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## Neo-Nationalism and Language Policy in the United States: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Public Discourse Advocating Monolingual English Use

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The anti-immigrant stances expressed by neo-nationalist actors in the United States have taken on increased political significance following the 2016 election of Donald Trump. From the president's office, Trump has been able to amplify messages voiced by neo-nationalist groups. In addition, policymakers within the administration are identified either directly or indirectly with neo-nationalist positions. Sympathetic news organizations help to mainstream these positions. Other media sources have brought attention to the close relationship shared between the Trump administration and neo-nationalist groups (Blow, 2019) and the coincidental—or not—rise in extremist-related murders (Sonmez & Parker, 2019). The Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (2019) editorialized Trump-style politics not just as a trend, but “part of an emerging

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ideology that can and should be described as late fascism—a fascism for our current era” (para. 15).

Nothing in neo-nationalism contradicts the ideological principles at the base of more conventional forms of nationalism (e.g., the basic unit of social organization shall be the nation-state, per Gellner, 1983). What justifies the term is the hyper-attention to border maintenance and internal homogeneity within spaces of established nationalized boundaries (Eger & Valdez, 2015; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019). That is, those who follow neo-nationalist ideologies involve themselves in defining national insiders from outsiders and maintaining clear boundaries to separate the two (Svitych, 2018, p. 9). An illustrative example of neo-nationalism can be found in the following platform statement presented online by the American Freedom Party:

**Freedom from the immigration invasion.** Americans never wanted their country to be overwhelmed and fundamentally altered by allowing tens of millions of legal and illegal immigrants to enter and drain endless billions of taxpayer dollars in services. A free country defends its borders by securing them, and the American Freedom Party will construct a well-armed security fence along the entire southern border when it takes power. (American Freedom Party, 2020, emphasis in original)

The American Freedom Party is a political organization with candidates in state and federal elections in the United States. In the above excerpt, they express their objective to physically separate nationalized outsiders (i.e., immigrants) from nationalized insiders (i.e., Americans). While the academic literature on neo-nationalism starts with Western Europe, case studies are being applied in other locations (Donley, 2018; Lee, Jon, & Byun, 2017), thus demonstrating that neo-nationalism is increasingly a global phenomenon (Svitych, 2018, p. 9).

Neo-nationalists occasionally associate themselves with “holistic nationalism.” For example, Augustus Invictus, a presidential candidate in the United States, included the following among his political objectives:

*Make Americans Great Again:* We will raise up the poor and working class by eschewing obsolete notions of capitalism and socialism, *returning to a holistic nationalism.* (Invictus, 2019, emphasis added)

The gerund phrase “returning to a holistic nationalism” conveys dissatisfaction with the current status quo. But what is holistic nationalism? The term emerges from the tension between the people of a nation and the political state at the center of the ideology. While both the national and the state components are always present in nationalist movements, one component can be emphasized over the other (Svitych, 2018). The result is a spectrum ranging between ethnic nationalism (nation-focused) and civic nationalism (state-focused).

Holistic nationalism is the neo-nationalist term for what has been called “ethnic nationalism” (Berezin, 2006, p. 278), in that it identifies the nation in ethnic terms. As the nationalized subject is the primary focus, holistic nationalism is “exclusive and organic, defined by common descent, native culture and other ascriptive and immutable criteria of national belonging” (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019, p. 412). Holistic nationalism lends itself to acts of social exclusion and the “subordination of individual civil and political liberty to the nationalized collective” (Carter, 2018, p. 172).

Thus, the phrase “returning to a holistic nationalism” communicates a rejection of civic nationalism. The excerpt argues instead for the exclusionary strand of nationalism that rigidly fixes individuals on one side or the other of national legitimacy: as either insider or outsider by birth or heritage. It goes without saying that xenophobia is a common thread in neo-nationalist writings and actions (Berezin, 2006, p. 278).

## Neo-Nationalism and Language

From the beginning, language has played a central role in the ideology of nationalism. Hartman (2003) claimed that “the role of language in the formation of the imagined communities now known as nations must not be underestimated” (p. 189). Billig (1995) and Anderson (2006) figured language at the center of early nationalist movements. Anderson reminded us that the printing press was a key tool in promulgating nationalism and the ability of individuals to imagine nationalized landscapes beyond their immediate environs. Echoing Anderson’s analysis of nations as “imagined communities,” Billig (1995) explained that

“national languages also have to be imagined, and this lies at the root of today’s commonsense belief that discrete languages ‘naturally’ exist” (p. 10). Risager (2018) expanded on this point, arguing that when one sees the world “as equipped with a number of languages that are separate from each other, it is a small step to take to seeing it as being perfectly natural for people who speak the same language wishing to have a common national state” (p. 62).

In their influential eighteenth century writings, Herder, Fichte, and Humboldt conceptualized a national language as fundamental to any nationalist project (Kedourie, 1993). For Herder, the national language was the most faithful expression of a nation’s true essence (Woolard, 1998, p. 16). Like Herder, Humboldt posited a national language as a primary link to the unique individual character of a nation, stating: “from every language we can infer backwards to the national character” (Humboldt, 1988, as cited in May, 2013, p. 61). In contemporary times, a national language remains a primary fixture upon which nationalist movements seek political legitimacy (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1992; Rezakhanlou, 2018).

