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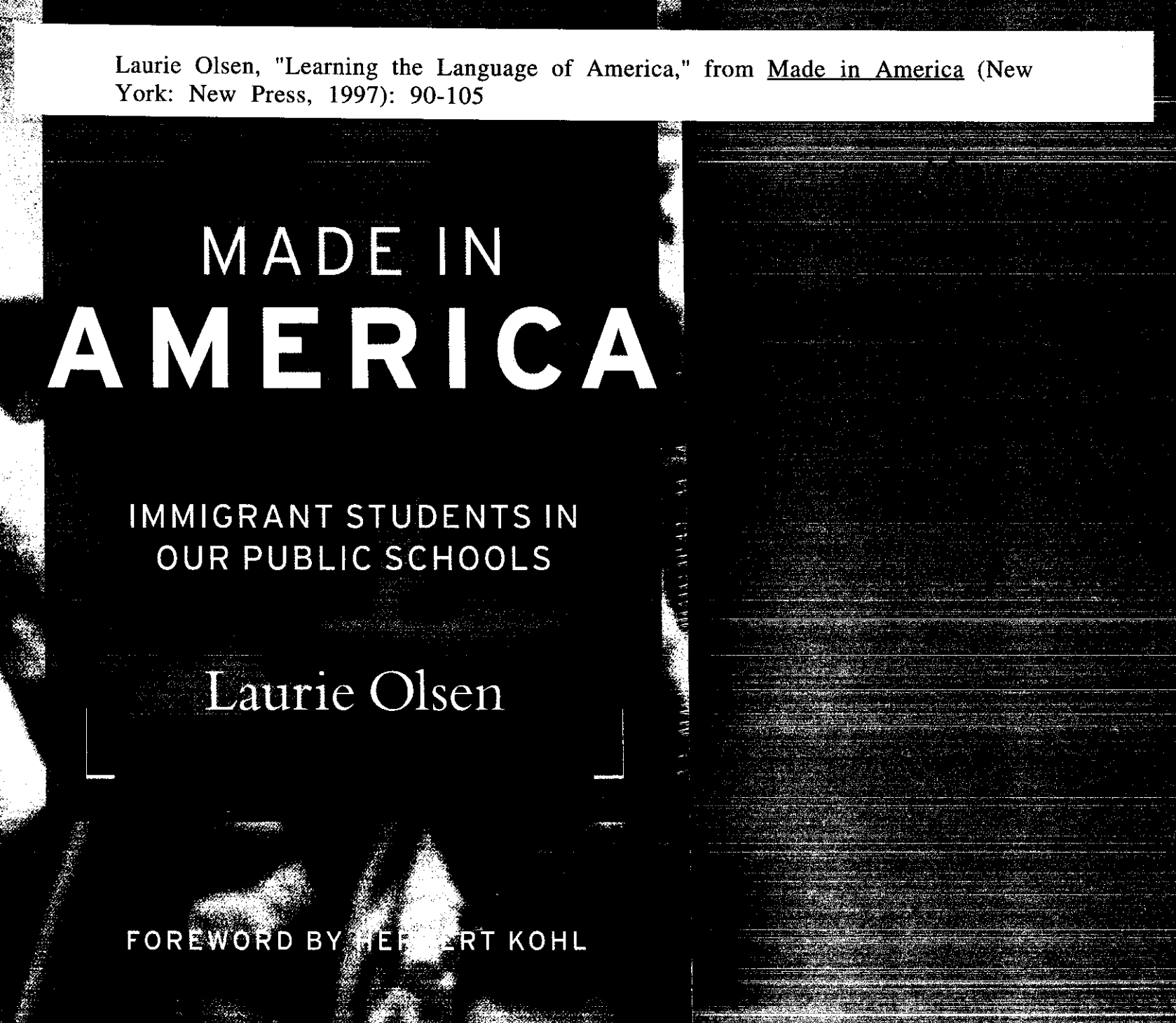

