

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 418

UD 035 944

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TITLE Language Use and English-Speaking Ability: 2000. Census 2000 Brief.
INSTITUTION Bureau of the Census (DOC), Washington, DC. Economics and Statistics Administration.
REPORT NO C2KBR-29
PUB DATE 2003-10-00
NOTE 12p.
AVAILABLE FROM U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC 20233. Tel: 301-457-4100; e-mail: webmaster@census.gov; Web site: <http://www.census.gov>.
PUB TYPE Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Attainment; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Higher Education; Housing; Immigrants; *Language Usage; *Limited English Speaking; *Population Trends; Regional Characteristics; *Residential Patterns
IDENTIFIERS Census 2000

ABSTRACT

This report, part of a series that offers population and housing data collected by Census 2000, presents data on the language spoken at home and the ability to speak English of U.S. people over age 4 years. It describes population distributions for the country, including regions, states, counties, and places with populations of 100,000 or more. The number and percentage of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home increased between 1990-2000. People who spoke languages other than English at home were not equally distributed across or within regions. The U.S. west had the greatest number and proportion of non-English language speakers. More than one-quarter of the population in seven states spoke a language other than English at home. Counties with a large proportion of the population who spoke a language other than English at home were concentrated in border states. Places with the highest percentages of non-English language speakers, Spanish speakers, and people who spoke English less than very well were concentrated in California, Florida, and Texas. In 2000, 4.4 million households were linguistically isolated, significantly more than in 1990. (SM)

Language Use and English-Speaking Ability: 2000

Census 2000 Brief

Issued October 2003

C2KBR-29

The ability to communicate with government and private service providers, schools, businesses, emergency personnel, and many other people in the United States depends greatly on the ability to speak English.¹ In Census 2000, as in the two previous censuses, the U.S. Census Bureau asked people aged 5 and over if they spoke a language other than English at home. Among the 262.4 million people aged 5 and over, 47.0 million (18 percent) spoke a language other than English at home.

This report, part of a series that presents population and housing data collected in Census 2000, presents data on language spoken at home and the ability to speak English of people aged 5 and over. It describes population distributions and characteristics for the United States, including regions, states, counties, and selected places with populations of 100,000 or more.

The questions illustrated in Figure 1 were asked in the census in 1980, 1990, and

¹ The text of this report discusses data for the United States, including the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are shown in Table 2 and Figure 5.

Figure 1.

Reproduction of the Questions on Language From Census 2000

11 a. Does this person speak a language other than English at home?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No → Skip to 12

b. What is this language?

(For example: Korean, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese)

c. How well does this person speak English?

- ☐ Very well
☐ Well
☐ Not well
☐ Not at all

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 questionnaire.

2000. Various questions on language were asked in the censuses from 1890 to 1970, including a question on "mother tongue" (the language spoken in the person's home when he or she was a child).

The first language question in Census 2000 asked respondents whether they spoke a language other than English at home. Those who responded "Yes" to Question 11a were asked what language they spoke. The write-in answers to Question 11b (specific language spoken) were optically scanned and coded. Although linguists recognize several thousand languages in the world, the coding operation used by the Census Bureau put the reported languages into

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about 380 categories of single languages or language families.²

For people who answered "Yes" to Question 11a, Question 11c asked respondents to indicate how well they spoke English. Respondents who said they spoke English "Very well" were considered to have no difficulty with English. Those who indicated they spoke English "Well," "Not well," or "Not at all" were considered to have difficulty with English — identified also as people who spoke English less than "Very well."

The number and percentage of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home increased between 1990 and 2000.

In 2000, 18 percent of the total population aged 5 and over, or 47.0 million people, reported they spoke a language other than English at home.³ These figures were up from 14 percent (31.8 million) in 1990 and 11 percent (23.1 million) in 1980. The number of people who spoke a language other than English at home grew by 38 percent in the 1980s and by 47 percent in the 1990s. While the population aged 5 and over grew by one-fourth from 1980 to 2000, the number who spoke a language other than English at home more than doubled.

In 2000, most people who spoke a language other than English at home reported they spoke English "Very well" (55 percent or

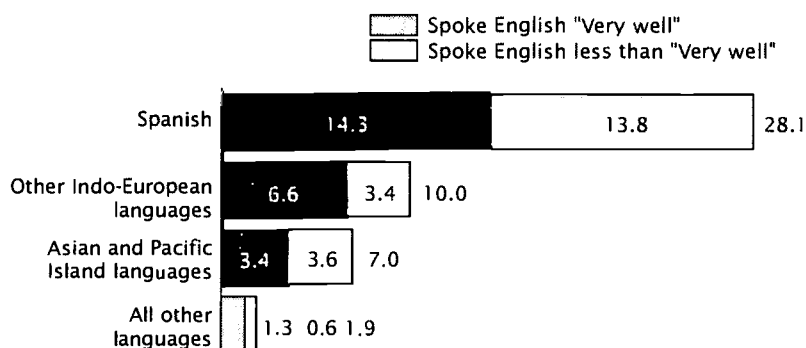
² More detailed information on languages and language coding can be found in "Summary File 3: 2000 Census of Population and Housing Technical Documentation" issued December 2002 (www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf).

³ The estimates in this report are based on responses from a sample of the population. As with all surveys, estimates may vary from the actual values because of sampling variation or other factors. All statements made in this report have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

Figure 2.

