

# Language Use in the United States: 2011

## American Community Survey Reports

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### INTRODUCTION

English is the language spoken by most people in the United States. The official language of many states is English<sup>1</sup> and it is the language used in nearly all governmental functions. Despite this predominance, many people in the United States speak languages other than English, and there has long been an interest in these groups and in how well they are able to participate in civic life and interact with the English-speaking majority. Beginning in 1890, the U.S. Census Bureau started inquiring about the languages that people spoke and, with some interruptions in the middle of the twentieth century, similar questions continue to this day.

The primary purpose of the current questions on language use is to measure the portion of the U.S. population that may need help in understanding English. These data are used in a wide variety of legislative, policy, and research applications as well as for legal, financial, and marketing decisions. People who speak a particular language other than English and cannot speak English “very well” can be helped with translation services, education, or assistance in accessing government services. The federal government uses data on language use and English-speaking ability to determine which local areas must provide language-assistance services under the Voting Rights Act. These data are also used to allocate educational funds to states to help their schools teach students with lower levels of English proficiency. In 2000,

<sup>1</sup> Schildkraut, Deborah, 2001, “Official-English and the States: Influences on Declaring English the Official Language in the United States,” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 2: pp. 445-457.

Figure 1.  
Reproduction of the Questions on Language From the 2011 American Community Survey

**4**

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

Yes

No →SKIP to question 15a

**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, 2011 American Community Survey.

President Clinton signed an executive order requiring federal agencies to identify the need for services to those with limited English proficiency (LEP) and to implement a system to provide meaningful access to language-assistance services. Agencies rely on these data to determine how and where to provide language-assistance services.<sup>2</sup> Many other institutions, organizations, local governments, and private enterprises make use of these data in similar ways.

<sup>2</sup> See <[www.lep.gov](http://www.lep.gov)>.

The Census Bureau collected language data in the 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial censuses using a series of three questions asked of the population 5 years old and over. The first question asked if the person spoke a language other than English at home. Those who responded “yes” to this question were then asked to report the language that they spoke. The Census Bureau coded these responses into 381 detailed language categories. The third question asked how well that person spoke English, with answer categories of “very well,” “well,” “not well,” and “not at all.” Beginning in 2010, the questions were no longer asked on the decennial census. These same three questions (Figure 1) are now asked each year on the American Community Survey (ACS), which is the primary source of language data.

This report relies primarily on data from the 2011 ACS. Language and English-speaking ability questions that were historically collected once every 10 years in the decennial census are now captured annually in the ACS. The ACS collects information from a large annual sample of approximately 3 million housing unit addresses and therefore provides more reliable statistics. The ACS is administered to a sample of the entire resident population, including those living in group quarters, which makes most estimates from the ACS comparable with those from earlier censuses.<sup>3</sup> Taking advantage of this fact, the report also provides a historical look at languages other than English spoken in the United States since 1980. The report also looks at characteristics of the population speaking a language other than

<sup>3</sup> A paper comparing ACS data to census data was prepared by the Census Bureau in 2008. See <[www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/Library/2008/Language\\_Comparison\\_Report\\_2008-03.pdf](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/Library/2008/Language_Comparison_Report_2008-03.pdf)>.

## Four Major Language Groups

**Spanish** includes Spanish, Spanish Creole, and 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, Gujarati, 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 Telugu, 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 indigenous languages of Central and South America.

English. The ACS also provides reliable estimates for small levels of geography, including counties, cities, and tracts, allowing exploration of the distribution of language use across states and metropolitan areas of the United States.

## LANGUAGES SPOKEN

Table 1 provides some basic information from the 2011 ACS about speakers of non-English languages and their English-speaking ability. Of 291.5 million people aged 5 and over, 60.6 million people (21 percent of this population) spoke a language other than English at home. While the Census Bureau codes 381 detailed languages, data tabulations are not generally available for all of these detailed groups. Instead, the Census Bureau collapses languages into smaller sets of “language groups.” The most detail used in standard data products separates out 39 languages and language

groups (Table 1). The simplest uses four major groups: Spanish, Other Indo-European languages, Asian and Pacific Island languages, and All Other languages. These four groups are explained further in the text box.

