

## Language Ideologies and the Settlement House Movement: A New History for Service-Learning

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*A significant number of community service-learning projects in higher education involve the teaching or tutoring of immigrants in English. As in related service-learning scholarship, these projects are commonly informed by perspectives on cultural difference, social justice, and power relations in U.S. society. Yet while faculty pair their students' work in immigrant literacy programs with the classroom examination of issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, very little of the scholarship suggests that these students are led to critique the role of language ideologies in U.S. society. In this article I urge that institutionalized notions of English in the U.S.—such as the putative role of English in social mobility and the widespread belief that English was always voluntarily adopted by immigrants—be considered closely in our community literacy projects. My argument calls upon sociolinguistic and historical studies of the Progressive period and examines most closely language ideologies in the settlement house movement, an important origin for historians of community service-learning.*

Recent migration patterns in and to the United States due to globalization have profoundly influenced demographics in our local communities. The wide-ranging community service-learning practices in the United States thus involve a significant portion of work with new immigrants. Recent scholarship in service-learning parallels these demographic shifts, showing faculty in a diverse range of disciplines pursuing service-learning for their students in new immigrant communities: American Studies (Ruíz, 2008), ESL (Hale & Whittig, 2006), Education (Hale, 2008; Rogers, Marshall, & Tyson, 2006; Tellez, 2004-2005), History (Miller, 2007), International Studies (Bauer, 2008), Literature in English (Daigre, Hutter, Ogden, & Sulit, 2006; Grobman, 2004, 2005; Jay, 2008), Political Science (Koulis 1998), Sociology (Calderón, 2004; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raskoff, 1994; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2004), Spanish (Arries, 1999; Beebe & de Acosta, 1993; Elloriaga, 2007; Plann, 2002). Perhaps not surprisingly, these articles reveal that students working with immigrants are primarily engaged in the teaching, tutoring, or mentoring of immigrants in the English language.

In all of these studies, faculty report cultural awareness or social justice perspectives as a primary goal for their students working in immigrant communities. A number of the articles also describe a critically-based pedagogy, as faculty lead students to examine globalization, political economy, and issues of power in U.S. society (see in particular Arries,

1994; Calderón, 2004; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2004). Yet although these programs take up issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, they pay very little attention to language rights issues, such as monolingual English ideologies, the history of multilingualism, and heritage language activism in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps most remarkable for programs in which language issues are the primary work of their students in local communities.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I contend that a critical examination of language issues and language ideologies should take a primary focus in our community service-learning initiatives with immigrants, especially when they involve language and education issues. What is the historical role of English and English learning in the construction of U.S. national identity? How might dominant assumptions about immigrants learning English come to bear in our interactions with immigrant communities? As we ask questions on the social construction of race, class, gender, and ethnicity in our community service-learning programs with immigrants, so we should critique the social construction of language issues as well.

My argument begins with an historical focus on the Progressive Era of U.S. history (1890s-1920). Research by sociolinguists and historians has revealed that monolingual ideologies on English pervasive in the public domain arose during this period (Hartmann, 1948; Leeman, 2005; Lissak, 1989; McClymer, 1982; Pavlenko, 2002, 2005; Ricento, 2003). Significantly, the settlement house move-

ment—an important origin in community service-learning historiography—was uniquely instrumental in the shaping of long-term attitudes and policy in U.S. institutions toward languages other than English. I concentrate on language ideologies that two settlement house leaders, Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago and Julia Richman at the Educational Alliance in New York City, held along with their colleagues in the midst of multilingual immigrant neighborhoods. The work of these reformers was instrumental in the shaping of curricula for public schooling and adult education, and in the development of the profession of social work. The examination of their language ideologies provides insight into the origins of long-term attitudes and policy toward languages other than English in the spheres of education and social services—both institutions with which we frequently partner in service-learning initiatives with immigrants.