Learning the Language of America

IN LINDA O'Malley's English-as-a-second-language classroom, students sit in a large u-shape, clustered by language groups—Spanish with Spanish speakers, Farsi speakers together. Vietnamese with Vietnamese speakers, etc. Late in the year such clustering is no longer required for communication, because most of the students by then have some basic English-speaking skills. But it still makes a difference in their comfort levels, O'Malley feels, if they sometimes can work in groups in which they can use their mother tongue, their strongest language. So, although students are mostly asked to speak in English for this class, when they are working on small group projects, the teacher lets them speak their native language. She explains:

> Misunderstandings are so common because even though they know the English words they want to use, when those same words are spoken by someone else with a heavy accent, they can't hear it. If I really want them to be able to discuss something, it works best when they can speak as fully as possible and understand as much as possible of what each other is saying. It makes it easier for them to share ideas, but also it is the only place in school where they are allowed to use their language. I think just to hear their own language and to feel it is allowed makes for a different sense of relaxation and "being here" in the classroom.

On this particular day, the groups are doing small group projects and speaking their native tongues. The room is filled with the excited voices of students planning presentations in Farsi, Tagalog, Spanish. A boy knocks on the door of the classroom, bearing a note for the teacher from the principal. He

crosses the room to give it to her, and on his way back out the door says very loudly, "Where am I? Doesn't anyone know how to speak English? Is this some kind of foreign country?!" The class is noticeably silent. When they begin to resume their conversations, it is subdued and in English.

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According to formal school policy, court law, and program design, the educational task of becoming American is viewed as a matter of becoming English speaking. The role of the school in Americanizing immigrants and addressing issues of national origin is viewed as a matter of taking non-English-speaking students and making them fluent English speakers. The program at Madison High and the teachers in it label and serve students expressly in terms of their English language fluency and language group. This reflects the politics beyond.

No other aspect of immigrant adjustment to life in the United States receives as much programmatic attention or generates as much political focus and controversy as the matter of language. Politics has intervened despite both common sense and research that established that students learn best in a language they can comprehend, and a research base on second-language acquisition that has shown that literacy in one's home language is the best basis for developing literacy in a second language. The use of a child's home language in schools has become a politically charged idea. Current public demands to assimilate immigrants more quickly, as well as demands to keep them out because of fear that this nation cannot absorb more diversity, both center largely on issues of proficiency in English. Framed in demands for strengthening English as the common or only language of the nation, legislation and initiatives throughout the country have focused on the need to demand allegiance to and use of English as a requirement for those living in these United States.[17] English has become the major public issue in the socialization of immigrant children in the United States.

Learning English is a fundamental requirement for acceptance and participation in an English-taught curriculum and English-dominant social world. Teachers, immigrant students, and native U.S.-born students alike, all agree that to be American, to be part of the fabric of Madison High, one must speak English.

The goal of becoming fluent English speakers appears to be embraced by all newcomers. There was no ambivalence or hint of negative judgment I could detect associated with adopting English as one's language. It is a border all seem to want to cross as soon as possible. The pressures appear to result

in newcomers desiring to become full-fledged English speakers as soon as possible. They are surprised and often discouraged then by the contradictory pressure to become English speaking and the many roadblocks to developing that proficiency, and the many barriers to becoming English literate. They and their families are saddened by the discovery that comes too late, that becoming English fluent usually is accompanied by a loss of home language use, fluency, and development.[18]

Because, in their first few years in the United States, newly arrived immigrants are enrolled for one half of the day in the separate Newcomer School across the street and for the other half day in classes designed for limited English speakers, newcomers are formally separated from English-speaking schoolmates. The social dynamics of the school include many English-speaking kids rejecting, putting down, and freezing newcomers out of social involvement with the English-speaking social world. Although the courses designed for LEP students are a vast improvement over the way things were done even ten years ago, where no special supports were in place to help immigrants access the curriculum, the institutional arrangements at Madison High still provide insufficient English language development and still prevent access to a full academic core curriculum. The result is that Madison is a world in which those who are not English speaking are precluded from learning the English that they know full well is necessary for acceptance and success in U.S. society. And because being English speaking is viewed as the central key to being American, most newcomers attempt to abandon use of their mother tongues while on the school site. The language in which they can express themselves, the language through which they can understand the world becomes banished.