One question that sometimes arises is, “How many languages are spoken in the United States?” To answer this question, we have to decide what constitutes a unique language. To develop its list of languages, the Census Bureau consulted reference works such as *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*,<sup>4</sup> which lists 6,909 languages. From these sources, the Census Bureau created a list of 381 languages, with less detail provided for languages rarely spoken in this country. Accepting this list, a second issue is that the count of languages is limited to those that people report speaking

<sup>4</sup> See <[www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)>.



Table 1.

## Detailed Languages Spoken at Home by English-Speaking Ability for the Population 5 Years and Over: 2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))

Characteristics	Population 5 years and over (Number)	Spoke a language other than English at home <sup>1</sup>	English-speaking ability <sup>2</sup> (Percent)			
			Spoke English "very well"	Spoke English "well"	Spoke English "not well"	Spoke English "not at all"
<b>Population 5 years and over</b> .....		X	X	X	X	X
Spoke only English at home .....		X	X	X	X	X
<b>Spoke a language other than English at home</b> ..	<b>60,577,020</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>58.2</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>7.0</b>
Spanish or Spanish Creole .....	37,579,787	62.0	56.3	17.8	16.9	9.0
Other Indo-European languages:						
French .....	1,301,443	2.1	79.6	13.9	5.9	0.6
French Creole .....	753,990	1.2	56.8	23.8	15.2	4.3
Italian .....	723,632	1.2	73.5	17.1	8.6	0.8
Portuguese .....	673,566	1.1	61.8	20.8	13.5	3.9
German .....	1,083,637	1.8	82.9	13.1	3.6	0.3
Yiddish .....	160,968	0.3	68.4	17.7	10.2	3.7
Other West Germanic languages .....	290,461	0.5	77.6	17.9	3.7	0.8
Scandinavian languages .....	135,025	0.2	90.6	7.7	1.6	0.1
Greek .....	304,928	0.5	75.3	15.5	7.8	1.4
Russian .....	905,843	1.5	52.3	25.6	16.8	5.3
Polish .....	607,531	1.0	60.0	23.4	13.8	2.8
Serbo-Croatian .....	269,624	0.4	61.7	21.9	13.6	2.9
Other Slavic languages .....	336,062	0.6	62.1	22.8	11.9	3.3
Armenian .....	246,915	0.4	53.8	22.2	16.5	7.6
Persian .....	407,586	0.7	62.7	21.9	12.0	3.4
Gujarati .....	358,422	0.6	63.8	20.2	12.2	3.8
Hindi .....	648,983	1.1	77.0	16.3	5.3	1.4
Urdu .....	373,851	0.6	70.0	19.3	9.2	1.5
Other Indic languages .....	815,345	1.3	60.6	23.7	10.9	4.9
Other Indo-European languages .....	449,600	0.7	65.1	21.5	9.9	3.4
Asian and Pacific Island languages:						
Chinese .....	2,882,497	4.8	44.3	26.1	19.9	9.7
Japanese .....	436,110	0.7	57.5	27.4	13.9	1.2
Korean .....	1,141,277	1.9	44.5	27.0	24.4	4.0
Mon-Khmer, Cambodian .....	212,505	0.4	47.1	23.4	22.9	6.6
Hmong .....	211,227	0.3	56.7	22.2	14.9	6.2
Thai .....	163,251	0.3	43.4	34.8	18.9	2.8
Laotian .....	140,866	0.2	50.9	22.1	22.7	4.3
Vietnamese .....	1,419,539	2.3	39.8	27.1	25.8	7.3
Other Asian languages .....	855,303	1.4	69.3	19.6	8.4	2.7
Tagalog .....	1,594,413	2.6	67.2	25.6	6.7	0.5
Other Pacific Island languages .....	428,476	0.7	61.6	25.7	11.7	1.1
Other languages:						
Navajo .....	169,369	0.3	78.8	14.2	4.8	2.2
Other Native American languages .....	195,407	0.3	85.4	11.4	2.9	0.3
Hungarian .....	93,102	0.2	71.0	21.1	7.3	0.7
Arabic .....	951,699	1.6	63.3	21.7	11.9	3.1
Hebrew .....	216,343	0.4	84.7	11.9	2.9	0.5
African languages .....	884,660	1.5	68.1	21.1	8.6	2.1
All other languages .....	153,777	0.3	56.3	19.7	14.8	9.3