### The Centrality of Jane Addams in Service-Learning Histories

Many prominent scholars of service-learning have cited the settlement house movement as an historical basis for modern university-community partnerships (Bruce, 2007; Daynes & Longo, 2004; Flower, 2002; Flower & Higgins, 1995; Garbus, 2002; Hargrove, 1993; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Morton, 1997; Peck, Zieren, & Stoddard, 2004; Pestello, 1996). Service-learning scholarship on the settlement house movement has emphasized the legacy of reformers in engaging the lived experience of the community, as opposed to either the cultural knowledge of elites or the technocratic knowledge of the university. When service-learning scholars have studied settlement house practices in specific contexts, they have focused on Jane Addams' work at Hull House in Chicago, calling special attention to her educational commitments in the local community (Daynes & Longo, 2004, pp. 7, 11; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994, p. 302; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997, p. 141). Daynes and Longo (2004) call attention to the Hull House Labor Museum, which was created by Addams in 1900 as a showcase for local immigrant craftsmanship. Inspired by John Dewey's model of "experiential learning" and the U.S. Arts and Crafts movement, Addams conceived of the Museum as a forum in which the artisan work of immigrant laborers was "performed" for and admired by observers as a kind of non-alienating and humanizing labor within their increasingly industrialized society (Daynes & Longo, 2004, p. 8; Jackson, 2000, p. 255). Daynes and Longo point out that the collaborative and flexible relationships Addams built through the Museum and other projects in Chicago's Ninth Ward, which

"allowed ordinary people to contribute their talents and skills to the common lot," are a source of inspiration for contemporary service-learning (p. 11).

Yet it is also important for service-learning to evaluate the assumptions on immigrant culture that Addams' Labor Museum and other educational programs embodied along with their democratic ideals. Addams, like other elite Progressives of her generation including Franz Boas, Randolph Bourne, Dewey, and Horace Kallen, was deeply invested in debates concerning diversity and assimilation. These intellectuals, responding to strict nativist ideologies on the superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture, championed what is commonly known as a "cultural pluralism," claiming, as Diana Selig (2008) writes, the compatibility of "immigrant cultures with American institutions and traditions" and the contribution of "immigrant...gifts that would revitalize American society and enrich the shared culture" (p. 2). Addams often wrote about "immigrant gifts," and her educational commitments in the Labor Museum and the pageantry, dance, and music promoted through Hull House clubs and activities speak to her sense of immigrant contributions to American life.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, Addams and her Hull House colleagues' conception of gifts was delimited by their belief on the English language as an incontrovertible marker of American identity (Lissak, 1989; Pavlenko, 2002). Significantly for historians of service-learning, the Hull House group took a special opposition to immigrant languages, which were multiple in the Ninth Ward where the settlement was located and which were strongly defended by immigrant leaders in Chicago as a source of cultural and religious heritage.<sup>4</sup> Immigrant languages were thought by the Hull House group to impede children's acquisition of Anglo-American ideas and of English. The next section concerns the conflicts between Hull House reformers and immigrant leaders who wanted bilingual education for immigrant children. These battles, the subsequent demise of bilingual education in Chicago, and the compromise that became "ethnic studies" in the public schools shed light on a distinct historical origin for ideologies on multilingualism, and immigrants learning English, that are often taken for granted in the public domain.

### Bilingual Education in Chicago is Supplanted by Ethnic Studies

Lissak's (1989) research concerns the struggles Hull House group leaders waged with bilingual parochial schools in Chicago's Ninth Ward over language issues, revealing how these struggles were inflected with larger ideological notions on cultural identity. In the first decade of the twentieth century,

