

Abstract

This Master's thesis aims to analyze the circumstances and grounds of the development of an English-Only Movement in the United States of America (USA), which pursues to establish English as the official language on a federal level, to evaluate its role in contemporary language policy in the United States where about half of all states do not have English enacted as the official language, and to confirm or reverse the thesis as to whether or not the English-Only movement is a right-wing conservative initiative and an influential interest group practicing a so-called language imperialism. This thesis describes the contemporary situation in five analyzed states and extends the topic by a language map of New York City as a historical gateway for immigrants into the United States. It also intends to analyze the contemporary language policy in the light of the new immigration law in a situation where the GOP has a majority in both Houses. The paper also has an ambition to introduce the existence, instruments and successes, or failures, respectively, of the movement to Czech professionals dealing with language issues.

In the first part, the paper outlines some important definitions, resources and methods applied herein, and provides a picture of the American identity, values and culture. The second part deals with the arrival and establishment of English in the United States and explains the background of the current issues in language and society. The third part explains the history and structure of key English-Only movements pursuing English as the only official language in the country, including some opposition groups pursuing language tolerance towards minorities, the approach of the society, political parties, civil initiatives and minorities towards the English-Only movement, the impact of the movement's activity on the equality in education of minorities and its pressure on national identity and cohesion of the society. The fourth part describes the language policy situation in five Southwestern states with a large Hispanic minority and the options they provide to English language learners (ELLs). Added to this chapter is an outline of the language map of New York City as a traditional point of entry for immigration and a considerably heterogeneous language space. The fifth part then summarizes the findings and conclusions and confirms or reverses the initial proposition of the (non)existence of the language imperialism.

The paper uses two research methods: 1) a historical method which tracks down the development of the movement and the opposition groups from its foundation to-date; 2) a comparative method focused on the activities of both trends and their impact on language policy.

Keywords

English, English language learner, language policy, linguistic imperialism, linguistic landscape, official language, the Movement