X Not applicable.

<sup>1</sup> The percentage in this column is calculated as the number of speakers of the specific language divided by the total number of those who spoke a language other than English at home (60,577,020).

<sup>2</sup> The percentages for these columns are calculated as the number of those who spoke English "very well," "well," "not well," or "not at all" for a particular language divided by the total number of those who spoke that language.

Note: Margins of error for all estimates can be found in the Appendix Table 1 <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table1.xls](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table1.xls)>. For more information on the ACS, see <[www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.



the language at home. Therefore, while no definitive answer to the question is available, a tabulation from the 2006–2008 ACS listed over 300 languages spoken in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the languages spoken in the United States are native North American languages. The ACS provides codes for 169 distinct native North American languages, and 134 of these languages were recorded in the tabulations from 2006–2008. In 2011, the Census Bureau published a brief report on native North American languages spoken in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

### ENGLISH-SPEAKING ABILITY

Most people who spoke a non-English language at home also reported that they spoke English “very well” (Table 4). Overall, the proportion was 58 percent who spoke “very well,” with another 19 percent who spoke English “well,” 15 percent who spoke “not well,” and 7 percent who spoke English “not at all.”

The usefulness of the self-rated English-speaking ability question was established in the 1980s, when research confirmed a strong relation between this rating and separate tests of ability to perform

tasks in English.<sup>7</sup> In many of its tables, the Census Bureau makes a distinction between those who speak English only or speak English “very well” on the one hand and those who speak English less than “very well” on the other.

Even among the speakers of the top ten languages, English-speaking ability varied greatly (Figure 2). A high proportion (80 percent or more) of French and German speakers spoke English “very well.” In contrast, less than 50 percent of those who spoke Korean, Chinese, or Vietnamese spoke English “very well.” The proportion of those who spoke English “very well” among Russian, Spanish, French Creole, Arabic, and Tagalog speakers ranged from 52 percent to 67 percent.

Among the most common non-English languages in 2011, Spanish experienced growth in the past several years. Interestingly, while the percentage of the total population 5 years and over who spoke Spanish increased from 2005 to 2011, the percentage of the total population who spoke Spanish and spoke English less than “very well” actually decreased (Figure 3). The percentage of the total population 5 years and over who spoke Spanish grew from 12.0 percent

in 2005 to 12.9 percent in 2011, while the percentage who spoke Spanish and spoke English less than “very well” decreased from 5.7 percent in 2005 to 5.6 percent in 2011.

Overall, speakers of all languages other than English who spoke English less than “very well” had not changed as a percentage of the total population 5 years and over from 2007 to 2011 (8.7 percent). This percentage had increased from 8.1 percent in 2000 to 8.7 percent in 2007.

### LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN THE UNITED STATES: A HISTORICAL LOOK

Data on language spoken and ability to speak English were first collected in the census of 1890 (Appendix A). The form of census questions about language has varied over the years, as well as the population covered. In 1890 and 1900, all people 10 years old and over who did not speak English were asked what language they spoke. In 1910, 1920, 1930, and 1960, foreign-born people were asked about their “mother tongue” (the language spoken in the household when the respondent was growing up). Finally, in the 1980 Census, and in data collections since that time, respondents were asked the standard set of three questions shown in Figure 1. These questions are now asked of everyone aged 5 and over in the household.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Department of Education, Office of Planning Budget and Evaluation, 1987, “Numbers of Limited English Proficient Children: National, State and Language-Specific Estimates” (April) mimeo, which examined the school-aged population and Kominski, Robert, 1989, “How Good is ‘How Well’? An Examination of the Census English-Speaking Ability Question,” accessed at <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/census/ASApaper1989.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/census/ASApaper1989.pdf)>, presented at the Annual meetings of the American Statistical Association, which examined the general population.