The maintenance of the nation-state is an ongoing sociopolitical struggle between various political stakeholders (Billig, 1995; May, 2013). From the standpoint of neo-nationalism, asserting the power to define the nation (i.e., nationalized people and culture) is fundamental to maintaining the nation-state. Neo-nationalist movements recognize that language is a symbolic fixture of a nationalized culture and therefore must be claimed. Once established, a national language can be a useful tool for promoting the belief in a homogeneous national culture (May, 2013, p. 59). It can also be used like a shibboleth to discern insider from outsider, or those with a legitimate presence in the nation from those without. In the case of the United States, neo-nationalist-affiliated political actors have asserted English to be central to how they imagine the nation and have lobbied for legitimacy of their nationalized imagining in the political institutions of the state (e.g., official English laws, executive orders, language-in-education policy). In this way, language policies at the federal and state levels become central sites of struggle over how to define legitimate language use in the nationalized space. The consequences of the power struggle between dominant and minority

groups within nationalized spaces are clear. May (2013) reminded us that, “by their pre-eminence, the dominant group’s culture and language comes to be represented as the core or ‘national’ culture and language. Minority groups, and their languages and cultures, consequently tend to be excluded from ‘national recognition’” (p. 85).

What can be observed about groups that embrace neo-nationalism is that they do not necessarily oppose foreign language use. For example, the National Socialist Movement website features a translation function that will change their writings into a number of European languages, and *The New York Times* recently reported that Swedish alt-right groups show influence of non-Swedish language sites (Becker, 2019). On the surface, this might appear to be counterintuitive, but such a stance is completely in line with the conventional ideology of nationalism. As Billig (1995) observed, no nation is intended to exist in isolation. All nationalized groups envision a landscape beyond their borders populated by nationalized counterparts, each with its own unique language, identity and political state, among other features. Conventional nationalism projects an interconnected global network of nation-states. Neo-nationalist groups follow this ideological blueprint. Thus, neo-nationalist groups look to counterpart groups across nationalized borders as allies, as long as all parties mutually acknowledge and maintain rigid boundaries of nation and state.

## The Study

### Purpose

Having provided an introduction to neo-nationalism and established the underlying ideological interest in language, this chapter now examines neo-nationalist influence on public discourse surrounding language policy in the United States. Specifically, the chapter explores six interrelated sets of texts that advocate for narrowing language use within the United States to monolingual English. In analyzing these sets of texts, the chapter will reveal intertextual linkages across them and the neo-nationalist underpinnings informing the arguments they convey. The

following two-part focus question guides the chapter: In what ways does public discourse on language policy in the United States rely on neo-nationalist priorities, and in what arguments are such neo-nationalist priorities conveyed?

## Method

The methodological orientation selected for this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Having adopted a critical stance, the basic presumption I had entering into the study was that people realize social ideologies in the texts they author. A second presumption is that texts are created and consumed by individual actors from varying positions of social power. A final presumption is that, depending on the context, a text can function to reinforce and/or challenge a given commonsense worldview made possible by a particular ideology.

For this study, I am examining how neo-nationalist ideology is realized in the arguments that political actors produce in support of monolingual English language practices in nationalized spaces. I look at how these arguments make repeat appearances across data sets to form intertextual chains (Fairclough, 1992). The theoretical position here is that the intertextual chains function as tangible, discursive means by which ideologies are reproduced and normalized in banal social activities.

The six sets of textual data are: (1) Candidate statements on language use in the United States (2010s); (2) text of the federal-level English Language Unity Act (2019); (3) advocacy statements in support of the English Language Unity Act (2019); (4) official English justification statements: Individual states (1986–2007); (5) neo-nationalism versus bilingual education (2018–2019); and (6) language-in-education legislation in state-level committee hearings (2019). Each data set varies in volume of text to be analyzed. However, with each set, the basic methodological technique is the same. Each text is analyzed primarily for the justification arguments they provide for isolating English as the single legitimate language for use in institutional work of the political

state (e.g., official English legislation and English immersion language-in-education policy).

## Analysis

### Candidate Statements on Language Use in the United States (2010s)

In the following analysis, an ideological link will be illustrated between neo-nationalism, as an ideology of national homogeneity and border vigilance, and contemporary English-only lobbying efforts in the United States. Education scholars have demonstrated the intertwining history of English-only movements in the United States and anti-immigrant sentiment (Bonilla Moreno, 2012; Hartman, 2003). Gándara (2012), in particular, noted that English-only legislation “tends to be pushed through during period of high immigration when Americans feel they are under siege by other languages” (n.p.). At a conceptual level, anti-immigrant and English-only stances are just a half-step from one another. The English-only stance is a logical extension of the anti-immigration stance because border maintenance within nationalism is simultaneously a physical and ideological task. Like related social ideologies, nationalism works when individuals replicate nation-based distinctions in multiple dimensions of everyday life (i.e., recursiveness). Such distinctions can “provide actors with the discursive or cultural resources to claim and thus attempt to create shifting ‘communities,’ identities, and selves, at different levels of contrast within a cultural field” (Gal & Irvine, 1995, p. 974). That is, individuals come to see nationalized borders no matter where they turn: in housing, in commercial media, in airports, in schooling, etc. The term “nationalist border practices” (Meadows, 2014b) is apt for describing the efforts of neo-nationalist actors to render nationalized borders in linguistic spaces through English-only policies.