With all the focus on and anxiety about immigrants learning English, few appear to recognize that the efforts of the school might mitigate this goal. Placed in special classes designed to address their lack of English proficiency, immigrant students are separated from English-speaking schoolmates. As a result, their access to learning the language and becoming part of the English speaking world is severely constrained. Put down for use of their mother tongues, and with no supports for continued development of their home languages, immigrant students not only fail to develop literacy in their native language, but begin to lose it. With that loss, they also sever ties to their families and homeland cultures. Unable to converse with grandparents, unable to read the literature from their homeland, unable to write to friends and families back in their motherland, they lose a rich and important connection.

"IF YOU DO NOT SPEAK THE ENGLISH RIGHT, YOU CANNOT BE AMERICAN."

In answer to the question, "Are there ways in which you feel American?" Mandy, an immigrant from Taiwan, once said emphatically, "Of course not! If you do not speak the English right, you cannot be American." In the initial understanding of newcomers, becoming English speaking is the same as becoming American. For almost all immigrants coming to Madison High in the first few years of their transition to the United States, learning English is a central and major issue in their lives.

Learning English is not easy. The prevalent attitudes that most immigrants encounter is far from accepting of accented and flawed English. Common attitudes of exclusion toward students whose English is not fluent is far from the "safe" effective environment necessary for language acquisition.[19] Being laughed at for incorrect English, being teased for heavy accents, and having difficulty finding their way when they do not understand and do not feel free to ask for clarifications of English, are daily occurrences for most immigrant students. One student described the overwhelming experience:

> I'd get so tired, my head would hurt. All day, I sit in classes and hear English, English, English, and try so so hard to understand, but I do not understand. I was afraid the teacher would call on me. I was trying to hear a word I knew. I was trying to figure out my science and my math. In the morning time it was better. I'd think, today I will understand. But by lunch my head was hurting, and I felt despair. By the last class in the day, I couldn't even listen anymore–it was so hard. I just sat there and nothing made sense.

They are in many ways suffering from "language shock." They need to learn English, they want to learn English, but there are also limits on the opportunities to learn and practice English.

Madison, like most high schools in California, has an English-as-a-second-language program. The newly arrived immigrants begin their ESL sequence with the lower-level ESL classes taught at the Newcomer School. They continue when they achieve intermediate levels of English fluency in higher-level ESL classes taught on site at Madison High. Together, the Newcomer School and Madison provide an ESL sequence that compares well to other high school ESL programs in California. However, a common weakness in Madison's program as well as most high schools is insufficient attention to writing, to reading comprehension, to academic vocabulary. Oral fluency

and comprehension are achieved—students eventually learn to speak and understand basic English—but the skills needed for academic participation and success at the high school level are not sufficiently developed. The problem is not just this. Although the school provides five periods of ESL levels 4 and 5, the school needs more sections than are currently offered. ESL is only one component of a comprehensive program. It should address the learning of English. But learning all the other subjects a student needs to learn requires a different kind of support. A student cannot learn social studies, math, and science if they cannot understand the language of the teacher or the language in the textbook. It takes three to seven years to become sufficiently fluent in English for academic learning. During these years, students need instruction or support in their home language and what is called "sheltered" instruction, in which teachers use visual cues, check on comprehension, work on vocabulary, and assist in bridging the language gap. This is where the Madison program has the most trouble. It is short of bilingual teachers who might make academic course content comprehensible and accessible to the LEP population while they are in the process of learning English more fully.

The school is, according to a Newcomer School analysis, short twenty-eight needed sections of academic courses taught in either the students' primary language or in sheltered approaches.[20] Of the sixteen that are offered, six are taught by teachers who do not have training in providing sheltered instruction. Thus, immigrant students are divided into their own classes, paying the prices of separation without gaining the benefit that such separation might offer and without the help that they need. At Madison High, LEP students receive insufficient formal English language development and are placed in many academic classes that do not address their needs for comprehensible instruction. The lack of trained teachers and the lack of sufficient offerings severely cuts down their access to schooling and curtails the development of English. And for immigrant students, a lack of English language fluency not only precludes them from access to the core curriculum, but is a social stigma as well. Immigrant students regularly express frustration about not having the English needed to participate fully and comprehend what is happening formally in school.