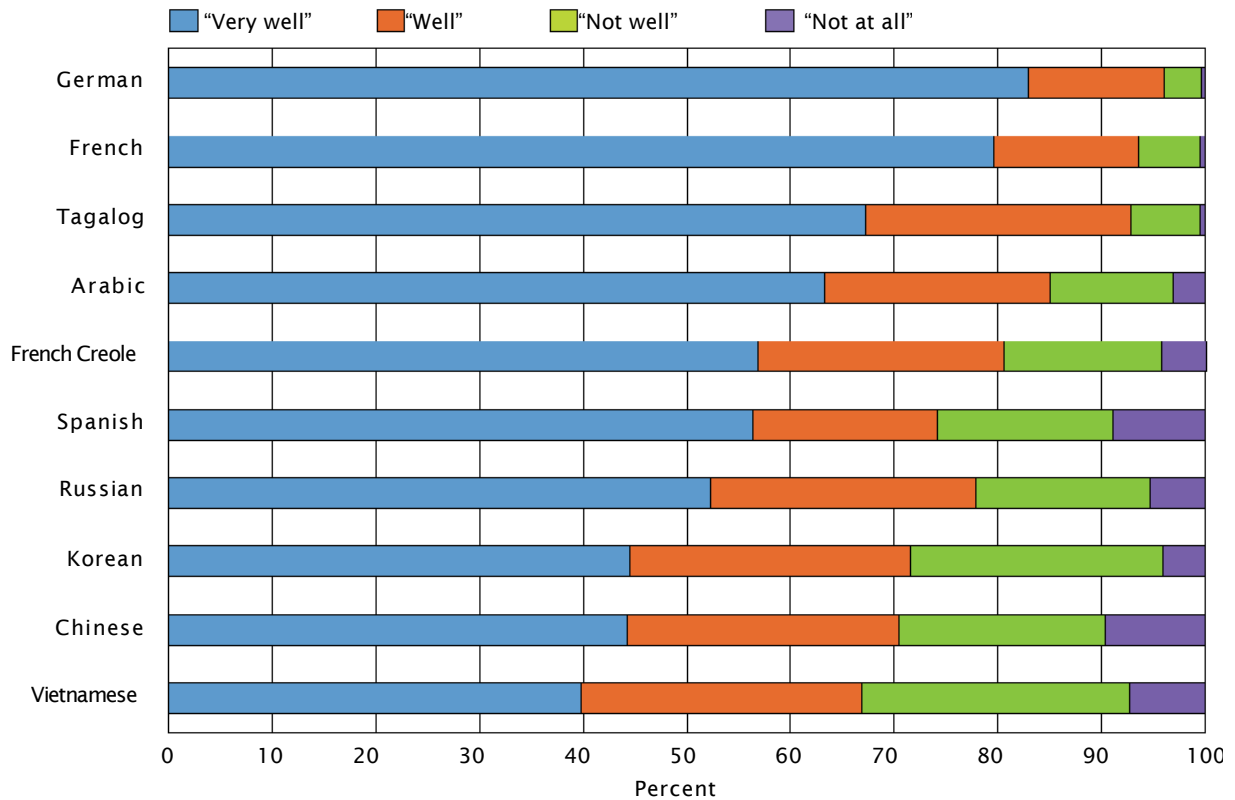
<sup>6</sup> See <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/other/detailed-lang-tables.xls](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/other/detailed-lang-tables.xls)>.

