

Join the national conversation!



Word Generation - Unit 2.11

## Focus Words

specify | establish | cohesive | constrain | xenophobia



## Weekly Passage

If you ride the bus through an American city, you will hear many languages spoken. Many new immigrants have come to the U.S., speaking languages like Vietnamese, Russian, Spanish, and Creole.

Immigrants want to be able to use public services. Interpreters and written information in different languages help them use hospitals, libraries, and schools. If immigrants go to court, they want to understand what is being said. When new citizens vote, they want to be able to read the voting ballot.

Right now, the U.S. does not specify what languages can be used by the government. For example in many states, people can take the driver's test in their home language. But some people want to establish English as our official language. If English is the only official language, they say the country will be more unified or cohesive. Using other languages in schools, courts, and city hospitals would be constrained by law. Immigrants

would need to learn English right away or miss out on services.

Other people say this is just xenophobia, a fear of foreign people. Immigrants are learning English as fast as they can. They deserve services and information in the language they know.

What do you think? Should immigrants be provided government services in their home language? Or do you think making English the official language of the United States will help us come together?

### TEACHER - Discussion Questions

- ▶ Because the US doesn't specify English as our official language, have you seen other languages used in government signs or papers? Where have you seen these?
- ▶ Would establishing English as our official language cause any hardship?
- ▶ Where do you think xenophobia comes from? Why do some people react that way?
- ▶ What are some things that can make a country more cohesive?
- ▶ If we constrained the use of other languages, do you think immigrants would learn English faster?

# Unit 2.11

## Should English be the official language of the United States?

### Focus Word Chart - TEACHER VERSION

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
specify	(v.) - to clearly define	specifies specified specifying		specific specifically specification specifiable specifier	
establish	(v.) - to cause to be recognized and accepted	establishes establishing established		disestablish establishment	stable
cohesive	(adj.) - unified		cohere	cohesion cohesively cohering cohered cohesiveness	coherent incoherent adhesive hesitation
constrain	(v.) - to hold back	constrains constraining constrained		constraint unconstrained	strict stringent restrain
xenophobia	(n.) - a fear of foreign people		phobia	xenophobe xenophobic	phobic

# Should English be the official language of the United States?

## Problem of the Week



Immigrant families around the world face many difficulties. They face **xenophobia** as well as day-to-day struggles with things from buying food to making friends. Using their first language at home helps families be **cohesive**. It helps them stay connected to their roots. **Establishing** English as the official language of the U.S. would not legally **constrain** the everyday use of other languages. However, some people think that having an official language would decrease the use of other languages, even in people's homes. The 2000 United States census asked people to **specify** which language they speak at home.

**Option 1:** The most common non-English language spoken at home in the U.S. is Spanish. The 2000 U.S. Census counted 262,375,152 U.S. residents. Of these, 28,101,052 spoke Spanish at home. What percent of Americans speak Spanish at home?

A) about 10.7%

B) about 28.2%

C) about 32.6%

D) about 45.1%

**Option 2:** The second and third most popular non-English languages spoken at home in the U.S. are Chinese and French. Of the 262,375,152 people counted on the 2000 Census, 2,022,143 spoke Chinese, and 1,643,838 spoke French. If an American is selected at random, what is the probability that he or she speaks Chinese or French at home?

Answer: about 1.4%

**Discussion Question:** Most people who want English **established** as the official language say that they are not **xenophobic**, they just want to preserve America's national culture. **Specifying** a national language will give Americans more incentive to speak fluent English. How can we be a **cohesive** nation, they ask, if we can't talk to our neighbors? However, learning a new language is difficult, and takes time. Have you ever been in a place where people used a language you couldn't understand? Did it **constrain** your behavior? Did it prevent you from doing things? Why or why not?

# Should English be the official language of the United States?

## Debating the Issue



# GO!

## 1. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A** English should be the official language of the United States. This will make us a more cohesive nation would be helpful to everyone. No other languages should be used for government services.

**B** The United States should not have an official language. Having one would take away people's rights to free speech.

**C** Children in U.S. schools should be required to learn English, but adult immigrants should only learn English if they choose to do so.

**D** Making English the official language of the U.S. is a good idea, but people should still receive government services in their home language if they do not know English.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

*In my experience . . .*

*that's similar to what I think too...*

*What makes you think that?*

*When I re-read the text, it reminded me...*

## 2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

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### TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

# Should English be the official language of the United States?

## Science Activity

Professor Kahn's class is discussing ProEnglish, a group that wants to make English the official language of the U.S.

"That's a **xenophobic** view," says Louis. "Immigrants are Americans, too! States can help people by printing important information in languages immigrants can read. **Establishing** an official language will **constrain** the use of other languages."

"Hold on," says Richard. "If we don't **specify** a national language, immigrants might never learn English. Their kids might never learn English. There could be whole states where people speak only Spanish or Chinese. We would not be a **cohesive** nation!"

"I think I have some data about children and grandchildren of immigrants from Mexico," says Professor Kahn. "Do they speak English? Let's take a look!"

### Question:

Do the children and grandchildren of immigrants from Mexico speak Spanish, English, or both?

### Hypothesis:

Over 50% of the Mexican immigrants' grandchildren speak fluent English, and under 50% speak fluent Spanish.

### Materials:

- ▶ 200 people who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico.
- ▶ 200 people who were born in the U.S. and are the children of Mexican immigrants.
- ▶ 200 people who were born in the U.S. and are the grandchildren of Mexican immigrants.

### TEACHER

#### Real Research:

-The article cited below describes a sociological study that found only 35% of second-generation and 7% of third-generation Mexican-Americans were fluent in Spanish. A similar trend of families losing touch with their ancestral language was found in immigrant families from other Latin American countries.

Uranga, R. (2006, September 14). English as not a second language. Study: Descendants lose Spanish fluency. Daily News (Los Angeles, CA). Retrieved on January 11, 2010 from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/ENGLISH+AS+NOT+A+SECOND+LANGUAGE+STUDY:+DESCENDANTS+LOSE+SPANISH...-a01514038382010>

**Classroom Discussion:** Summarize the real research. (By the third generation, immigrant families tend to lose touch with their ancestral language.) Are students surprised by this finding? Why or why not? How does the finding connect to this week's topic? Which side(s) of the debate could it support?

**Procedure:**

1. Recruit subjects.
2. Test their fluency in Spanish and English.
3. Calculate the percentage of people who are fluent in Spanish, and the percentage who are fluent in English.

**Data:**

	Percentage who are fluent Spanish speakers	Percentage who are fluent English speakers
Immigrants from Mexico	99%	23%
Children of Mexican immigrants	35%	88%
Grandchildren of Mexican immigrants	7%	94%

**Conclusion:**

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Only 7% of the immigrants' grandchildren speak fluent Spanish, while 94% speak fluent English.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

specify | establish | cohesive | constrain | xenophobia

Check off what you accomplished:

- ☐ Included 1 focus word

☐ Included 1-2 focus words

☐ Used 2-5 focus words

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

## Unit 2.11

### Source References:

- » [http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/saoghal/mion-chanain/LSA\\_statement.txt](http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/saoghal/mion-chanain/LSA_statement.txt)
- » <http://www.us-english.org/inc/>
- » <http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/lewell01.html>