Below are some examples of candidate public statements online that reflect neo-nationalist ideology and the focused attention to English-only

stances. While these candidates may or may not self-identify with neo-nationalism, the political actions they advocate for are consistent with neo-nationalist priorities. In their arguments, the candidates additionally link anti-immigrant with English-only stances. As Art Jones, a 2016 Republican candidate for Illinois's 3rd Congressional District, wrote on his website:

Make English the Official Language: America was found by English speaking people. For most of our history as a nation, if you wanted to be able to advance yourself, as a new legal immigrant, you had to learn how to speak and write in English. Since 1965, with the repeal of the McCarran-Walter Act [...] the requirement for citizenship to be able to speak and write English was swept aside and now any two-legged vagabond from any third-world, non-white, non-Christian country is given preference whether they arrived legally or illegally. (Jones, 2018)

In a blog post dated December 11, 2013, Merlin Miller, a 2012 Candidate for President of the United States under the American Third Position Party (later, American Freedom Party), listed 19 things he would consider immediately if elected president. Among them, number 11 was: "Make English the official language in the United States and require non-English speakers to gain proficiency before being granted citizenship" (Miller, 2013).

The public arguments presented here represent neo-nationalist attention to language in the way that they equate the nation with English language use. Both positioned English usage as a primary criterion of one's legitimacy within the nationalized space (i.e., *shibboleth argument*). Jones (2018) developed a more extended rationale linking English to the nation's origins (i.e., *heritage argument*) and a past era when nationalized borders were more vigilantly protected (i.e., *mythical past argument*). Something else these statements reveal is candidate self-positioning as authors of the nationalized people and culture. Neo-nationalist arguments only really work when expressed from a position of national proprietor, self-proclaimed or not.



## Text of the Federal-Level English Language Unity Act (2019)

With the election of Donald Trump, neo-nationalist arguments have increasingly informed immigration policy at the national level. However, neo-nationalism has had less tangible impact on language policy, despite the importance of language to the neo-nationalist agenda. At the level of federal legislation, political organizations have promoted legislation codifying English as the official language of the political state. In the House of Representatives, a bill has been introduced as the English Language Unity Act (H.R. 997); the Senate companion bill is known as S. 678. Despite multiple introductions since 2005, neither bill has gone beyond initial consideration in committee. Nevertheless, political organizations like ProEnglish and U.S. English actively lobby for these bills each year. As the analysis will show, justification arguments in favor of official English are logical extensions of the anti-immigrant arguments central to neo-nationalism.

To begin with, the title of the act communicates the intended function of English, which is to unite the national people. This is premised on the Herderian principle (Woolard, 1998) calling for one language for one nation. The logic follows that a shared language provides a direct pathway to a shared identity under nationhood. The following section examines selected excerpts from the 2019 H.R. 997 bill. Section 2 articulates the findings or the justification for the bill. Lines 4–20 read:

The Congress finds and declares the following:

- (1) The United States is composed of individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and continues to benefit from this rich diversity.
- (2) Throughout the history of the United States, the common thread binding individuals of differing backgrounds has been the English language. (Congress.gov, 2019)

These statements provide a rationale for the bill that is articulated in a *commonality argument*. For example, the English language is represented as a “common thread” that has been “binding” diverse individuals together within a nationalized space. Section 3 of the bill proposes

amendments to Title 4 of the U.S. Code. Among the amendments are three guiding proclamations:

- § 162. Preserving and enhancing the role of the official language
- § 163. Official functions of Government to be conducted in English
- § 164 Uniform English language rule for naturalization

Proclamation § 162 details requirements of federal institutions to promote English language use and English learning by those who require it. This reflects an intended function of official English to perpetuate the American national people, as the authors interpret it (i.e., *the continuation argument*). Proclamation § 163 codifies requirements for all federal operations to be conducted in English. Also included in this part are exceptions when non-English languages may be used, such as (1) the teaching of languages and (2) requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Finally, Proclamation § 164 establishes English reading comprehension as a criterion for naturalization. This is the shibboleth argument identified in the previous section.

As written, the text justifies the actions of the bill based on the commonality argument. However, the bill must be interpreted as imposing a common language rather than simply acknowledging one. This is because if English were at present a common language nationwide, then it would not be necessary to clarify where it will be used within a nationalized space. While it is not stated in the text of the code, the underlying impact of the bill would be to marginalize millions of people within the United States who may not use English as their preferred language. Like immigration policies that physically remove individuals from nationalized spaces, official English policies carry a similar potential but in terms of legitimate participation in nationalized spaces.

The bill includes exceptions, thus clarifying the legitimate spaces in which non-English languages may be used in institutional settings (e.g., education, international relations, public health/safety, criminal justice, and “terms of art or phrases from languages other than English”). These exceptions portray institutional contexts in which the primacy of English is not infringed upon. Echoing the neo-nationalist websites that allow

non-English translations, these exceptions show that it is not monolingual space per se that is the ultimate objective but rather the hierarchy of legitimate language use with English at the top privileged position.