Some spend long hours desperately trying to unlock the secrets of English fluency. They carry dictionaries to look up every word they cannot understand in their English textbooks. Most newcomers appear to consciously make themselves students of English speakers' behavior, spending lunchtime on the fringes of the activity on campus, listening and watching carefully and trying to absorb what it is that Americans do and how it is that they speak.

Others simply retreat into social groups with others of their same language, or cluster in social groups with other newcomers where some baseline social English allows them to communicate superficially, and then float by in classes without really understanding what is going on or what is being said, hoping that good behavior will suffice for passing the course—frequently, it is.

"YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING, AND YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING."

For immigrant students at Madison, a sore and painful arena of their transition is the embarrassment and rejection they feel because they are not fluent English speakers. As Helen, a Chinese immigrant, explained:

> The kind of things [for which] American people laugh at immigrants, are their ways of talking in English. Because like Chinese people talk different ways of English that Americans couldn't understand. They make fun of the English and laugh at them. They pretend to say the same words that Chinese people say and make it funny and tell other Americans and laugh together at us. Immigrant peoples are very embarrassed in front of American people. It is because of the English.

And Samiya, a tenth grader, added:

> If I want to fit in the American way I have to talk like American people in English all the time. If I talk Dari ever, they make fun of me. But they make fun even when I talk English. I learn to shut up.

The need to learn English is not only to avoid ridicule, but also to be able to understand fundamentally what is happening around them and to be a participant. This is a struggle. A young woman from Mexico explained:

> I felt very bad at Madison. Everyone was talking in class and their English was better than mine and they had friends. I also was surprised because students [were] rude to their teachers, which didn't happen in my country. Sometimes they were very rude but the teacher didn't do anything. I wished I could go back to my country. I thought my teachers and other students here were so lucky because they could talk their native language at school. They don't know how it feel when one lives

> in a strange country. You can't understand anything and you can't say anything.

This sense of loss for not being able to understand what is being said begins the first day of school. Padma described her first week at Madison High, after immigrating from India.

> I felt so nervous. I was so shy when I came here. I didn't know English so I have problems. I didn't know anybody in this school, and I am so alone. I didn't know where the main office [was] or who is the principal. I didn't know where is my classroom. I was scared and afraid. In India we didn't have to change clothes in p.e., but here we have to change clothes. It is all so different. I thought, if only I could speak English it would all be okay.

Huan described the invisibility.

> I remember all the classmates make fun of me because I couldn't spoke English. I felt very upset because I didn't have no friends who can help me with my work, and it was very hard for me to understand the teacher. The teacher didn't see me. I felt I wasn't there at all.

It is not only a desire to understand that drives these young immigrants to want to learn English, they seek also to adopt the behavior and make the sounds that would not give them away as foreigners and result in being excluded. Even those who are considered fairly English fluent by academic standards used by their teachers find it difficult to master the slang of their American peers and to overcome the accents that mark them as different. In classes, the English that is spoken is a classroom English. Cut off from much interaction with English-speaking peers as they sit in their sheltered classes or attend the Newcomer School, many newcomers hear the English of the youth culture only as they walk through the campus, but they cannot understand what they are hearing nor participate in the peer banter. As a Vietnamese student, Lanh wrote:

> In other countries they speak a language and it is all the same. But here in America, slang words are used everywhere by the students and most of all especial here at Madison. Even the teachers do not

> use these words. Firstly, let's start with the American students. They are using slang words . . . everywhere. And sometimes when I was there, I don't even understand . . . what they are talking about. They all, "hey dude, wuzz up?," and I think it means . . . "How are you doing?" Well it sounds a little weird but anyway we have to learn to use them because here at Madison if you don't use them, then people will make fun of you. In some other ways, the American kids usually say: "uh huh" or "get lost." Well, I got very confused because it does not make any sense at all. And besides the American kids, the immigrants student also try to say slang words like "hey, gals, what's up with ya?" and things they heard from the American kids used to say. They do this because they don't want others to laugh at them by not knowing the new style that the natives know. I don't know how other people feel about those slang words from the American kids, but for me, I'm really interested. It is weird and cute, but I have to study it hard. No one teaches it and it is not in the dictionary.