Speakers of Languages Other Than English at Home and English Ability by Language Group: 2000

(Population 5 years and over, in millions. Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, sampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf)

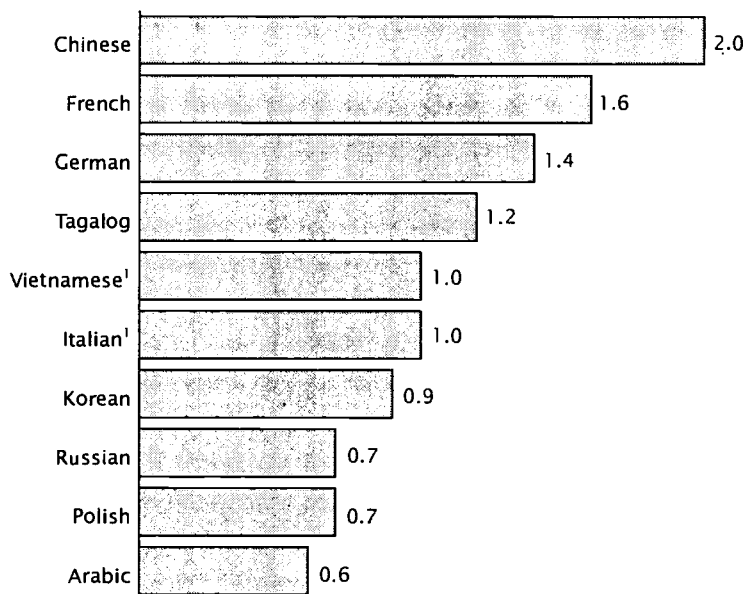


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3.

Figure 3.

Ten Languages Most Frequently Spoken at Home Other Than English and Spanish: 2000

(Population 5 years and over, in millions. Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, sampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf)



¹ The number of Vietnamese speakers and the number of Italian speakers were not statistically different from one another.

Note: The estimates in this figure vary from actual values due to sampling errors. As a result, the number of speakers of some languages shown in this figure may not be statistically different from the number of speakers of languages not shown in this figure.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3.

Four Major Language Groups

Spanish includes those who speak Ladino.

Other Indo-European languages include most languages of Europe and the Indic languages of India. These include the Germanic languages, such as German, Yiddish, and Dutch; the Scandinavian languages, such as Swedish and Norwegian; the Romance languages, such as French, Italian, and Portuguese; the Slavic languages, such as Russian, Polish, and Serbo-Croatian; the Indic languages, such as Hindi, Gujarathi, Punjabi, and Urdu; Celtic languages; Greek; Baltic languages; and Iranian languages.

Asian and Pacific Island languages include Chinese; Korean; Japanese; Vietnamese; Hmong; Khmer; Lao; Thai; Tagalog or Pilipino; the Dravidian languages of India, such as Telegu, Tamil, and Malayalam; and other languages of Asia and the Pacific, including the Philippine, Polynesian, and Micronesian languages.

All other languages include Uralic languages, such as Hungarian; the Semitic languages, such as Arabic and Hebrew; languages of Africa; native North American languages, including the American Indian and Alaska native languages; and some indigenous languages of Central and South America.

25.6 million people). When they are combined with those who spoke only English at home, 92 percent of the population aged 5 and over had no difficulty speaking English. The proportion of the population aged 5 and over who spoke English less than "Very well" grew from 4.8 percent in 1980, to 6.1 percent in 1990, and to 8.1 percent in 2000.

In Figure 2, the number of speakers of the four major language groups (Spanish, Other Indo-European languages, Asian and Pacific Island languages, and All other languages) are shown by how well they spoke English (see text box above). Spanish was the largest of the four major language groups, and just over half of the 28.1 million Spanish speakers spoke English "Very well."

Other Indo-European language speakers composed the second largest group, with 10.0 million speakers, almost two-thirds of whom spoke English "Very well." Slightly less than half of the

7.0 million Asian and Pacific Island-language speakers spoke English "Very well" (3.4 million). Of the 1.9 million people who composed the All other language category, 1.3 million spoke English "Very well."

After English and Spanish, Chinese was the language most commonly spoken at home (2.0 million speakers), followed by French (1.6 million speakers) and German (1.4 million speakers, see Figure 3). Reflecting historical patterns of immigration, the numbers of Italian, Polish, and German speakers fell between 1990 and 2000, while the number of speakers of many other languages increased.

Spanish speakers grew by about 60 percent and Spanish continued to be the non-English language most frequently spoken at home in the United States. The Chinese language, however, jumped from the fifth to the second most widely spoken non-English language, as the number of Chinese speakers rose from 1.2 to 2.0 million people (see

Table 1).⁴ The number of Vietnamese speakers doubled over the decade, from about 507,000 speakers to just over 1 million speakers.

Of the 20 non-English languages most frequently spoken at home shown in Table 1, the largest proportional increase was for Russian speakers, who nearly tripled from 242,000 to 706,000. The second largest increase was for French Creole speakers (the language group that includes Haitian Creoles), whose numbers more than doubled from 188,000 to 453,000.

THE GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE WHO SPOKE A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME

This section discusses the geographic distribution of the population aged 5 and over who stated in Census 2000 that they spoke a language other than English at home.

The West had the greatest number and proportion of non-English-language speakers.⁵

People who spoke languages other than English at home were not distributed equally across or within regions in 2000.⁶ While the West

⁴ The changes in ranks between 1990 and 2000 have not been tested and may not be statistically significant.

⁵ Hereafter, this report uses the term "non-English-language speakers" to refer to people who spoke a language other than English at home, regardless of their ability to speak English (see Table 1).