distressed by the lack of priority local bilingual parochial schools placed on English, Hull House residents launched a campaign for the surveillance of Chicago's parochial schools by a state education board. Among their demands were the credentialing of parochial school teachers by the public system and English-only instruction (pp. 51-52). When the proposal was counteracted by the Catholic and German Lutheran churches on the basis of religious freedom, however, Hull House reformers attempted to compromise with ethnic leaders, and shifted to a platform for "ethnic studies" in the Chicago public schools. The curriculum for ethnic studies, which was adopted by the School Board in 1912 with the backing of Ella Flagg Young, a colleague of Addams, foreclosed the teaching of immigrant languages in the primary grades and limited "foreign" language study to elective courses in the middle and high school years. Its emphasis, moreover, is on "immigrant gifts" to be taught and told in English. A speech Addams gave to the National Educational Association in 1908 on a curriculum for ethnic studies makes this clear: "The body of teachers in our great cities," Addams contended, "could take hold of the immigrant colonies, could bring out of them their handicrafts and occupations, their traditions, their folk songs and folklore, the beautiful stories which every immigrant colony is ready to tell and translate...into English" (1908, p. 100, cited in Lissak 1989, p. 55). Ethnic studies in Chicago, therefore, was created to foster only a certain kind of cultural pluralism in public schools: one in which immigrant children would come to appreciate their Old World heritages *in English*, leaving their languages at home.

The same year Superintendent Young stood behind the passage of ethnic studies, she published an essay, "Modern Languages in the High Schools," that argued that elementary school language study was superfluous for U.S.-born children, because they would naturally abandon their parents' cultures: "in a few years the parents in (a) particular locality..." Flagg wrote, "will be American born, and the desire for the study of the language of the fathers will disappear" (1912, cited in Lissak 1989, p. 57). Young's statement seems strangely uninformed, because German had in fact been taught in the Chicago grammar schools since 1865, due to successful campaigns by leaders in the German-speaking community. Other European immigrant groups in Chicago had been arguing for the teaching of their languages in the schools since the 1880s (Lissak, pp. 55-56). Presumably, some of these individuals by the time of the publication of Young's essay in 1912 were U.S. born *and* they wanted to keep their languages. Young's rationale for doing away with language study in Chicago public elementary schools coun-

tered more than 50 years of advocacy, instruction, and the desires of immigrant groups themselves. The "foreign" language curriculum in the middle and high schools, moreover, would unfortunately not reach many immigrant children, not only because its emphasis on languages with modern social capital (French and German) meant few high schools offered Chicago heritage languages like Hebrew, Yiddish, Modern Greek, Russian, and language variations of Southern Italy, but also because language courses were not available in "manual" or vocational high schools, which most immigrant children attended (Lissak, pp. 58-59).

The ethnic studies curriculum leveraged by the Hull House group ended the opportunity for the kind of teaching of immigrant culture in public schools that many immigrants themselves wanted—and had successfully implemented in Chicago neighborhoods—a teaching of their heritage cultures in their heritage languages. The struggle over bilingual instruction waged in the Hull House neighborhood, in the Illinois state legislature, and in the Chicago city schools suggests that in these spaces, the "natural" and "dominant" position of English in U.S. society was a social construction lobbied by elites in their influence on public institutions.<sup>5</sup> As Lissak (1989) points out, this had profound implications for immigrant children, who missed opportunities for immigrant children to develop resources—both private and social—through the use and preservation of their heritage languages (p. 60).

#### English as a Deterrent to Delinquency in the New Discourse of Social Work

Ideologies on English among Hull House reformers were not isolated to the sphere of education. Lissak's research shows that practitioners in the burgeoning field of social work in the Hull House sphere also held views on English as a form of social uplift. Sophia P. Breckinridge and Edith Abbott, Addams' close colleagues at Hull House and the founders (along with Graham Taylor) of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, which would become the School of Social Work at the University of Chicago (Jackson, 2000, p. 287), publicly criticized the bilingual parochial schools of immigrant neighborhoods for not teaching enough English. In an influential tract on child delinquency called *The Delinquent Child and the Home* they published in 1912, Breckinridge and Abbott scrutinized the rising number of immigrant juvenile court cases in Chicago through a list of factors they felt were obtained in poor immigrant neighborhoods. In one of their chapters, "The Child of the Immigrant: The Problem of Adjustment," Abbott and Breckinridge laid blame for

social problems suffered by immigrant children upon their linguistic isolation in parochial ethnic schools: “the child that leaves the parochial school,” Abbott and Breckinridge wrote, “must be fitted into an American community life in which the *mastery of the English tongue* is not merely a necessary tool but the only medium through which he may share the most valuable products of American civilization” (1912, pp. 55-56; cited in Lissak, 1989, p. 50, emphasis added).