Learning a basic vocabulary and rudiments of English is step one. Finding American teenage friends who will converse so the new language is used in context and finding friends who will explain the slang is step two. The commonly expressed desire to "find an American friend" is not just mired in a desire for companionship, but also in a desire to have the means of learning social English. Mandy spoke about her wish to find an American friend:

> Sometimes we tried to talk to them to learn more English, some of them helped us, and some of them just laughed and made fun of us. Sometimes, most when you have an American friend talk to you and be friendly and be nice to you, you feel really happy. But most, when you walk on any street or walk through a group of American students, you hear them say something or they pick on you or they throw something at you, and they do it because they think you don't understand English and speak English. They think we don't understand their message because we can't understand the words they use. We understand. They tell us by how they act that they don't want us.

Shirley, the eldest of three children from Taiwan, is the person in charge of her household. The children were sent to the United States for their high

school education. It is Shirley's responsibility to see to it that her brothers and a cousin get up in the morning, have food on the table, and go to school and do their homework. She is a competent seventeen-year-old, full of concern for her family and willing to be the head of household. She is also a serious student. Her biggest worry, though, is how to learn English herself and to help her charges learn English. All attend Madison High and assume they will be returning to their homeland when they finish school. It is important to them to learn English, both for the capital it will give them on their return to their homeland, and also because they are lonely. But learning English is problematic. None have American friends, so Shirley has tried to get a tutor to come to their house and help them with English.

> How can we learn English if no one speak it with us? No Americans speak with us. A friend would be best, but it is a puzzle. If you don't speak English you can't have American friend. So how do we learn English?

On the advice of her teacher, Ms. Meyer, Shirley has posted an advertisement for an English-speaking tutor at the local community college. She is waiting for a reply.

For most of the students, one of the transitions they make as they move between their home and school, is the switch in language environments. Their families are not English-speaking. The world of school is English-speaking. There are no bilingual classes at Madison in which their home language is used, and only the ESL class and the Newcomer School provide a space where they can sometimes speak in their native tongues. Socially, their native tongue would be the language of choice, but the proximity of English-speaking students and the fear of being overheard and laughed at is a deterrent to using it more often. In the sheltered classes, a particular form of English is the language of currency. It is an English that is so heavily accented in a variety of ways that students often can't understand each other even though they are all speaking English. Ms. O'Malley has mentioned this often in explaining to me the importance of her voice in her classroom as the only real English-speaking model.

Without strength in English, newcomers rely on help from friends who speak their language and seek places where it is safe to use it. The Newcomer School offers a respite from and contrast to the anti-native-language attitudes of Madison High. Many immigrant students speak in glowing terms of how important the Newcomer School staff and classrooms are to them because of

the relative comfort and ease they feel about using their home language. "I like it at the Newcomer School. Mr. Moreno speaks Spanish to me, and Ms. White is so patient and always lets me speak Spanish or English, even if my English is so bad."

In addition to the Newcomer School, there are some places certain newcomer groups have found at Madison where they are safe to use their own language. Dorothy Meyer's ESL classroom is a place where the Indian girls can hang out during lunch. They can speak their language and they can listen to their music, away from the sting of being laughed at by American English-speaking students. It all started during Ramadan, a holy season, when this group of girls were fasting and needed some place to be during lunch time, away from all the lunch eaters. Meyer, on learning of the traditional fasting, had invited them to come to her classroom. The practice has continued for years. For this group of students, Meyer's classroom is a place where they can be who they are. Similarly, some other immigrant groups have managed to find a place on the campus under the sheltering wing of the few teachers who have befriended them.