⁶ The Northeast region includes the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Midwest region includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The South region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, a state equivalent. The West region includes the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Table 1:
Twenty Languages Most Frequently Spoken at Home by English Ability for the Population 5 Years and Over: 1990 and 2000

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf)

Language spoken at home	1990		2000					
	Rank	Number of speakers	Rank	Total	Number of speakers			
					English-speaking ability			
					Very well	Well	Not well	Not at all
United States	(X)	230,445,777	(X)	262,375,152	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
English only	(X)	198,600,798	(X)	215,423,557	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
Total non-English	(X)	31,844,979	(X)	46,951,595	25,631,188	10,333,556	7,620,719	3,366,132
Spanish	1	17,339,172	1	28,101,052	14,349,796	5,819,408	5,130,400	2,801,448
Chinese	5	1,249,213	2	2,022,143	855,689	595,331	408,597	162,526
French	2	1,702,176	3	1,643,838	1,228,800	269,458	138,002	7,578
German	3	1,547,099	4	1,382,613	1,078,997	219,362	79,535	4,719
Tagalog	6	843,251	5	1,224,241	827,559	311,465	79,721	5,496
Vietnamese ¹	9	507,069	6	1,009,627	342,594	340,062	270,950	56,021
Italian ¹	4	1,308,648	7	1,008,370	701,220	195,901	99,270	11,979
Korean	8	626,478	8	894,063	361,166	268,477	228,392	36,028
Russian	15	241,798	9	706,242	304,891	209,057	148,671	43,623
Polish	7	723,483	10	667,414	387,694	167,233	95,032	17,455
Arabic	13	355,150	11	614,582	403,397	140,057	58,595	12,533
Portuguese ²	10	429,860	12	564,630	320,443	125,464	90,412	28,311
Japanese ²	11	427,657	13	477,997	241,707	146,613	84,018	5,659
French Creole	19	187,658	14	453,368	245,857	121,913	70,961	14,637
Greek	12	388,260	15	365,436	262,851	65,023	33,346	4,216
Hindi ³	14	331,484	16	317,057	245,192	51,929	16,682	3,254
Persian	18	201,865	17	312,085	198,041	70,909	32,959	10,176
Urdu ³	(NA)	(NA)	18	262,900	180,018	56,736	20,817	5,329
Gujarathi	26	102,418	19	235,988	155,011	50,637	22,522	7,818
Armenian	20	149,694	20	202,708	108,554	48,469	31,868	13,817
All other languages	(X)	3,182,546	(X)	4,485,241	2,831,711	1,060,052	479,969	113,509

NA Not available. X Not applicable.

¹ In 2000, the number of Vietnamese speakers and the number of Italian speakers were not statistically different from one another.

² In 1990, the number of Portuguese speakers and the number of Japanese speakers were not statistically different from one another.

³ In 1990, Hindi included those who spoke Urdu.

Note: The estimates in this table vary from actual values due to sampling errors. As a result, the number of speakers of some languages shown in this table may not be statistically different from the number of speakers of languages not shown in this table.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3.

had only slightly more than one-fifth of the U.S. population aged 5 and over, it was home to more than one-third (37 percent) of all non-English-language speakers, the highest proportion of any region (see Table 2). Within regions, the proportion who spoke a non-English language at home was 29 percent in the West, 20 percent in the Northeast, 15 percent in the South, and only 9 percent in the Midwest.

Reflecting the higher proportion of speakers of non-English languages

in the West, people in that region were more likely than those in the other regions to have difficulty with English. In 2000, 14 percent of all people aged 5 and over in the West spoke English less than "Very well" — compared with 9 percent in the Northeast, 7 percent in the South, and 4 percent in the Midwest.

Figure 4 illustrates the prevalence of the four major non-English-language groups spoken in each region. Spanish was spoken more than any other language group in

all regions. The West and the South combined had about three times the number of Spanish speakers (21.0 million) as the Northeast and the Midwest combined (7.1 million). In the Northeast and the Midwest, Spanish speakers composed slightly less than half of all non-English-language speakers, while in the South and the West, they represented around two-thirds (71 percent and 64 percent, respectively), in large part because of the geographic proximity to Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries.

Table 2.
Language Use and English-Speaking Ability for the Population 5 Years and Over for the United States, Regions, and States and for Puerto Rico: 1990 and 2000

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf)