### **Advocacy Statements in Support of the English Language Unity Act (2019)**

Two political organizations championing H.R. 997/S. 678, the English Language Unity Act, are U.S. English and ProEnglish. These groups do not self-identify as neo-nationalist, but their strong advocacy on H.R. 997/S. 687 is occasionally framed in arguments consistent with neo-nationalist priorities. Hartman (2003, p. 196) located English-only organizations within the U.S. mainstream and not necessarily on the societal margins. The following analysis examines blog postings during 2019 that one advocacy group, ProEnglish, associates with H.R. 997. There are 22 postings in total. The method of analysis was to search online for the H.R. 997 category and analyze the blog posts for content and for arguments. The entire data set is accessible at <https://proenglish.org/category/h-r-997/>.

In January 2019, the group articulated their lobbying agenda for the year and then repeated these priorities in two subsequent postings during the year. The agenda items are:

- (a) passing HR997/S678,
- (b) passing the RAISE Act,
- (c) facilitating an executive order to rescind Executive Order 13166, and
- (d) increase the number of official English laws at the state level.

In their blog postings, the group provided justification arguments to advance their support of H.R. 997/S. 678. For example, the following statement was posted on February 7th and then repeated in seven subsequent blogs during the year: “The passage of official English legislation in H.R. 997 and S. 678 will save Americans billions of dollars in current, government-mandated translation and interpretation costs and will encourage cultural and linguistic assimilation by new arrivals to our

nation” (Guschoy, 2019c). This policy statement argues for two potential functions of official English legislation: (a) *economic argument*, and (b) *unifying argument*. The economic argument is that government operations in multiple languages creates unnecessary expenditures, which are paid by Americans. At the same time, the unifying argument is that shared language use will promote the assimilation process. One may note that assimilation in itself conveys conformity of the outsider to an insider cultural norm. It is a homogenizing of the national space according to cultural and linguistic ideals pre-determined by neo-nationalist actors. These arguments are consistent with neo-nationalism in the way that they clarify, through word choice, legitimate members of the national collective (i.e., “Americans” in the economic argument) from the non-legitimate (i.e., “new arrivals” in the unifying argument). That is, as the arguments justify a political stance, they are at the same time discerning insiders from outsiders.

The group invokes external sources to further legitimize their stance. A January 2nd blog posting referenced a Rasmussen Reports poll “that showed that 81% of Americans believe that English should be the official language of the United States” (Guschoy, 2019a). This was repeated in 12 subsequent blog posts. Another source of external support is in the Trump administration, which the group invoked several times in 2019 in support of H.R. 997/S. 678. A January 7th posting reads: “Official English advocates have in the White House perhaps the most pro-English president since Theodore Roosevelt. President Donald Trump frequently has stated, ‘We have a country where to assimilate, you have to speak English’” (Guschoy, 2019b).

Subsequent references to the Trump administration are deployed on March 12th. In addition, the group reports three meetings with the Trump administration to encourage a new executive order to rescind Executive Order (E.O.) 13166, which entitles federal government agencies to provide multilingual access to all agency services. Bonilla Moreno (2012, p. 199) reported that E.O. 13166 is justified by Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin. ProEnglish’s campaign against E.O. 13166 is rooted in neo-nationalist boundary maintenance. It is the ethnic nationalism of sanitizing a nationalized space to remove the presence of foreign Other.

If not outright removal, then the next best thing is clarifying the power structure: English is the first and only representative language of the nation.

Two additional H.R. 997 postings communicate the argument that English can function to unify people within nationalized space. This echoes the neo-nationalist arguments identified previously. In a June 24th posting on the topic of statehood for Puerto Rico, the group presented the following position statement exemplifying the unifying argument:

Accepting Puerto Rico as a new state, without a specific designation of English as the primary official language of the island, would automatically transform the United States into a bilingual nation. ProEnglish believes that the U.S. should look to Canada's experience as a bilingual nation in order to remind us of the potential risks and consequences involved. (Guschoy, 2019e)

Additionally, in a November 19th posting, the group cites a recent author who champions English as a national unifying element (i.e., unifying argument):

In Lowry's new book [...] he stated that English was a 'pillar of our national identity.' Lowry made it a point of focus in his book to discuss the importance of a common language as a source of social cohesion: 'Where a common language is present, it creates a cultural glue; where it isn't, there are usually deep-seated divisions.' (Guschoy, 2019f)

One observation, based on the analysis of the 22 blog postings, is that the group is asserting a position of power to define a nationalized culture, a nationalized heritage, and the specific elements that will promote a shared national identity. Another is that these blog postings advance the unifying argument in the interest of defining insiders from outsiders, and this interest is consistent with neo-nationalist priorities. A third observation is the way that the group uses word choice to emphasize legitimate from illegitimate status; the authors consistently use "Americans" to refer to monolingual English speakers and avoid using the same term for all nationalized others (e.g., new arrivals, immigrants). Terms

matter because they communicate legitimate membership in the nation. Finally, they utilize discursive strategies to associate themselves with external sources of legitimacy and social capital such as national polling organizations, news media organizations, and the Trump administration.

Overt attempts to discredit established policies like E.O. 13166 are illustrative of the fundamental struggle within nationalist frames to make the political state in the mold of the national people. To discredit the laws of the political state is to argue implicitly that the current political state no longer reflects the essence of the national people. This is a power play on the part of the advocacy group to assert such a position. Ultimately, this figures into the general agenda of neo-nationalism to separate national insiders from outsiders.

The weakness of the unifying argument is two-fold. First, a language can be shared between two nation-states at war (e.g., the American Revolution, the American Civil War). Second, language as a unifier can be a false promise for new Americans. What can happen is that, even after achieving proficiency in English, many still face racial, class, or gender discrimination.

