century from Now," Newsroom Archive, December 12, 2012, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html>.

473 by colleagues or patrons at work, but I don't know them and I am too embarrassed of my poor  
474 Cantonese skills to engage with them.”

475 This theme of being discouraged or uncomfortable while speaking another language (i.e.  
476 a Spanish-speaking library worker with limited Spanish proficiency feeling uncomfortable  
477 speaking to Spanish-speaking patrons with full or native proficiency) was not unexpected. We  
478 argue that it corresponds with what is known about the experiences of children of immigrants.<sup>75</sup>  
479 Research supports that, for immigrants from non-English speaking countries, language loss  
480 persists with each subsequent generation as they assimilate to America, this transition is known  
481 as the three-generation process.<sup>76</sup> When language loss occurs, children of immigrants are at risk  
482 of feeling alienation from their culture and family, as well as potentially being deprived of key  
483 social resources.<sup>77</sup>

484 In another instance, a participant describes language policing by a co-worker:

485  
486 “Yes, there was an issue with a coworker when me and another Spanish speaker  
487 were communicating in Spanish. This coworker insisted that we only speak English if  
488 there were no Spanish speaking patrons around. She told me that speaking Spanish made  
489 other non-Spanish speaking employees uncomfortable. I spoke to my boss about this but  
490 not much was done about it. I still don’t feel comfortable around this coworker because  
491 she basically targeted the two of us because we possessed adequate skills in English. She,  
492 however, had no problems with either of us communicating with [a] custodian in Spanish  
493 because said custodian has somewhat limited English skills. I felt very discouraged  
494 because we were both explicitly hired to target the Spanish-speaking population in our  
495 community. We don’t always have Spanish- speaking patrons come in daily so it was  
496 nice to be able to practice on the off day. Unfortunately, this incident removed this  
497 opportunity for us.”

498  
499 Other respondents highlighted how they were able to build community and feel less  
500 isolated stating, “Yes. Some of the faculty who are native Japanese find my being able to  
501 understand and speak with them in Japanese to be extremely helpful, and in the town where i  
502 [sic] live, there is a good number of Japanese immigrants, and my language skills have helped  
503 me connect to a group of Japanese wives. honestly, they are my only friends there.” Another  
504 described, “I'm relaxing to be around because not only do I speak the language, but I am also  
505 more Japanese in my expressions and they don't have to worry about upsetting any American  
506 sensibilities or trying to explain a lot because I have an understanding of things more similar to  
507 theirs.”

508 It becomes clear that language skills have value in both personal and professional  
509 development and although difficult to quantify, language policing, a lack of financial  
510 compensation, and lack of encouragement or recognition are hindering the potential and  
511 possibility of language skills and knowledge.

## 512 *Distribution of Labor*

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<sup>75</sup> Alejandro Portes and Lingxin Hao, “The Price of Uniformity: Language, Family and Personality Adjustment in the Immigrant Second Generation,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 6 (January 1, 2002): 890, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987022000009368>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 907.

513 One aspect of library services involving translation and brokering that we unfortunately  
514 did not touch on in our survey was the distribution of labor. The Multilingual Glossary compiled  
515 by members of the Instruction for Diverse Populations Committee of the Association of College and  
516 Research Libraries Instruction Section is a worthwhile resource which presents a list of common  
517 library terms in seven languages and provides their definition in English.<sup>78</sup> However, we would  
518 like to acknowledge and ask the question: who is tasked with translating and brokering?<sup>79</sup> With  
519 the demographics of librarianship being unrepresentative of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of  
520 the communities they serve, can we assume that librarians heavily rely on multilingual racial and  
521 ethnically diverse library workers to do the work of language brokering and assisting non-  
522 English speaking patrons? This would, of course, be a large assumption to make but it certainly  
523 would be an area of further focus; it directly relates to the problem of the lack of diversity among  
524 librarians and the burden that non-librarian staff may be asked to take on.

### 525 *Linguistic Imperialism and “Neutrality” in Libraries*

526 The myth of neutrality in libraries has been hotly debated in recent years, including a  
527 literal, formal debate at the American Library Association Midwinter Meeting in January 2018.<sup>80</sup>  
528 However, as Chris Bourg states, “the origin of public libraries in the US is inextricably tied to  
529 the fact that the history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism, slavery, and  
530 segregation.”<sup>81</sup> The recent dialogues about libraries as neutral institutions stems partly from the  
531 ethical dilemma of whether libraries have an obligation to provide spaces for all, including  
532 racists, white supremacists, and/or hate groups. Libraries are public-facing institutions, but their  
533 espoused ethical tenets (e.g. ALA Bill of Rights) are not always evident in the collections,  
534 services, or staff demographic composition. Historically, collections and services reflect the  
535 values of locally powerful groups.<sup>82</sup> Wiegand states, “on many occasions public libraries  
536 functioned as obstacles to cultural democracy by perpetuating racism, sexism, classism, and  
537 homophobia their collections supported.”<sup>83</sup> Linguistic imperialism shows us that neutrality  
538 cannot exist when English is seen as the official or default (and by extension, correct) language.  
539 Furthermore, how can library spaces claim neutrality when they’re operating within a  
540 linguistically imperialist context?