Area	1990			2000					1990 and 2000 percent change in "Spoke a language other than English at home"
	Population 5 years and over	Spoke a language other than English at home	Percent	Population 5 years and over	Spoke a language other than English at home	Percent	Spoke English less than "Very well"	Percent	
United States	230,445,777	31,844,979	13.8	262,375,152	46,951,595	17.9	21,320,407	8.1	47.4
Region									
Northeast	47,319,352	7,824,285	16.5	50,224,209	10,057,331	20.0	4,390,538	8.7	28.5
Midwest	55,272,756	3,920,660	7.1	60,054,144	5,623,538	9.4	2,398,120	4.0	43.4
South	79,248,852	8,669,631	10.9	93,431,879	14,007,396	15.0	6,149,756	6.6	61.6
West	48,604,817	11,430,403	23.5	58,664,920	17,263,330	29.4	8,381,993	14.3	51.0
State									
Alabama	3,759,802	107,866	2.9	4,152,278	162,483	3.9	63,917	1.5	50.6
Alaska	495,425	60,165	12.1	579,740	82,758	14.3	30,842	5.3	37.6
Arizona	3,374,806	700,287	20.8	4,752,724	1,229,237	25.9	539,937	11.4	75.5
Arkansas	2,186,665	60,781	2.8	2,492,205	123,755	5.0	57,709	2.3	103.6
California	27,383,547	8,619,334	31.5	31,416,629	12,401,756	39.5	6,277,779	20.0	43.9
Colorado	3,042,986	320,631	10.5	4,006,285	604,019	15.1	267,504	6.7	88.4
Connecticut	3,060,000	466,175	15.2	3,184,514	583,913	18.3	234,799	7.4	25.3
Delaware	617,720	42,327	6.9	732,378	69,533	9.5	28,380	3.9	64.3
District of Columbia	570,284	71,348	12.5	539,658	90,417	16.8	38,236	7.1	26.7
Florida	12,095,284	2,098,315	17.3	15,043,603	3,473,864	23.1	1,554,865	10.3	65.6
Georgia	5,984,188	284,546	4.8	7,594,476	751,438	9.9	374,251	4.9	164.1
Hawaii	1,026,209	254,724	24.8	1,134,351	302,125	26.6	143,505	12.7	18.6
Idaho	926,703	58,995	6.4	1,196,793	111,879	9.3	46,539	3.9	89.6
Illinois	10,585,838	1,499,112	14.2	11,547,505	2,220,719	19.2	1,054,722	9.1	48.1
Indiana	5,146,160	245,826	4.8	5,657,818	362,082	6.4	143,427	2.5	47.3
Iowa	2,583,526	100,391	3.9	2,738,499	160,022	5.8	68,108	2.5	59.4
Kansas	2,289,615	131,604	5.7	2,500,360	218,655	8.7	98,207	3.9	66.1
Kentucky	3,434,955	86,482	2.5	3,776,230	148,473	3.9	58,871	1.6	71.7
Louisiana	3,886,353	391,994	10.1	4,153,367	382,364	9.2	116,907	2.8	-2.5
Maine	1,142,122	105,441	9.2	1,204,164	93,966	7.8	24,063	2.0	-10.9
Maryland	4,425,285	395,051	8.9	4,945,043	622,714	12.6	246,287	5.0	57.6
Massachusetts	5,605,751	852,228	15.2	5,954,249	1,115,570	18.7	459,073	7.7	30.9
Michigan	8,594,737	569,807	6.6	9,268,782	781,381	8.4	294,606	3.2	37.1
Minnesota	4,038,361	227,161	5.6	4,591,491	389,988	8.5	167,511	3.6	71.7
Mississippi	2,378,805	66,516	2.8	2,641,453	95,522	3.6	36,059	1.4	43.6
Missouri	4,748,704	178,210	3.8	5,226,022	264,281	5.1	103,019	2.0	48.3
Montana	740,218	37,020	5.0	847,362	44,331	5.2	12,663	1.5	19.7
Nebraska	1,458,904	69,872	4.8	1,594,700	125,654	7.9	57,772	3.6	79.8
Nevada	1,110,450	146,152	13.2	1,853,720	427,972	23.1	207,687	11.2	192.8
New Hampshire	1,024,621	88,796	8.7	1,160,340	96,088	8.3	28,073	2.4	8.2
New Jersey	7,200,696	1,406,148	19.5	7,856,268	2,001,690	25.5	873,088	11.1	42.4
New Mexico	1,390,048	493,999	35.5	1,689,911	616,964	36.5	201,055	11.9	24.9
New York	16,743,048	3,908,720	23.3	17,749,110	4,962,921	28.0	2,310,256	13.0	27.0
North Carolina	6,172,301	240,866	3.9	7,513,165	603,517	8.0	297,858	4.0	150.6
North Dakota	590,839	46,897	7.9	603,106	37,976	6.3	11,003	1.8	-19.0
Ohio	10,063,212	546,148	5.4	10,599,968	648,493	6.1	234,459	2.2	18.7
Oklahoma	2,921,755	145,798	5.0	3,215,719	238,532	7.4	98,990	3.1	63.6
Oregon	2,640,482	191,710	7.3	3,199,323	388,669	12.1	188,958	5.9	102.7
Pennsylvania	11,085,170	806,876	7.3	11,555,538	972,484	8.4	368,257	3.2	20.5
Rhode Island	936,423	159,492	17.0	985,184	196,624	20.0	83,624	8.5	23.3
South Carolina	3,231,539	113,163	3.5	3,748,669	196,429	5.2	82,279	2.2	73.6
South Dakota	641,226	41,994	6.5	703,820	45,575	6.5	16,376	2.3	(NS)
Tennessee	4,544,743	131,550	2.9	5,315,920	256,516	4.8	108,265	2.0	95.0
Texas	15,605,822	3,970,304	25.4	19,241,518	6,010,753	31.2	2,669,603	13.9	51.4
Utah	1,553,351	120,404	7.8	2,023,875	253,249	12.5	105,691	5.2	110.3
Vermont	521,521	30,409	5.8	574,842	34,075	5.9	9,305	1.6	(NS)
Virginia	5,746,419	418,521	7.3	6,619,266	735,191	11.1	303,729	4.6	75.7
Washington	4,501,879	403,173	9.0	5,501,398	770,886	14.0	350,914	6.4	91.2
West Virginia	1,686,932	44,203	2.6	1,706,931	45,895	2.7	13,550	0.8	3.8
Wisconsin	4,531,134	263,638	5.8	5,022,073	368,712	7.3	148,910	3.0	39.9
Wyoming	418,713	23,809	5.7	462,809	29,485	6.4	8,919	1.9	23.8
Puerto Rico	3,522,037	(NA)	(NA)	3,515,228	3,008,567	85.6	2,527,156	71.9	(NA)

NA Not available. NS Not statistically different from zero at the 90-percent confidence level.