### **Official English Justification Statements: Individual States (1986–2007)**

One area where official English advocacy groups have had more tangible success is at the state level. As of 2019, 32 U.S. states have passed official English legislation (this number does not include U.S. territories). Interestingly, some of the language of the English Language Unity Act is echoed in the state-level acts. This analysis will narrowly examine the arguments individual states articulate to justify their official language legislation. First, not all legislative acts provide an explicit justification for the act. This frames the privileged status of English as beyond question in that an explicit justification is not necessary ( $n = 24$ ). One representative example is in the Indiana (1984) text which states simply: “The English language is adopted as the official language of the state of Indiana.”

Still, where a justification is provided, a common theme is English as a unifying element ( $n = 8$ ). What is interesting is that some justifications link the state to the nation ( $n = 5$ ). One notable observation is that nearly all acts articulate explicit exceptions for (a) foreign language and (b) English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, which may require non-English language use as a form of instructional support. One representative example is in the South Carolina (1987) text which reads:

Sections 1-1-696 through 1-1-698 do not prohibit any law, ordinance, regulation, order, decree, program, or policy requiring educational instruction in a language other than English for the purpose of making students who use a language other than English proficient in English or making students proficient in a language in addition to English.

As seen in Table 2.1, there is a common textual design to the eight justification statements. All establish that the function of English is to serve as common language (e.g., commonality argument). Some statements additionally relate the state to the nation (e.g., AK, CA, and NC). Following that, half formulate the purpose to “preserve, protect, and enhance/strengthen English language [use]” (e.g., AK, AL, CA, NC). This is a continuation argument in that the expressed desire is for English language use to continue the current interpretation of the American national people into the future. Iowa and Missouri stand out in the purpose they offer for official English status. Their texts convey the unifying argument (i.e., assimilation):

Iowa (2002): In order to encourage every citizen of this state to become more proficient in the English language, thereby facilitating participation in the economic, political, and cultural activities of this state and of the United States.

Missouri (1998): The general assembly recognizes that English is the most common language used in Missouri and recognizes that fluency in English is necessary for full integration into our common American culture.

Like official English legislation at the federal level, these enactments serve neo-nationalist goals to map the people to the political state. This is an

Table 2.1 State justification statements

State	Text excerpt	Arguments presented
Alabama (1990)	<p>"The legislature and officials of the state of Alabama shall take all steps necessary to ensure that the role of English as the common language of the state of Alabama is preserved and enhanced. The legislature shall make no law which diminishes or ignores the role of English as the common language of the state of Alabama"</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument Function: continuation argument</p>
Alaska (1998)	<p>"The people of the State of Alaska find that English is the common unifying language of the State of Alaska and the United States of America, and declare a compelling interest in promoting, preserving and strengthening its use"</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument Function: continuation argument (Note: "The people find...")</p>



State	Text excerpt	Arguments presented
California (1986)	<p>“English is the common language of the people of the United States of America and the State of California. This section is intended to preserve, protect and strengthen the English language, and not to supersede any of the rights guaranteed to the people of this Constitution”</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument (state + nation)            Function: continuation argument</p>
Idaho (2007)	<p>“Idaho was able to build a state from this widespread and diverse background because of a binding common thread...The English language. A common language has allowed us to discuss, debate, and come to agreement on difficult issues. The need is just as great today. The purpose of this bill is to have an official language become our common language”</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument            Function: commonality argument</p>

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

State	Text excerpt	Arguments presented
Iowa (2002)	<p>"1b. Throughout the history of Iowa and of the United States, the common thread binding individuals of differing backgrounds together has been the English language.</p> <p>2. In order to encourage every citizen of this state to become more proficient in the English language, thereby facilitating participation in the economic, political, and cultural activities of this state and of the United States, the English language is hereby declared to be the official language of the state of Iowa"</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument  Function: unifying argument (state + nation)</p>
Missouri (1998)	<p>"English as common language of the state. Section 1. The general assembly recognizes that English is the most common language used in Missouri and recognizes that fluency in English is necessary for full integration into our common American culture"</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument  Function: unifying argument (nation)</p>

State	Text excerpt	Arguments presented
North Carolina (1987)	<p>“§145-12. State Language. (a) Purpose. – English is the common language of the people of the United States of America and the State of North Carolina. This section is intended to preserve, protect, and strengthen the English language, and not to supersede any of the rights guaranteed to the people by the Constitution of the United States or the Constitution of North Carolina.”</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument (nation + state) Function: continuation argument</p>
South Dakota (1995)	<p>“1-27-20. English as common language—Use in public records and public meetings. The common language of the state is English. The common language is designated as the language of any official public document or record and any official public meeting.”</p>	<p>Justification: commonality argument Function: commonality argument</p>

orientation toward ethnic or holistic nationalism where the ethnic group takes priority in the nation-state relationship. The opposing orientation is toward liberal nationalism. The ultimate effect of these political acts is to marginalize communities within the nationalist space that do not meet narrowly-defined ethnic/cultural criteria.

Finally, the similarity between the English Language Unity Act (at the federal level) with Official English legislation (at the state level) cannot be overlooked. For example, the commonality argument is present in both, as is the unifying argument. Additionally, the state level texts articulate exceptions to the official English policy, as does the federal one.