In these few classrooms, in the Newcomer School, the students appear to appreciate the ease of not having to monitor the language they use, of being free to use whichever language makes things most comprehensible, and of being free from harassment. But the desire to be English speaking and accepted by Americans, and to avoid the sting of being laughed at or put down are powerful incentives. They not only become English seekers, these students abandon their mother tongues relatively quickly, becoming English preferers. The students seem immune to the messages that adults at the Newcomer School attempt to get across, that bilingualism is an asset and is something students should strive for. It appears that very few immigrant students put any premium or value on continuing to develop their native tongue. Perhaps they take it for granted. Perhaps they do not understand that lack of use leads to atrophy. Perhaps they do not know the wealth of literature and tradition and history that could be theirs by strengthening their literacy in their mother tongue. Or perhaps it is simply too great a load to try to develop literacy in two languages at one time. They appear to be aware of the pain and difficulty of standing between two languages and most respond to that pain by emphasizing a transition to English and leaving behind their mother tongue. As Concepcion, an immigrant from Mexico two years earlier, explained:

> I sometimes don't have Spanish words anymore for the feelings I have here, and I don't yet have English words for them either.

> Or I can't find the English words that explain what I know and have felt in my Mexican life. The words don't work for me. I have become quiet, because I don't have words. I don't even try to use my Spanish. I only wait until I know my English.

The discomfort of being "outside," the trouble of not having the words to express themselves, the frustration with being laughed at for use of their native tongues, all result in a determination of most immigrant students to try to learn English as quickly as possible.

Even if students were to develop their home languages, there is no program which supports that task. Even for those who might need instruction in subjects through their home language because they are not yet proficient enough in English to comprehend the instruction taught in English, the program does not exist. Unlike some schools and districts, Madison High sidesteps the issue of primary language instruction. There is no official policy in either the school or the district about bilingual and home-language instruction. Newcomer School teachers and administrators repeatedly speak to the high school principals in the district about the need to hire bilingual teachers to offer the primary language instruction that is necessary to provide educational access. Throughout the district, people respond that they are making every effort to provide "appropriate instruction." The rhetoric, the official policy, the verbalized discourse about services for students who cannot understand English enough to learn in English is heavily influenced by the fact that there are legal mandates requiring the provision of such instruction, and by a political atmosphere opposed to it. For years, Bayview has been under pressure from the California Department of Education Bilingual Compliance Division to make some progress toward "remedying the shortage of bilingual teachers." Yet, little progress has been made. The political issue is not confronted directly, but offhandedly. The general tenor of comments by mainstream teachers and administrators is reflected in the comments of this administrator: "We have so many different languages here that it really isn't realistic to try to find teachers and offer primary language classes in all those languages. It just makes more sense to teach them in English."

These comments pose a kind of common-sense stance but display ignorance of the processes of second-language acquisition and learning. They are often followed by some reference to the need for a common language and the need to promote faster learning of English. Here are some examples from teacher and administrator interviews:

> Anyway, the sooner they learn English, the better. That's really the most important thing we can do for them. Get them into English as soon as possible.

> I'm not really sure our resources would be best put into bilingual teachers anyway. After all, what they really need is English as soon as possible. I think we're holding them back if we put them in classes where they can fall back on using their home language.

When the point is not argued in terms of common sense, or a defense of English, it is argued in terms of practicality. In one meeting with the high school principals, I heard one make the following comment in frustration when the Newcomer School coordinator spoke up again for priority hiring of bilingual teachers.

> Christ, don't you know there is a shortage of bilingual teachers in this state? We can't get the applications or qualified folks. Get real. We couldn't get the teachers even if we wanted them.

In some sense, the principal is right. There is a national shortage of bilingual credentialed teachers—in California, the teacher pool provides only half of the bilingual teachers needed. Furthermore, Bayview salaries are low compared to other districts in the region. Because of the persistent fiscal crises in the district, hiring is usually done at the last minute. The rare bilingual teachers certified for secondary single subjects are already hired and placed elsewhere. But the "even if we wanted to" clause gives him away. In all of these responses, it is also evident that there is little understanding that when primary language instruction is not provided to LEP students, it means that they are being denied access to an education. A student who speaks no English and is given instruction *only* in English, is really being given no instruction at all.

Repeatedly, the Newcomer School and the sheltered teachers at Madison make efforts to "educate" the administrators and department chairs about the role of primary language instruction in providing access to core curriculum. The message apparently is not heard. If anything results in action, it tends not to be appeals about student access to instruction, but references to potential lawsuits or compliance violation reports. Meanwhile, instruction continues only in the majority language of English, preventing the one-fourth of the student body who are immigrants limited in English fluency from fully acquiring educational resources and content.