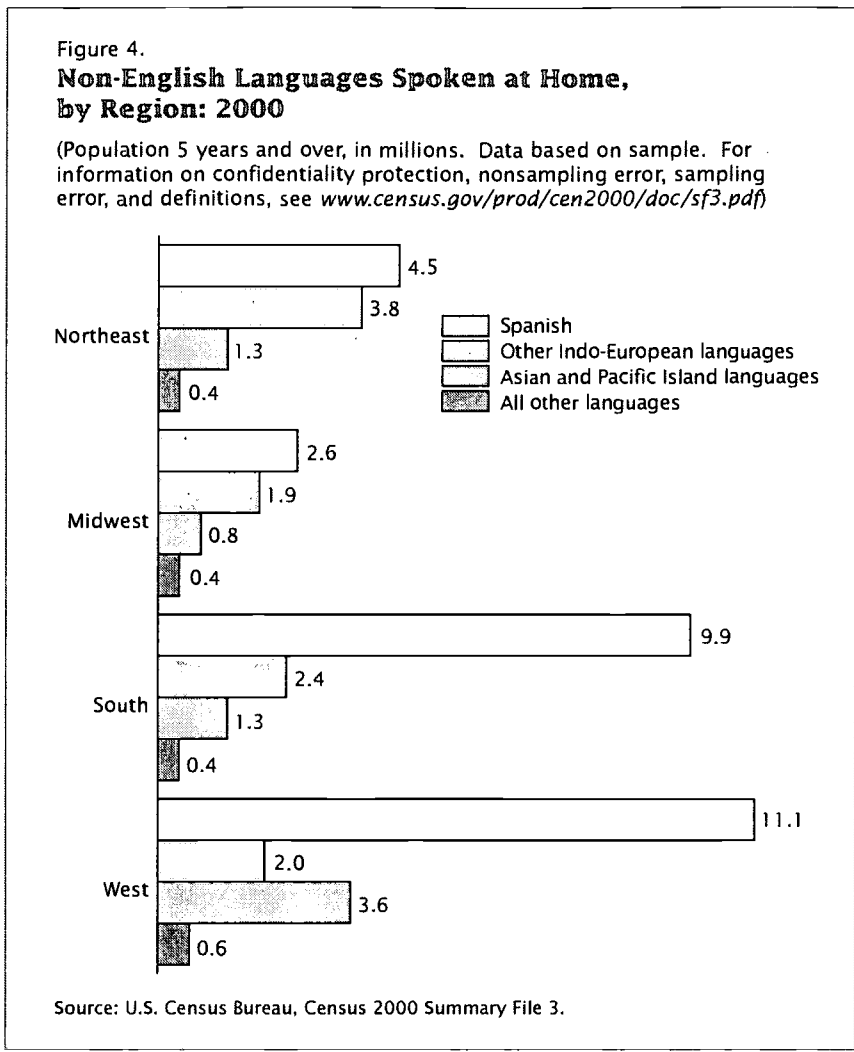
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3 and 1990 Census Summary Tape File 3.

In the Northeast, the Midwest, and the South, speakers of Other Indo-European languages made up the second largest non-English-language speaking group, while in the West, the second largest group was speakers of Asian and Pacific Island languages. Half of Asian and Pacific Island-language speakers lived in the West in 2000.

Table 3 shows the change in the number of speakers of Spanish, Other Indo-European languages, Asian and Pacific Island languages, and All other languages between 1990 and 2000. The largest percentage increase of Spanish speakers was in the Midwest. Asian and Pacific Island-language speakers increased most rapidly in the South and the Midwest. Although the number of Spanish speakers grew in all regions, more than three-fourths of that growth was in the West and the South. The number of Asian and Pacific Island-language speakers grew substantially in all regions, with the greatest numerical increase in the West, which was home to more than half of all Asian and Pacific Island-language speakers in both years.

More than one-quarter of the population in seven states spoke a language other than English at home in 2000.

California had the largest percentage of non-English-language speakers (39 percent), followed by New Mexico (37 percent), Texas (31 percent), New York (28 percent), Hawaii (27 percent), Arizona, and New Jersey (each about 26 percent, see Table 2). The five states with fewer than 5 percent of the population who spoke a language other than English at home were all in the South — Tennessee (4.8 percent), Alabama and Kentucky (each 3.9 percent), Mississippi



(3.6 percent), and West Virginia (2.7 percent).

Eight states had over 1 million non-English-language speakers in 2000, led by California (12.4 million) with more than twice the number of any other state. Texas had the second largest number of non-English-language speakers (6.0 million), followed by New York (5.0 million), Florida (3.5 million), Illinois (2.2 million), New Jersey (2.0 million), Arizona (1.2 million), and Massachusetts (1.1 million).

During the 1990s, California surpassed New Mexico as the state with the largest proportion of

non-English-language speakers.

While the proportion of non-English-language speakers in New Mexico increased slightly from 36 percent to 37 percent, the proportion in California jumped from 31 percent to 39 percent.

The number of non-English-language speakers at least doubled in six states from 1990 to 2000. The largest percentage increase occurred in Nevada, where the number increased by 193 percent. Nevada also had the highest rate of population increase during the decade. Georgia's non-English-language-speaking residents

Table 3.
Language Spoken at Home for the Population 5 Years and Over Who Spoke a Language Other Than English at Home for the United States and Regions: 1990 and 2000

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/st3.pdf)

Area	Spanish			Other Indo-European languages			Asian and Pacific Island languages			All other languages		
	1990	2000	Percent change	1990	2000	Percent change	1990	2000	Percent change	1990	2000	Percent change
United States	17,345,064	28,101,052	62.0	8,790,133	10,017,989	14.0	4,471,621	6,960,065	55.6	1,238,161	1,872,489	51.2
Region												
Northeast	3,133,043	4,492,168	43.4	3,547,154	3,778,958	6.5	845,442	1,348,621	59.5	298,646	437,584	46.5
Midwest	1,400,651	2,623,391	87.3	1,821,772	1,861,729	2.2	459,524	760,107	65.4	238,713	378,311	58.5
South	5,815,486	9,908,653	70.4	1,909,179	2,390,266	25.2	715,235	1,277,618	78.6	229,731	430,859	87.5
West	6,995,884	11,076,840	58.3	1,512,028	1,987,036	31.4	2,451,420	3,573,719	45.8	471,071	625,735	32.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3 and 1990 Census Summary Tape File 3.

increased by 164 percent, followed by North Carolina (151 percent), Utah (110 percent), Arkansas (104 percent), and Oregon (103 percent).⁷

Since 1990, the proportion of people who spoke a language other than English at home decreased in three states. North Dakota had the largest decrease (19 percent), followed by Maine (11 percent) and Louisiana (2 percent). These three states also had low rates of population growth from 1990 to 2000.

