What Languages Does the United States Speak?

A Geographic Analysis of the Languages Spoken at Home in the United States, 2015-2019

Erik L. Hernandez, Sandy L. Dietrich, and Kurt J. Bauman

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Introduction

• In 2019, the most widely spoken language in the country was English, but 22% spoke a different language at home.¹
• An updated ranking of languages is necessary. In 2010, Spanish was the most widely spoken language other than English, followed by Chinese, French and French Creole, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.¹
• Immigrant destinations in the U.S. are dynamic and this leads to new geographic areas of the country where non-English languages are spoken as well.²,³
• In 2019, China replaced Mexico as the leading country of origin for immigrants in the U.S., and as a result, the number of people speaking Chinese in the U.S. increased as well.
• The current study aims to assess the prevalence, trends, and distribution of languages spoken at home in the U.S.
• Most up-to-date information is valuable in identifying the most prevalent languages in specific areas in the U.S. so that community development, resources, and services can be tailored to specific language-speaking populations.

Data and Methods

Data: 2006-2010 and 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates

Universe: Persons (age 5+ years) who speak a language other than English at home

Variable of Interest: Language spoken at home other than English

Analyses:
1) Ranking of top 10 languages other than English spoken at Home in 2015-2019
2) Percent change in estimates for top 10 languages (2015-2019) since 2006-2010
3) State-level geographic analysis of two most spoken languages (Spanish and Chinese), fastest growing (Arabic), and fastest declining (German) in top 10

Results

1) Top 10 Languages Ranking:
• There are seven languages with at least one million speakers.
• Spanish is the most common language other than English spoken in the U.S. (~40.7 million speakers), followed by Chinese (~3.4 million speakers).

2) Trends among Top 10 Languages Spoken at Home:
• Growing Languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, Hindi, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog
• Declining Languages: German, Korean
• Fastest Growing Language in Top 10: Arabic (56.9%)
• Fastest Declining Language in Top 10: German (-19.5%)
• Growth in 7 out of 10 languages is greater than growth in total population

3) Language Geographic Analysis:
• Geographic distributions vary by language spoken
• Spanish is the most spoken language other than English in 2015-2019, followed by Chinese, French, and Tagalog.
• Arabic, Chinese, and Hindi speakers experienced the largest growth, while German and Korean speakers declined.
• Further explore the geographic differences in specific language growth/decline.

Discussion and Future Research

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• Arabic, Chinese, and Hindi speakers experienced the largest growth, while German and Korean speakers declined.
• Further explore the geographic differences in specific language growth/decline.

References