"SHELTERED—THAT'S LOWER, RIGHT?"

The program designed for the immigrant students, which is supposed to address the "language barrier," tends to be some sheltered content classes and English-as-a-second-language classes for those at the lower levels of English fluency. With the exception of physical education and an occasional elective class, most of these newcomer LEP students remain with other LEP students through most of their school day. The attitude of other students in the school quickly permeates these classes. They are stigmatized.

On the first day of Lisa Stern's "sheltered" world history class, she introduced herself and said: "This is a sheltered-content world history class." One of the students called: "What's sheltered?" Before Stern could answer, another called out: "Sheltered, that's lower, right?" She tried then to explain that it was not "lower." The textbooks are the same, the content is the same. She *showed* them the stack of textbooks from her "regular" world history class to try to convince them that the curriculum was the same. But the students would not believe her. It seemed confirmed in their minds that classes for "LEP" students were "lower."[21]

It is not only this incident that drove home to me how thoroughly it is believed that classes to address language issues are stigmatized. In the first weeks of a semester, six Chinese and Vietnamese students reportedly switched out of the sheltered class. Interviewing the students later, I found out that they had been told by friends, cousins, the "grapevine," that it wasn't good to be in sheltered classes if they wanted to get in to a college later. The grapevine in their community was trying to protect them from being identified as LEP and being "trapped" in LEP classes. Perhaps as a result of trying to escape the stigma, these students ended up being denied needed support and help in language development. Or perhaps they were right and they saved themselves from being identified and held back in ways that would track them away from college and academic success. At Madison High, there is no real way to know. The school does not have a data system that would enable anyone to track LEP students by the courses they opt for and to trace their academic success. It is one of the ways that the data and monitoring system contributes to the invisibility and silence about the ways in which the school sorts students.

Madison High does offer one Spanish for Spanish speakers class for those who want to develop literacy in their mother tongue. It is offered because a foreign-language teacher (the Spanish teacher) wanted to offer it. It exists only because like other courses for LEP students, there is interest on the part of an individual teacher. From a program perspective, from an institutional point of view, home language is neglected. In fact, few of the students taking Spanish for

Spanish speakers are immigrants. It is a course more often taken by U.S.-born students whose home language is Spanish but who are English dominant. Furthermore, as linguists have pointed out, teaching a minority mother tongue for a few hours a week in a school where the majority language is the medium of education may be psychologically beneficial, but represents only therapeutic and cosmetic support rather than a basis for language maintenance and development.[22] And there is little mention that literacy in their home language might be an essential way to introduce them to the writers, history, and literature of their culture. Thus, throughout most of the school native language use is not allowed except for the English speakers. To be taught in one's home language remains the privilege only of those whose homes are English speaking. In the sheltered classes and ESL classes and the Newcomer School, however, there is permission to use the native language. Only in the few bilingual courses offered at the Newcomer School is there actually promotion of minority languages. Of the newcomers in the district, only a few Spanish speakers are literate in Spanish. In the fall of 1994, out of a total of ninety-five Spanish speaking students, sixty-two fell at or below the tenth percentile on the SABE (the Spanish version of the California Test of Basic Skills test). There is no evident effort to encourage or prize bilingualism or biliteracy. And in the social atmosphere in which students' use of languages other than English is looked down on, the result is a school campus experience that is highly "disabling."[23]

As an example, Nadira is moving farther and farther away from the young woman she might have been had her family remained in Afghanistan. Having immigrated at age thirteen, she is already forgetting her Farsi, she can no longer read or write Farsi, and she can only read and write in English.

> I used to read when somebody sent a letter. I used to read it but now I can't. I've forgotten. Sometimes my Dad is sad, and he says to me, "You have forgotten your own Farsi."

At home they speak some Farsi. But Nadira's younger siblings speak only English. This is deeply troubling to Nadira and her parents.

> We are trying to teach them (my younger brother and sister) more about the Afghan religion, and my parents are very strict. Sometimes we think we should speak only Farsi at home, but they turn on the TV and it's English, and my sisters and brothers speak English most of the time anyway.