Breckinridge and Abbott’s warning has disturbing implications, ones that continue to pervade modern political discourse on immigrants in the United States. Without English, Breckinridge and Abbott insist, immigrant children cannot be expected to fit into American society. Delinquency among immigrant children, they seem to insinuate, can be triggered by a failure to learn English. While Breckinridge and Abbott’s book also calls attention to structural inequalities in poor urban neighborhoods, they emphasize the immigrant child’s home life and the choices of immigrant parents, including sending children to bilingual schools. Their tract had a strong influence on the professionalization of social work in the 20th century, which tended to urge individual responsibility for children’s welfare on parents, instead of advocating for broader social reforms (Jackson, pp. 288-299). A similar legacy of Breckinridge and Abbott can be seen in public discourse that places blame for poverty and social problems on families speaking languages other than English in the home.

#### Julia Richman and The Educational Alliance in New York City

Monolingual English ideologies among the Hull House group are to be found similarly among reformers in New York City, where the settlement house movement had a large presence and impact on public institutions, especially schools. The activism of Lillian Wald of the Henry Street Settlement and Mary Simkovitch of Greenwich House was responsible for bringing free and reduced lunches and on-site nurses into the New York City public schools in the 1920s. But immigrant languages fared less well in the schools, as the example of Julia Richman, who became District Superintendent of New York City schools for the Lower East Side in 1898, shows. Richman was a prominent leader at the Educational Alliance in New York, a Reform-based Jewish settlement house that began in 1889. The Alliance was established by Jews whose families had originally come from Germany and who had achieved a relatively stable status in U.S. society. This group saw the community of poor, more recently immigrant

Eastern European Jews on the Lower East Side as a “ghetto,” whose culture was distinct from that of German Jews and who were a potential source of generalized anti-Semitic stereotyping and bias (Berger, 1980, pp. 46-47). The Educational Alliance was thus originally created to help in the assimilation of Eastern European Jews into Anglo-American norms of dress, language, work, and manners (Berger, pp. 52-53). Language at this settlement house, like at Hull House, was a site of struggle. Alliance leaders offered Hebrew classes to counter what they deemed to be the parochial effects of the *cheders*, or traditional schools that met in teachers’ homes (Berger, p. 57). As Berger cites from the 1894 annual report of the Alliance, the cheders were considered inexpedient from the standpoint of “hygienic, moral and Americanizing” standards (1980, n.p.). The blurring of norms of cleanliness, health, morality, and cultural assimilation around the theme of language is striking here, calling our attention again to ways in which language ideologies can be indicators of other forms of social bias.<sup>6</sup>

Julia Richman’s language ideologies in her leadership as Lower East Side superintendent reflect her affiliation with the Educational Alliance. When Richman became District Superintendent in 1898, she went so far as to forbid the speaking of Yiddish in school hallways. Her opposition toward languages other than English went beyond policy toward children, as her public comments on “Americanizing” parents through adult education courses reveals: “In great cities,” she addressed the National Education Association in 1904, “where foreign colonies are planted and foreign customs are perpetuated...the school must step in to wrest not only the child, but the whole family, from traditions which enslave the mind and furnish some of the most stubborn obstacles to a proper assimilation and Americanization of the alien” (1904, p. 115; cited in Berrol, 1977, p. 367). Richman in fact led in the activism for English education of adult immigrants in New York City, succeeding through her contacts in the public schools for the Educational Alliance to offer adult English literacy classes (as well as kindergarten) in public school facilities (Berrol, p. 361).