Counties with a large proportion of the population who spoke a language other than English at home were concentrated in border states.

Figure 5 illustrates the high proportions of people who spoke a language other than English at home in 2000 in the states that border Mexico, the Pacific Ocean, or the Atlantic Ocean. Some of these "border states" were entry points for many immigrants.

In 2000, in about 1 percent of the 3,141 counties in the United States, more than 60 percent of

the population spoke a language other than English at home. In seven counties, more than 80 percent of the population spoke a non-English language at home — Maverick, Webb, Starr, Kenedy, Zavala, Presidio, and Hidalgo — all in Texas. All but one of the 20 counties with the highest proportions of non-English-language speakers were located in Texas (Santa Cruz County, Arizona being the exception).

Figure 5 shows the high proportion of non-English-language speakers in counties with large cities, such as Atlanta, Chicago, Miami, and New York City. Other counties with relatively high proportions of non-English-language speakers included concentrations of people who spoke Native American languages.⁸ For example, in Bethel Census Area, Alaska, 66 percent of the population spoke a language other than English at home, and 97 percent of the non-English-language speakers spoke a Native North American language. The Navajo speakers in the Navajo Nation Indian Reservation, which spanned several counties throughout Arizona, New Mexico,

and Utah, accounted for a large proportion of the population who spoke a language other than English at home in these counties.

In some counties, relatively high proportions of non-English-language speakers are found in small, rural populations. For example, the proportions of non-English-language speakers were 25 percent in Logan County and 36 percent in McIntosh County in North Dakota and 33 percent in McPherson County in South Dakota.⁹ In these three counties, each with a population of fewer than 4,000, German speakers were predominant among non-English-language speakers: 95.3 percent, 98.1 percent, and 99.6 percent, respectively.¹⁰

Among all counties, the median percentage of the population who spoke a language other than English at home was 4.6 percent.¹¹ The fact that the proportion was

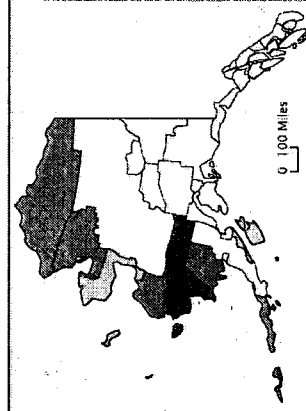
⁷ The percentage increases between Arkansas and Utah and between Arkansas and Oregon were not statistically different from one another.

⁸ For more detailed information on language use and English-speaking ability, see Summary File 3.

⁹ The proportions of non-English-language speakers in McIntosh County, North Dakota, and McPherson County, South Dakota, were not statistically different from each other.

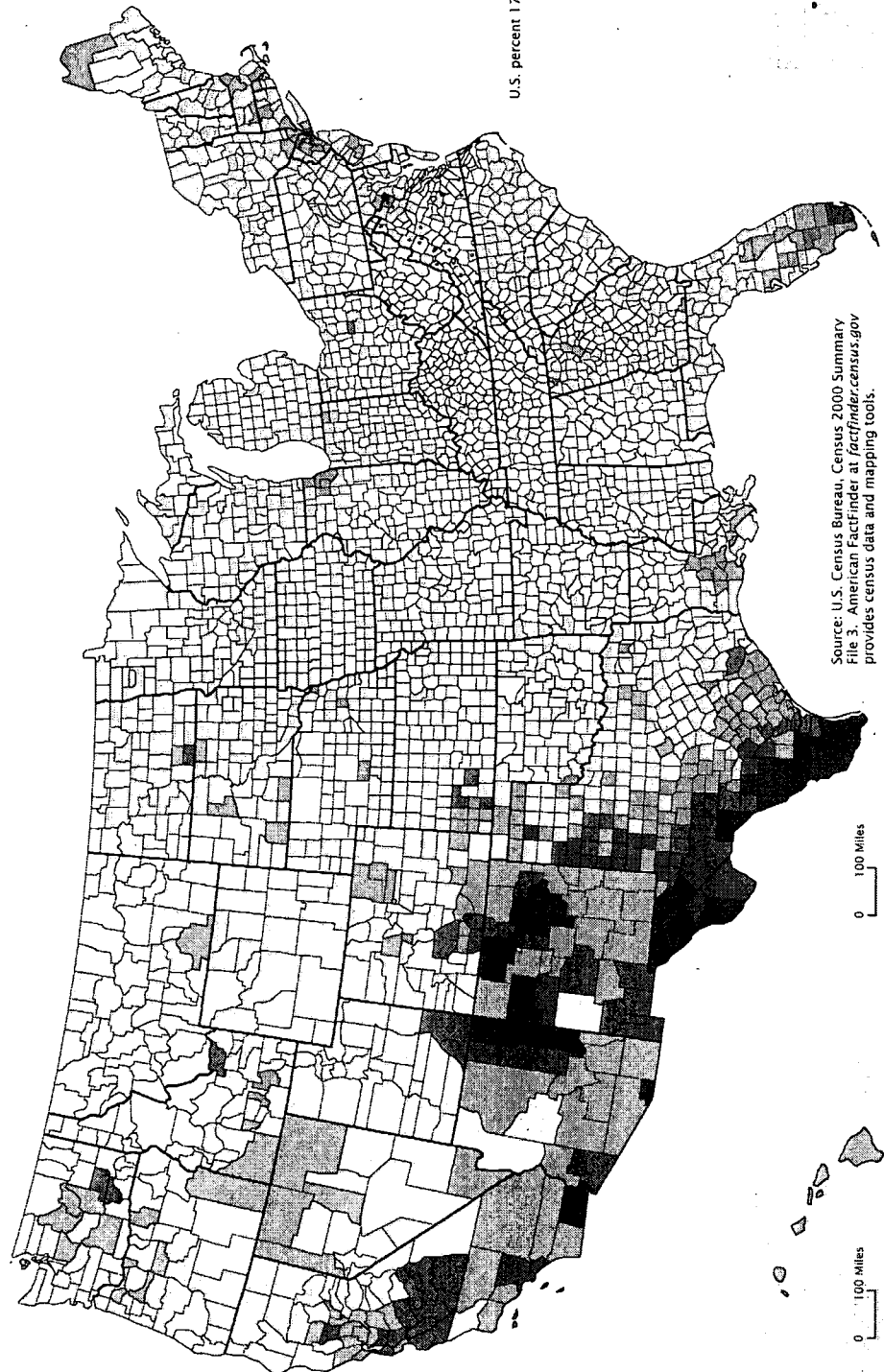
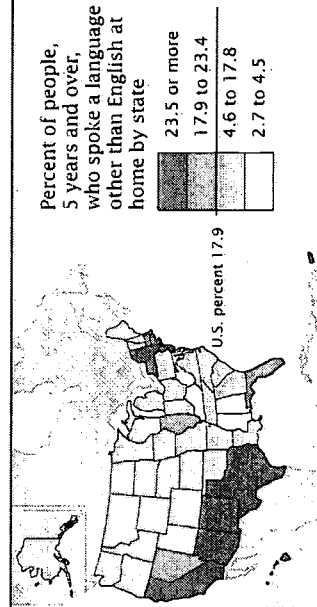
¹⁰ The proportions of German speakers among non-English-language speakers in Logan County and McIntosh County, North Dakota, were not statistically different from each other.