Nadira has also become increasingly troubled at how quickly she has lost her Farsi.

> I never guessed that this would happen. My language was part of me. I wanted so much to be American and to speak English, but I never knew I would lose my language. I feel so sad. I used to think about maybe going back to Afghanistan after the war. Will I get my language back?

"SPANISH IS OUR LANGUAGE, MAN. YOU GOT TO HAVE SOME PRIDE!"

Newcomer Spanish-speaking immigrants feel the same sting of hostility and embarrassment about using their mother tongue as their immigrant peers from other language groups. However, a different campus dynamic exists among U.S.-born Mexicans about speaking Spanish than exists among other languages.[24] In the last six months of the fieldwork for this study, a change in political climate was occurring among the Mexican American and Latino students at Madison High. Organizers from La Raza clubs at the nearby university involved several dozen Madison High Latino students in study groups in issues of language and culture. This became the seed of a budding Latino student movement at the school. Many of the Washington High students who had moved to Madison from their largely Spanish-speaking community hold on fiercely to their language as a badge of loyalty and connection to their culture. In the C Hall corridor where Latinos hang out at the school, Spanish is sometimes spoken both as a means of communication and as a symbol of cultural visibility, pride, and ownership of turf. Although some Latinos there continue to put down newcomers for speaking Spanish, others can be heard speaking with pride of Spanish. I overheard one student admonish another (although I did not hear what prompted it). "Spanish is our language, man. You got to have some pride in it. Don't let anyone tell you it's no good."

Demands from a Latino student walk-out in the spring and discussions of the Latino Task Force, which was established by the school district following the walkout, made clear that for Latino students, improving the schools' attitude toward and support for the Spanish language was a key element of what they wanted to see changed. They called for the hiring of more bilingual teachers and a greater number of rigorous courses taught in Spanish. They requested the use of Spanish literature in their courses. And in describing the conditions they wanted changed, they wrote: "Some teachers say: don't talk Spanish here, we're not in Mexico, or It's rude to talk Spanish.

For the newcomer immigrants from Mexico and Central America, the

status as newcomer still brings with it a desire to be English speaking as quickly as possible and, for many, a deep shame about their home language. To be accepted as American means they first have to shift from their home language to English. But for an increasing number of Latinos and Chicanos at Madison High, a kind of reversal of the shame process is beginning

For most immigrants, including the vast majority of Spanish-speaking immigrants who are yet untouched by the Latino student movement, the requirement remains that they must be English speaking for participation socially and academically in the Madison High world. English-speaking proficiency eventually comes; English fluency and literacy do not. There seems to be no hint of newcomer students judging each other for having "crossed a line" as they become English speakers, or chastised for forgetting who they are because immigrants stop using their home language. The transition to becoming English-only speakers is an uncontested aspect of becoming "American" and appears to be the one aspect of becoming American that immigrants continue to believe that they can achieve without question.

The intense desire to be accepted and be able to participate in their new land results for almost all newcomers in becoming English speaking relatively quickly. As they become English speaking, immigrants participate more and more in the social world of Madison High. But the level of English speaking required for social participation is not sufficient to participate or succeed in high school courses taught only in English. The program continues to provide insufficient English language development that is necessary to participate fully and succeed academically. Attitudes and social pressures are maintained which negate and weaken immigrant ties to their mother tongue. These patterns reinforce the stereotypes held about language-minority groups and limit their paths to participation. Despite stereotypes held by U.S.-born students and teachers that immigrants crowd out native born students and outdo them academically, the reality is that very few get the preparation they need and the language development required for success.

Newcomers cross the threshold and do become English speakers but not usually full English participants in the academic system. Still, they achieve the conditions of that original social compact they understood would result in acceptance. Is becoming English speaking sufficient for newcomers to be accepted as Americans? With all of the overt and conscious focus on English as the dividing line between foreigners and Americans, between "them" and "us," it turns out that in the life of newcomers at Madison High, a complex weave of other transitions and changes are expected and required for citizenship. And as newcomers face these expectations, they learn to question their original assumption that if they learn English and work hard, they will make it in this new land.