### 541 *Language as Community Building, Self-Care, and Language as an Act of Resistance*

542 Apart from language as an asset to community dialogue, cultural competencies, and  
543 cross-cultural engagement, is there added value in having language skills within libraries as a  
544 point of community building among library staff? When asked whether speaking another

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<sup>78</sup> Association of College & Research Libraries, “Multilingual Glossary for Today’s Library Users,” ACRL Instruction Section Website,” accessed August 2, 2019, <https://acrl.ala.org/IS/instruction-tools-resources-2/pedagogy/multilingual-glossary-for-todays-library-users/>.

<sup>79</sup> Sheila Garcia, Eileen Bosch, Valeria Molteni, and Johana Orellana, “Caught in the Middle: Examining the Role of Libraries and Librarians in Supporting Language and Cultural Brokers” (poster presented at the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color, Albuquerque, NM, September 29, 2018).

<sup>80</sup> Amy Carlton, “Are Libraries Neutral?,” *American Libraries Magazine*, February 12, 2018, <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/are-libraries-neutral/>.

<sup>81</sup> Chris Bourg, “Debating y/Our Humanity, or Are Libraries Neutral?,” *Feral Librarian* (blog), February 12, 2018, <https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2018/02/11/debating-y-our-humanity-or-are-libraries-neutral/>.

<sup>82</sup> For additional context about collections see Sofia Leung, “Whiteness as Collections,” Sofia Leung (blog), April 15, 2019, <https://www.sofiayleung.com/thoughts/whiteness-as-collections.> :

<sup>83</sup> Wiegand, Part, 5.

545 language allowed them to better connect with others, we were surprised to find that some of  
546 these connections included other library workers. One respondent stated: “Yes definitely. A  
547 coworker and I speak Spanish often. There are several other coworkers who speak some Spanish  
548 or are learning it and it has been an area through which we've connected even if we don't talk to  
549 each other in Spanish.” These connections are important within the context of the linguistic  
550 imperialist underpinnings of librarianship. It also serves as a reminder that multilingual  
551 collections serve a wide range of patrons, not just native speakers but learners of languages as  
552 well. Thus, library workers connecting with each other through a shared language is an act of  
553 resistance through which we disrupt linguistic imperialism.

554 In a setting where librarians of color must navigate overwhelming Whiteness, oppressive  
555 barriers and structures, code-switching and speaking a non-English language with others can be  
556 liberating in that it breaks linguistic barriers imposed by the English language.<sup>84</sup> Connecting with  
557 a colleague via shared language may be a moment of self-care in an otherwise oppressively  
558 White space. It allows librarians who speak other languages to be more authentic version of  
559 themselves. To be clear, we should not need to create these self-care spaces to heal from the  
560 traumas of White librarianship - this trauma should not exist in the first place. The realities of  
561 being a person of color in librarianship include navigating non-inclusive spaces,  
562 microaggressions, macroaggressions, and their resulting trauma. The fact that one of our  
563 participants experienced language policing is unacceptable. Thus, there is value in connection  
564 and self-care through shared language. Most importantly, there is resistance. Speaking another  
565 language should not be a deficit but rather a form of linguistic capital.<sup>85</sup> Our bilingual and  
566 multilingual skills are of value, not just when it comes to communication but, as cultural brokers  
567 between two languages, we gain multiple social tools such as “audience awareness, cross-  
568 cultural awareness, and ‘real-world’ literacy skills.”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, “linguists and psychologists  
569 have repeatedly noted the association of fluent bilinguals with better cognitive performance in  
570 comparison to monolinguals in any language.”<sup>87</sup>

## 571 **Conclusion**

572 As history has shown, linguistic imperialism plays a significant role in the structures and  
573 cultures that uphold English as the non-negotiable American language. As a result of linguistic  
574 imperialism, English, though not native to the United States, is ubiquitous. It is in no danger of  
575 extinction, as many indigenous languages are. Furthermore, libraries are not neutral and operate  
576 within this system of language supremacy as part of the larger structure of a society that  
577 marginalizes bilingual and multilingual library workers and patrons. While further research  
578 needs to be done in this area, specifically on language demographics, it is significant to note that  
579 the RUSA Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and

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<sup>84</sup> Angela Galvan, “Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (June 3, 2015), <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/soliciting-performance-hiding-bias-whiteness-and-librarianship/>; Nosisi P. Diamini and Gregory H. Kamwendo, “Code-Switching as a Strategy for the Decolonisation of Learning: A Case of One University in Swaziland,” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 39–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2018.1479873>.

<sup>85</sup> Tara J. Yosso, “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (March 2005): 69–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

<sup>87</sup> Portes and Hao, “Price,” 890.

580 Services have not seemed to influence change with regards to staffing. To echo survey responses,  
581 courses and professional development opportunities that do deal with serving an ethnically,  
582 culturally, and linguistically diverse society, merely “scratch the surface” of these issues.  
583 Furthermore, library workers with expertise in languages and cultures are not likely to be  
584 recognized or compensated for their abilities, and at times policed on when, where, and with  
585 who, they can use their abilities. Librarianship has a responsibility to value additional languages  
586 among its spaces, staff, and services and, furthermore, provide access and equitable services as  
587 central rather than peripheral to its mission.

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