### **Neo-Nationalism Versus Bilingual Education (2018–2019)**

A particular thorn for groups that align themselves with neo-nationalist priorities is bilingual education. For them, bilingual education on principle is a threat because it displaces English as the primary medium of instruction, even if temporarily (Johannessen, Guzman, Thorsos, & Dickinson, 2016). Currently around 10% of the total K-12 student population in the United States identifies as English learners (ELs). This population represents hundreds of different languages, although roughly 70% are Spanish language dominant. Despite conventional representations, EL status does not necessarily coincide with immigrant status in the United States. Also, as a 2019 U.S. Department of Education study determined, EL students are “heavily concentrated in districts and schools with their EL peers” (n.p.).

Wright (2019) observed that public schooling is not part of the Federal Constitution, and therefore public education has largely been left to the states. This has changed since the 1960s as federal oversight of public education has increased. On the one hand, the right of EL students to receive a fair and appropriate education has been established in Civil Rights and subsequent legislation (ESEA of 1965 and EEOA of 1974) and has been clarified in Supreme Court cases (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). On the other hand, Federal education policy has established protocols of accountability that have heavily influenced how individual states administer their schooling systems. These new protocols

have come with consequences for EL students. For example, the language of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act turned the focus towards EL performance on state exams and away from previously-recognized benefits of bilingualism (Wright, 2019, pp. 59–60). The federal update to education policy, ESSA, has loosened some of the accountability requirements, but the large-scale testing requirements remain, as well as the emphasis on linguistic assimilation over bilingualism.

This view is validated in the recent scholarship on language-in-education policy. The ESSA and NCLB policies “often reflect the belief that all other languages are, and should continue to be, subservient to English, thus, ignoring the language rights of students” (Johannessen et al., 2016, p. 28). Yazan (2019) explained how the dominance of English plays out in the K-12 setting, where such “policies support the normative assumption that emergent bilinguals should learn English to succeed in their academic life and there is no legitimate place for their home languages in schooling practices” (p. 4).

Language education is an important area of concern for neo-nationalism because it pertains to the determination of what nationalized spaces will look like. In their own words, neo-nationalist groups link immigration with public education. In a VDARE blog posting, “American Schools Suffer under Foreigner Invasion” (July 11, 2019), the group writes:

[...] arguably the most negatively affected sector is education in the local schools. In order to teach foreign children, resources must be reallocated and increased to deal with students who may not speak either English or Spanish, but instead understand only their tribal language. American students are being shortchanged by having to share their schools with uninvited foreigners.

A 2018 research report published by FAIR (Federation for American Immigration Reform) presents economic arguments against English language support services for K-12 students:

Public school districts across the United States are suffering under [...] the requirement to educate millions of illegal aliens, the school age

children of illegal aliens, refugees and legal immigrant students. FAIR estimates that it currently costs public schools \$59.8 billion to serve this burgeoning population. The struggle to fund programs for students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), sometimes called English Language Learners (ELL), represents a major drain on school budgets. (p. 5)

The same report presents the argument that immigrant students bring down the quality of K-12 education:

Yet the underlying tragedy behind this mad dash to accommodate illegal aliens, refugees and legal immigrants is that despite all the money spent, there is little to show for it. LEP students consistently demonstrate dismal progress in all subject areas and the fallout is affecting other students. (FAIR, 2018, p. 13)

The VDARE and FAIR statements link immigration to public education in order to offer the following arguments in opposition to English language services: (a) *economic argument* (e.g., “The struggle to fund programs [...] represents a major drain on school budgets”), (b) *pedagogical argument* (e.g., “despite all the money spent, there is little to show for it. LEP students consistently demonstrate dismal progress”), and (c) *detriment argument* (e.g., “American students are being shortchanged by having to share their schools with uninvited foreigners”). The advocacy group, ProEnglish, echoes a similar pedagogical argument to justify their own opposition to bilingual education: “After 30 years of the bilingual experiment and billions of dollars spent, reliable research shows that these programs fail to teach students the English language and literacy they need for school success” (ProEnglish, 2019).

Around the time that the AZ bill was voted on, a February 15th ProEnglish blog commentary presented arguments in support of English language immersion programs (and not bilingual instruction). Titled “English Immersion Classes Could Be Rolled Back in Arizona,” it opened with:

ProEnglish long has advocated for English language immersion programs as far superior to bilingual education programs for students for whom English is not the native language, in order not to relegate such students

to a linguistic ghetto in which they are destined for a poorer-quality educational experience and a stronger likelihood of lower-paying job opportunities upon graduation. (Guschoy, 2019d)

Interestingly, the arguments did not include the commonality or unifying arguments, as observed in previous sections. Instead, they are (a) the pedagogical argument and (b) the economic argument.

Academic scholarship has challenged the pedagogical arguments opposing bilingual education. For example, Hartman (2003) pointed out that the “English-only movement’s non-racist claims are seriously undermined by their systematic attacks on bilingual education” (p. 192). Johannessen et al. (2016) called out the English-only movement for the assimilationist agenda underlying the lobbying efforts, noting that the legislative efforts “infuse politics and society [...] to impose policies that English is, and should always be, the only language suitable for academic development” (p. 32). TESOL International (2005) publicized this position statement on challenges to bilingual education: “English-only policies will polarize and divide rather than unify; they will exclude rather than include immigrants and other English language learners from civic life and hence further marginalize this group” (p. 4).

