

**Immigration and Language Policy:  
An Examination of the Effects of Popular Sentiment on Provision of Library Services**

**Denice Adkins, University of Missouri**

Language is one of the primary ways people interact with each other. While language connects people, people are separated by speaking different languages. In the United States, multilingualism is uncommon and the Spanish language is often devalued. In U.S. libraries, the traditional language of interaction has been English. Spanish is the language that is next most supported.<sup>1</sup> This is due not only to the increase of the Hispanic/Latino population that has been noted in the two most recent decennial censuses, but also to the activism of librarians who serve Spanish-speaking populations.

Arizona shares a national border with Mexico, and migration across the Arizona-Mexico border is common. Population statistics indicate that 30.1 percent of Arizona's total population are of Hispanic origin,<sup>2</sup> 15.6 percent are foreign-born,<sup>3</sup> and 28.5 percent speak a language other than English at home.<sup>4</sup> These percentages are greater than the national averages for Hispanic origin, foreign-born, and non-English home language populations, which are 15.4, 12.6, and 19.7 percent respectively.

At the same time, anti-immigrant sentiment in Arizona runs high. Militia groups such as the Arizona Minutemen patrol the border with weapons, searching for illegal immigrants. Educational policies have been modified to limit children's access to bilingual instruction and move them toward English immersion education. In 2004, Arizona voters passed Proposition 200, a law to restrict public services to non-U.S. citizens. Prior to clarification by the Arizona attorney general, librarians wondered if this law would oblige them to check patrons' citizenship status before they could offer services. Arizona librarians are on the forefront of immigration issues. In this paper, I intend to demonstrate that library services to the Spanish-speaking both flow with and resist against popular anti-immigrant sentiment.

This paper combines the analysis of legal and news materials over the past ten years with changes in library practice over that same time. Changes in laws will be assessed by reviewing the Arizona Revised Statutes and the Arizona Legislative Information System for information about library services, language policies, and immigrant status over the same 11-year period. These changes will be documented and assessed, to develop a sense of the overall rate of change of the legal positions of both documented and undocumented immigrants in Arizona and the use of the Spanish language in Arizona social services agencies, schools, and libraries.

The analysis of news reports will be conducted using Lexis-Nexis and InfoTrac Newsstand, and will cover the period between 1999 and 2010. The analysis will focus on Arizona newspapers, including the Arizona Daily Star (Tucson) and the Arizona Republic (Phoenix), as well as other Arizona papers if available. Search terms included in the search are "immigrants/immigration," "legal status," and "illegal immigrants," "Proposition 200," and other terms that are associated with news items related to immigration. Frequency of news items and letters to the editor featuring these search terms will be measured. Individual items will be read to identify trends toward positive or negative press coverage toward immigrants and immigration policies.

Developments in library services will be evaluated using data collected during two surveys of Arizona public library services to the Spanish-speaking, one conducted in 1999-2000 and another conducted in 2009-2010. This survey asked specifically about services to the Spanish-speaking, such as provision of a Spanish-speaking staff person at all open hours, a Spanish-language or Spanish-bilingual collection of

materials, or Spanish or bilingual library programming. Additional statistical information on Arizona public libraries will be gathered from IMLS and NCES Public Library Data Files and added to the database as an indicator of a library's general condition (including library size and growth).

Newspaper and legislative searching are in progress, but not complete. Survey results are still coming in for the 2009-10 survey. At this point, predictions are premature. However, an initial look at suggest that libraries have expanded their services to Spanish speakers, despite a good deal of anti-immigrant sentiment in news media over the decade. This suggests that librarians in Arizona have deliberately chosen to assist Spanish-speaking patrons, despite a statewide cultural shift against service to immigrants.

This research project will demonstrate how libraries react to community feeling, by using one particular example – services to the Spanish speaking – and contrasting library provision of that service to the image of the immigrant as held up in the news media. This paper will articulate the role of the library in the community, whether as mirror of popular sentiment or agent of uplift and social responsibility.

---

<sup>1</sup> Serving Non-English Speakers in U.S. Public Libraries. American Library Association, March 25, 2008.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/olos/nonenglishspeakers/index.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Table 19, Resident Population by Race, Hispanic Origin, and State: 2008. *The 2010 Statistical Abstract*. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0019.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Table 40, Native and Foreign-Born Population by State: 2008. *The 2010 Statistical Abstract*. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0040.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Table 54, Language Spoken at Home by State, 2007. *The 2010 Statistical Abstract*. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0054.pdf>