¹¹ The median percentage is a point estimate based on a sample.



**Figure 5.
People Who Spoke a Language
Other Than English at
Home: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf)



Percent of people, 5 years and over, who spoke a language other than English at home by county

60.0 or more
35.0 to 59.9
17.9 to 34.9
4.6 to 17.8
0.4 to 4.5

U.S. percent 17.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3. American Factfinder at factfinder.census.gov provides census data and mapping tools.

Table 4.
Ten Places of 100,000 or More Population With the Highest Percentage of People 5 Years and Over Who Spoke a Language Other Than English at Home, Who Spoke Spanish at Home, and Who Spoke English Less Than "Very Well": 2000

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf)

Place	Number	Percent	90-percent confidence interval
Spoke a Language Other Than English			
Hialeah, FL	197,504	92.6	92.3 - 92.9
Laredo, TX	145,510	91.8	91.4 - 92.2
East Los Angeles, CA ¹	97,645	87.4	86.8 - 88.0
Brownsville, TX	110,003	87.2	86.7 - 87.7
El Monte, CA	84,834	80.7	80.0 - 81.4
Santa Ana, CA	241,303	79.6	79.2 - 80.0
McAllen, TX	73,882	76.1	75.3 - 76.9
Miami, FL	254,536	74.6	74.2 - 75.0
El Paso, TX	369,000	71.3	70.9 - 71.7
Elizabeth, NJ	75,305	67.5	66.7 - 68.3
Spoke Spanish			
Hialeah, FL	195,884	91.9	91.6 - 92.2
Laredo, TX	144,633	91.3	90.9 - 91.7
Brownsville, TX	109,153	86.6	86.1 - 87.1
East Los Angeles, CA ¹	96,525	86.4	85.8 - 87.0
McAllen, TX	71,800	74.0	73.2 - 74.8
Santa Ana, CA	211,276	69.7	69.2 - 70.2
El Paso, TX	356,558	68.9	68.5 - 69.3
Miami, FL	227,293	66.6	66.1 - 67.1
El Monte, CA	64,889	61.8	61.0 - 62.6
Pomona, CA	74,557	55.0	54.2 - 55.8
Spoke English Less Than "Very Well"			
Hialeah, FL	126,358	59.3	58.7 - 59.9
East Los Angeles, CA ¹	57,966	51.9	51.1 - 52.7
Santa Ana, CA	156,692	51.7	51.2 - 52.2
El Monte, CA	53,662	51.1	50.2 - 52.0
Miami, FL	160,790	47.1	46.6 - 47.6
Laredo, TX	69,071	43.6	42.9 - 44.3
Brownsville, TX	52,970	42.0	41.2 - 42.8
Garden Grove, CA	57,313	37.6	36.9 - 38.3
Elizabeth, NJ	41,068	36.8	36.0 - 37.6
Salinas, CA	49,099	35.9	35.2 - 36.6

¹ East Los Angeles, CA, is a census designated place and is not legally incorporated.

Note: Because of sampling error, the estimates in this table may not be significantly different from one another or from rates for other places not listed in this table.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3.

below 4.6 percent in one-half of all counties, while the national average was 17.9 percent, reflects the large number of counties (primarily non-metropolitan counties in the Midwest and the South) with relatively small populations and with low proportions of non-English-language speakers.

Figure 5 illustrates the low proportions of non-English-language speakers in many counties in the South and the Midwest, including Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. In West Virginia, all but 2 of the 55 counties had a proportion of non-English-language speakers below 4.6 percent.