#### Lessons for Service-Learning

As scholars of service-learning observe, the views of progressive settlement house reformers like Jane Addams have had a large influence on the way universities and other American institutions interact with the communities and institutions that surround them. My study posits that one aspect of this influence is an ideology of English monolingualism, which became naturalized in public discourse and policy in the early 20th century, including through the influence of

prominent settlement house reformers on public schooling and social work. Addams and her colleagues at Hull House and Julian Richman at the Educational Alliance articulated a clear bias toward English as an assimilating tool for immigrants.

In this history of language ideologies in the settlement house movement, I do not mean to disqualify Addams and other reformers from their rightful place as ground-breaking activists and scholars in a tradition of partnership with local communities. But as Gary Daynes (2003) points out in his article “The Use of History in the Movement for the Civic Engagement of Higher Education,” practitioners of civic engagement “must uncover the historical contexts of the programs we adopt. We must ask how those contexts will fit the contexts we work in” (n.p.) Practitioners of service-learning have not yet probed deeply into questions on language ideologies in U.S. society, their development in distinct historical contexts, and their resonance for our work with immigrant communities today. Because the public schools, adult education programs, and social service agencies—all modern inheritors of settlement house theories and practices—often sponsor English literacy programs with which we partner, my historical argument has special resonance. These partnerships often recuperate social justice philosophies and creative collaboration rooted in the settlement house movement. They may also reproduce a linear narrative on English that also has its source in this movement.

Several language ideologies that are legacies from the Progressive era and that have at least partial origin in the settlement house movement present themselves for our contemplation. First, a perspective on settlement house elites’ attitudes on English as social and moral uplift can help us to examine closely our own and our communities’ beliefs regarding English and upward mobility. Sociolinguists have identified common assumptions that posit English acquisition as the key conduit to immigrant prosperity as problematic (García, 1995; May, 2001; Pavlenko, 2002). García, who compared the economic status of Latinos across the country who were monolingual in English, monolingual in Spanish, and bilingual speakers, concluded that *neither* English acquisition nor Spanish language preservation among Latinos made a significant effect on their economic status, although both language experiences are consistently argued as having this effect in the public domain. Like May and Pavlenko, García urges us to look at structural factors, such as race and class segregation and discrimination, that are obscured in the linguistic rationale for socio-economic problems in the Latino community.

A second ideological remnant of the settlement house movement is the common belief that multilingualism in the United States, and debates over bilin-

gual schooling, are relatively recent phenomena. English, as this narrative goes, has until now been a “dominant” or “natural” force that newcomers readily adopted in the United States. Yet as we saw in the struggle in Chicago’s Ninth Ward between the bilingual parochial schools and the Hull House group, there was a strong public resistance of many immigrants to Hull House language and other assimilationist practices. This resistance belies the commonly-held belief—another ideology—that immigrants to the United States from past eras *voluntarily* gave up their languages.<sup>7</sup> Lissak’s (1989) research on Jane Addams and her colleagues’ open conflicts with parochial bilingual schools and their public advocacy for dominant English ideologies in public schools reveals that in fact, far from giving up their heritage languages voluntarily, European immigrants in Chicago felt strongly about, and fought for, the right to preserve their heritage languages through political channels.

By revisiting language ideologies in settlement house practices, we see that acquiring English—and the potential leaving behind of immigrant languages—was a process fraught with much complexity and struggle. Notions on English as a marker of social identity in the U.S. subtends much of the curricula, practices, and attitudes of education spheres with which we frequently partner in community service learning. Keeping in mind that these notions are ideologies with discrete historical origins may allow us to consider other ways in which English can be acquired, as well as home languages be maintained. One way in which this ideology may be countered with our students is through sociolinguistic research on the key role that bilingual schooling can play in immigrant children as well as adults’ acquisition of English.<sup>8</sup> So too, popular or participatory education methodologies in U.S. ESL education offer alternative models by which immigrants can learn English, focusing on learners’ own construction of meaning in the classroom and their questioning of the discourses of power.<sup>9</sup>