### **Language-in-Education Legislation: State-Level Committee Hearings (2019)**

Individual state agencies develop their own language-in-education policy within the framework provided by the federal government in ESSA. Although Official English legislation has been successful in 32 states, state education policies in 2019 have started to reaffirm bilingual education. As reported in *Education Week* (Mitchell, 2019), California (Proposition 58) and Massachusetts (LOOK Act) have both re-instated pathways for bilingual education in their states. In 2019, Arizona gave up the 4-hour English language block (S.B. 1014). According to *Education Week*, the governor is planning a state-wide repeal bill for 2020. These movements come with accompanying support for dual-language and Seal of Biliteracy initiatives.

Fourteen bills were voted on by state legislatures during 2019 legislative sessions. They were located via Education Commission of the States (2019), an aggregator site. From a cursory look at the bill titles, it is clear that state legislatures nation-wide are pushing their respective education agencies to meet the Civil Rights obligations as they pertain to EL students and their families. For example:

- MD HB1144: County Boards of Education – Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency
- OR SB496: Prohibits the Restriction of Certain Areas in Schools from English Language Learners
- WA HB1130: Creation of a Work Group Regarding Language Access Barriers for Public School Students and their Families.

I reviewed committee transcripts/video recordings for seven of the 14 bills, which I was able to easily access online (see Table 2.2). It should be noted that all seven of the bills received overwhelming support in the public hearings reviewed. However, the focus of the current study is how

**Table 2.2** State-level bills pertaining to language-in-education for EL students, 2019

Bill number	Last Action (2019)	Title/description
AZ – SB 1014	February 14	Models of English Language Instruction
ID – H 222	March 20	Education Program Appropriations
MD – HB 1144	May 13	County Boards of Education—Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency
NV – AB 219	June 17	Creates Reporting Requirement and Corrective Action Plan Creation Regarding ELL Student Performance
OR – SB 496	June 17	Prohibits the Restriction of Certain Areas in Schools from English Language Learners
UT – SB 173	March 26	Dual Language Immersion Pilot Programs
WA – HB 1130	May 7	Creation of a Work Group Regarding Language Access Barriers for Public School Students and their Families



arguments consistent with neo-nationalism are deployed in legislative hearings in order to oppose bilingual education.

In reviewing the bills, two public oppositions were recorded in the recordings/transcripts. One was in opposition to Arizona S.B. 104 and a second to Oregon S.B. 496. Both were reviewed in detail, but only Arizona S.B. 104 will be discussed below. This is because Oregon S.B. 496 pertains to equitable access of EL students to all district facilities so as to avoid unnecessary physical segregation during the school day. The intent of the bill is consistent with the Office for Civil Rights (2015) guidance, which notes that unnecessary segregation diminishes EL students' access to all the district services to which they are entitled. This is a positive direction for how school districts service EL student populations, but the issue does not directly relate to language-in-education and the relationship with neo-nationalism.

On January 15, 2019, the Arizona Senate Education Committee held a public hearing to consider the bill S.B. 104. The bill rescinds the state-wide requirement that EL students attend a 4-hour English instructional block until they achieve sufficient English proficiency as required to participate in mainstream, English-medium classwork. First, it must be noted that the majority of the public statements were in support of the bill. Support for the bill was led by representatives of Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) and Stand for Children, a public advocacy group. The single opposition to Arizona S.B. 104 will be discussed here because it pertains directly to language of instruction for EL students and thus invokes familiar discussion between monolingual and multilingual models of high interest for neo-nationalism. The speaker is a former classroom educator and former member of the English Learner Task Force that originally developed the Structured English Immersion policy in 2000. (The 4-hour English language block was added in 2008.) At the public hearing, the representative advanced a pedagogical argument: "This bill will harm ELLs permanently by limiting their access to the English instruction they so desperately need to be successful." The speaker contended that these students are not learning English because "we have too many teachers teaching to them in Spanish, and they're put with a lot of kids speaking Spanish so WHERE WILL THEY LEARN the English. They don't. They're not exposed to it enough."

Without claiming an association between the speaker and political lobbying groups, the pedagogical argument presented in this context is related to the arguments presented in the previous section by ProEnglish, VDARE, and FAIR. The pedagogical argument the representative offers is clear: The daily 4-hour immersion block is the fastest way to provide the exposure students need to acquire English. What is intriguing is the follow-up elaboration the representative presents to the committee. The pedagogical argument nearly reveals nationalized imaginings of monolingual English spaces. The representative's speaking volume increases, conveying heightened emotion. The representative appears to describe a Spanish-language classroom environment (i.e., teachers and students speaking in Spanish). From a neo-nationalist perspective, this scenario is likely frightening because it disrupts the idealization of U.S. institutional spaces as primarily English ones. If this is indeed what is going on with the representative's comments, it would be consistent with language complaints in similar contexts that draw directly on nationalism (Meadows, 2014a).

The basic premise underlying the public exchanges reviewed is so engrained that neither side articulates any possible alternative to monolingual English schooling. For example, one remedy would be to implement a multilingual model in place of the current monolingual one. But to do that would be to disconnect the American nation from the English language as realized in a public schooling system overseen by institutions of the nation-state. The fact that neither side articulates a multilingual solution reveals the power of the monolingual frame in the United States.