Places with the highest percentages of non-English-language speakers, Spanish speakers, and people who spoke English less than "Very well" were concentrated in California, Florida, and Texas.

Of the 245 places with 100,000 or more population in 2000, Hialeah, Florida, topped the list with 93 percent of the population aged 5 and over who spoke a language other than English at home in 2000.¹² In addition, 92 percent spoke Spanish and 59 percent spoke English less than "Very well" in Hialeah (see Table 4).¹³ Six additional places were included in all three categories in Table 4: Laredo and Brownsville, Texas; East Los Angeles, El Monte, and Santa Ana, California; and Miami, Florida.

McAllen and El Paso, Texas, and Elizabeth, New Jersey, were included in two of the three categories. Pomona, Garden Grove, and Salinas, all in California, were included in one of the three categories.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

How many people were linguistically isolated?

In the United States, the ability to speak English plays a large role in how well people can perform daily activities. How well a person speaks English may indicate how well he or she communicates with public officials, medical personnel, and other service providers. It

¹² Census 2000 showed 245 places in the United States with 100,000 or more population. They included 238 incorporated places (including 4 city-county consolidations) and 7 census designated places that were not legally incorporated. For a list of these places by state, see www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/phc-t6.html.

¹³ The percentages of people who spoke English less than "Very well" in Hialeah, Florida, and Laredo, Texas, were not statistically different from each other. The percentages of people who spoke Spanish in Hialeah, Florida, and Laredo, Texas, were also not statistically different from each other.

Linguistically Isolated Households

A linguistically isolated household is one in which no person aged 14 or over speaks English at least "Very well."

That is, no person aged 14 or over speaks only English at home, or speaks another language at home and speaks English "Very well."

A linguistically isolated person is any person living in a linguistically isolated household. All the members of a linguistically isolated household are tabulated as linguistically isolated, including members under 14 years old who may speak only English.

could also affect other activities outside the home, such as grocery shopping or banking. People who do not have a strong command of English and who do not have someone in their household to help them on a regular basis are at even more of a disadvantage. They are defined here as "linguistically isolated" (see text box above).

In 2000, 4.4 million households encompassing 11.9 million people were linguistically isolated. These numbers were significantly higher than in 1990, when 2.9 million households and 7.7 million people lived in those households.

ABOUT CENSUS 2000

Why Census 2000 Asked About Language Use and English-Speaking Ability

The question on language use and English-speaking ability provides government agencies with information for programs that serve the needs of people who have difficulty

speaking English. Under the Voting Rights Act, information about language ability is needed to meet statutory requirements for making voting materials available in minority languages.

The Bilingual Education Program uses data on language to allocate grants to school districts for children with limited English proficiency. These data also are needed for local agencies developing services for the elderly under the Older Americans Act.

Accuracy of the Estimates

The data contained in this report are based on the sample of households who responded to the Census 2000 long form. Nationally, approximately 1 out of every 6 housing units was included in this sample. As a result, the sample estimates may differ somewhat from the 100-percent figures that would have been obtained if all housing units, people within those housing units, and people living in group quarters had been enumerated using the same questionnaires, instructions, enumerators, and so forth. The sample estimates also differ from the values that would have been obtained from different samples of housing units, people within those housing units, and people living in group quarters. The deviation of a sample estimate from the average of all possible samples is called the sampling error.

In addition to the variability that arises from the sampling procedures, both sample data and 100-percent data are subject to nonsampling error. Nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the various complex operations used to collect and process data. Such errors may include: not enumerating every household or every person in the population, failing to

obtain all required information from the respondents, obtaining incorrect or inconsistent information, and recording information incorrectly. In addition, errors can occur during the field review of the enumerators' work, during clerical handling of the census questionnaires, or during the electronic processing of the questionnaires.

Nonsampling error may affect the data in two ways: (1) errors that are introduced randomly will increase the variability of the data and, therefore, should be reflected in the standard errors; and (2) errors that tend to be consistent in one direction will bias both sample and 100-percent data in that direction. For example, if respondents consistently tend to underreport their incomes, then the resulting estimates of households or families by income category will tend to be understated for the higher income categories and overstated for the lower income categories. Such biases are not reflected in the standard errors.

While it is impossible to completely eliminate error from an operation as large and complex as the decennial census, the Census Bureau attempts to control the sources of such error during the data collection and processing operations. The primary sources of error and the programs instituted to control error in Census 2000 are described in detail in *Summary File 3 Technical Documentation* under Chapter 8, "Accuracy of the Data," located at www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf.

All statements in this Census 2000 Brief have undergone statistical testing and all comparisons are significant at the 90-percent confidence level, unless otherwise noted. The estimates in tables, maps, and other figures may vary

from actual values due to sampling and nonsampling errors. As a result, estimates in one category may not be significantly different from estimates assigned to a different category. Further information on the accuracy of the data is located at www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf. For further information on the computation and use of standard errors, contact the Decennial Statistical Studies Division at 301-763-4242.

For More Information

The Census 2000 Summary File 3 data are available from the American FactFinder on the Internet (factfinder.census.gov).

They were released on a state-by-state basis during 2002. For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, sampling error, and definitions, also see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf or contact the Customer Services Center at 301-763-INFO (4636).

Information on population and housing topics is presented in the Census 2000 Brief series, located on the Census Bureau's Web site at www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html. This series presents information on race, Hispanic origin, age, sex, household type, housing tenure, and

social, economic, and housing characteristics, such as ancestry, income, and housing costs.

For additional information on language use and English-speaking ability, including reports and survey data, visit the Census Bureau's Internet site at www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/lang_use.html. To find information about the availability of data products, including reports, CD-ROMs, and DVDs, call the Customer Services Center at 301-763-INFO (4636), or e-mail webmaster@census.gov.



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