We can also consider May’s (2001) recommendation that a “traditionally associated language” be reconfigured not as a threat to the dominant culture but as a “significant resource to one’s ethnic identity, both at the level of societal integration and social integration” (p. 134). Recent sociological research has indicated the role that retention of intergenerational ties through language and culture has on immigrant and first-generation children’s identity (Flores-González, 2002). In our service-learning with immigrants who speak many different languages, this research suggests a counterbalance to prevailing notions on English in the United States. Paraphrasing García (1995), we might ask in our service-learning work with immigrants: Are language minority speakers in our communities given agency to name them-

selves through their languages, or are they only labeled and categorized by others? Are they given an opportunity in their schools and public environments to use their languages as resources? (pp. 155-156).

I have begun with colleagues and students in two programs in Northern Virginia that provide Spanish literacy instruction for children and bilingual ESL and that also advocate for preserving Spanish in homes and communities (for descriptions of these programs, see Burke, 2006; Ferraro, 2008; Glod, 2007; Rodríguez, 2007; Rabin & Román-Mendoza, 2008). So too, an historical counter-example to settlement house language ideologies can be found in the work of the International Institutes, a unique social service agency for immigrants founded by Edith Terry Bremer in the early 1920s. Bremer and the Institutes, which would come to number more than 50 across the nation, actively promoted both through the national administration and local units preserving European immigrant languages through the 1940s (Mohl, 1982). In my research on the many immigrant language classes at various International Institutes, I hope to historicize more fully one way in which grassroots efforts to preserve heritage languages coalesced with support from U.S. institutions.

### Conclusion

Our inclusion of the study of language ideologies alongside issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity in service-learning with immigrants provides another way in which we and our students may examine social inequities in U.S. society. Our students' look at historical contexts in which this linear narrative is disrupted—the language activism of immigrants in bilingual public education, for example—can provide a platform by which different kinds of literacy provision that does not exclude heritage languages, or uses it to help students in the acquisition of English, are imagined. We can also translate our historical knowledge on this period into the promotion of multilingualism and bilingual education in our nation and in our communities. By expanding upon the historical research on the roots of service-learning in the settlement house movement through a focus on reformers' language ideologies, I have hoped to add to our ongoing conversations in the university about working with communities to enact social change.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Various co-authors and I have addressed a similar lack of attention to language rights issues in U.S. literature classrooms (Leeman & Rabin, 2007) and Spanish service-learning projects (Leeman, Rabin, & Román-Mendoza, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Hale & Whittig (2006) and Jay's (2006) articles,

although focused on language rights, report more on students' perception of language inequities than on their critical examination of language ideologies.

<sup>3</sup> For studies on cultural pluralism, see Montalto (1982a, 1982b); Hollinger (1995); and Selig (2008).

<sup>4</sup> For a history of bilingual schooling and heritage language activism in the U.S., see Kloss (1997) and Grinberg & Saavedra (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Pavlenko (2002) studies the ideology of English as a "natural" marker of Anglo-American identity among powerful elite groups in the Progressive Era.

<sup>6</sup> See Pavlenko (2002) again for the sources of this ideology in the Progressive Era.

<sup>7</sup> See James Crawford (1992) for an analysis of language as a surrogate for race in both early 20th-century Americanization and contemporary English-only movements.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary of research on the benefits of bilingual education for English language learners, see Cummins (1996). Atkinson (1987), Auerbach (1993), Barahona (1996), and Rivera (1999) discuss the positive role of native language use and literacy in ESL programs.

<sup>9</sup> Auerbach et al. (1996) offers a useful introduction and bibliography on participatory ESL. See Pavlenko (2005) for an historical example of how one group of English language-learners in the Progressive Era resisted the discourse of Americanisation.

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