A review of the language education policy proposals that state legislatures considered in 2019 shows that the momentum is with advocacy groups and education scholars who envision formal schooling in the United States as inclusive spaces. The Civil Rights of EL students are increasingly being acknowledged in state-level policy. When placed in nationalist terms, the current momentum is toward civic/liberal nationalism, as opposed to the ethnic/holistic nationalism characteristic of neo-nationalism. However, the English monolingual model has not changed nor has the ESSA accountability system tied to large-scale testing.

## Discussion

The analysis explored six sets of discourse data, listed in Table 2.3, and traced contiguities in discourse between anti-immigration stances at the federal level, official English language policy at federal and state levels, and through to language-in-education policy at state levels.

As summarized in Table 2.3, the analysis identified the arguments utilized by political actors in interrelated contexts to advance language policy consistent with neo-nationalist priorities. For those individuals and organizations wishing to closely align state political policy with a narrowly-defined national people, English language use is a central concern. In the texts examined, the authors formulated multiple argument types to justify a privileged spot for English in institutional spaces. These included: (a) heritage argument (i.e., English is part of the national culture), (b) mythical past argument (i.e., English has always been with

**Table 2.3** Analysis summary

Data set	Argued justifications FOR English	Argued function(s) OF English
1. Candidate statements on language use in the United States (2010s)	<i>Heritage argument</i> <i>Mythical past argument</i>	<i>Shibboleth argument</i>
2. Text of the federal-level English Language Unity Act (2019)	<i>Commonality argument</i>	<i>Continuation argument</i> <i>Shibboleth argument</i>
3. Advocacy statements in support of the English Language Unity Act (2019)		<i>Economic argument</i> <i>Unifying argument</i>
4. Official English justification statements: Individual states (1986–2007)	<i>Commonality argument</i>	<i>Continuation argument</i> <i>Unifying argument</i>
5. Neo-nationalism versus Bilingual education (2018–2019)	<i>Economic argument</i> <i>Pedagogical argument</i> <i>Detriment argument</i>	
6. Language-in-education legislation: State-level committee hearings (2019)	<i>Pedagogical argument</i>	

us), (c) commonality argument (i.e., English is a common thread that binds diverse groups), (d) economic argument (i.e., multiple language media is costly), (e) detriment argument (i.e., the presence of EL students takes away from American students), and (f) pedagogical argument (i.e., EL students need sustained exposure to English away from Spanish or other languages). The commonality argument appeared in official English legislation at the federal and state levels. Additionally, the pedagogical argument was invoked by authors in support of English-medium classroom practices.

Authors also formulated multiple argument types to establish a function for official English status. These included (a) shibboleth argument (i.e., English proficiency as a criterion of immigration), (b) continuation argument (i.e., to protect and preserve English), (c) unifying argument (i.e., to assimilate/participate in national civic society), and (d) economic argument (i.e., official language will save money). The majority of these arguments appear in at least two data sets. The shibboleth argument appears in the candidate statements, as well as the federal English Language Unity Act. The continuation argument appears in the federal- and state-level Official English legislation. Finally, the unifying argument appears both in the state-level Official English legislation and in advocacy statements put forth by ProEnglish.

The commonality argument used to justify English-centric language policies can only be successful if one subscribes to a nationalized worldview that strictly discerns between cultural insiders and outsiders. The logic only makes sense if one interprets English speakers as cultural insiders (who therefore count) and speakers of non-English languages as cultural outsiders (who therefore do not count). As the commonality argument draws attention to nationalized insiders and outsiders, it can serve in the interest of neo-nationalist priorities.

Despite the surface arguments, public efforts to enact official English laws and English monolingual instructional models are entirely about border maintenance (i.e., what language use is permissible within a given nationalized space). The justifications and the functions offered in the data sets advance an agenda to draw the political state in direct line with the cultural practices of a nationalized people. This is the influence of

neo-nationalism on public debates over language policy in the United States at present.

## Conclusion

Neo-nationalism is identifiable in the U.S. context in much the same way as it has been discussed extensively in the contexts of Western and Eastern Europe. This chapter has defined neo-nationalism in the United States and considered how the objectives of neo-nationalism are translated into language policy at federal and state levels. The chapter traced neo-nationalist arguments intertextually in how they are reproduced across contexts by interrelated political actors.

As the six data sets reveal, efforts to cultivate English-only spaces has had limited success. While there are at least 32 state-level laws for Official English, such a law does not exist at the federal level, despite vigorous lobbying on the part of advocacy groups and politicians. In regards to language-in-education policy, the momentum is away from exclusively monolingual instruction. Still, the arguments that undergird these lines of advocacy are not disconnected from the arguments shaping immigration policy adopted by the Trump administration. Despite this sympathetic venue for anti-immigration views, neo-nationalist politicians and political parties have started distancing themselves from the Trump administration and the Republican party. For example, the American Freedom Party (2020) encourages their followers to abandon the Republicans and Democrats, stating that “we need a nationalist party interested in defending our borders, preserving our language and promoting our culture” (para. 1).

For scholars of language education and applied linguistics, there is good reason to remain sensitive to the arguments surrounding language policy in the United States and the potential ideological links to neo-nationalism. As demonstrated in this chapter, language policy is intertwined with immigration policy when seen through a holistic/ethnic lens of nationalism.

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