<sup>7</sup> See <[www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-10.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-10.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> See Gillian Stevens, 1999, “A Century of U.S. Censuses and the Language Characteristics of Immigrants,” *Demography*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 387–397.



Figure 2.  
**English-Speaking Ability for the Top Ten Languages: 2011**  
 (Population 5 years and over who spoke a language other than English at home)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.

Table 2 provides a detailed list of 17 of the common languages other than English spoken in the home for the period 1980 to 2010.<sup>9</sup> This list provides data for only those languages that were available in all

<sup>9</sup> Data from 1980, 1990, and 2000 are from decennial censuses, while the data from 2010 come from the 2010 ACS. For more information about language use and English-speaking ability differences between the census and the ACS, read "Comparison of the Estimates on Language Use and English-Speaking Ability from the ACS, the C2SS, and Census 2000 (Report)." This report can be accessed at <[www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/library/2008/Language\\_Comparison\\_Report\\_2008-03.pdf](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/library/2008/Language_Comparison_Report_2008-03.pdf)>.

four time periods. In 1980, 23.1 million people spoke a language other than English at home, compared with 59.5 million people in 2010 (a 158 percent increase, during which time the population grew 38 percent).

Some languages showed remarkable growth since 1980, while others declined. The largest numeric increase was for Spanish speakers (25.9 million more in 2010 than in 1980). Vietnamese speakers had the largest percentage increase

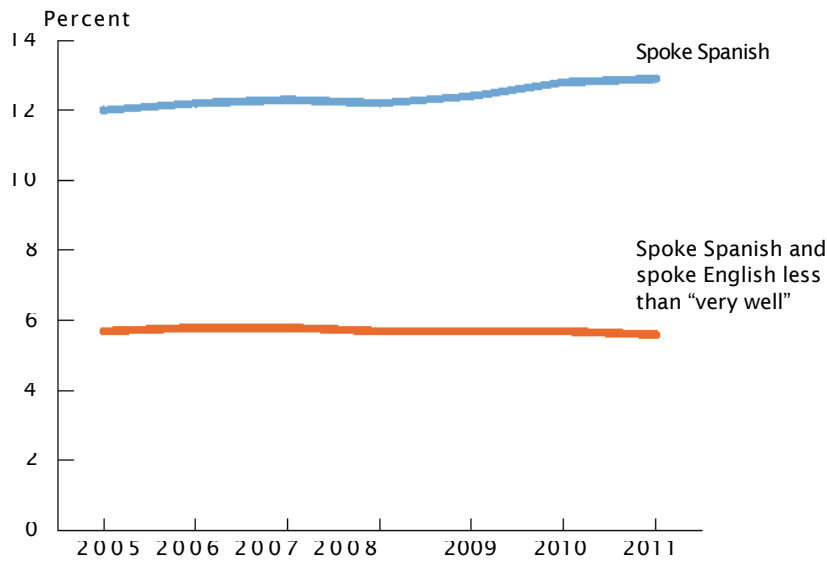
(599 percent). Eight languages more than doubled during the period, including four that had 200,000 speakers or fewer in 1980: Russian, Persian, Armenian, and Vietnamese.

While increased immigration led to gains for some language groups, other groups experienced aging populations and dwindling migrant flows into the United States. The languages that declined in use since 1980 include Italian, which had a net decline of about 900,000





Figure 3.  
**Percentage Who Spoke Spanish and Percentage Who Spoke Spanish and Spoke English Less Than “Very Well” of the Population 5 Years and Over: 2005–2011**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 American Community Surveys.

speakers (55 percent decline). Other languages, such as Polish, Yiddish, German, and Greek, have also seen large proportionate decreases.

The Census Bureau recently examined the future of language use in the United States. Two offsetting influences determine the number of people in the United States who speak a language other than English. The first is immigration—if an increased number of

people enter the country from places where English is not the main language, the number who speak other languages at home will increase. A second major influence is population aging—as people get older and spend time in the United States, they are increasingly likely to make English their main language of communication. The research shows that we can expect a small increase in the percentage

who speak a language other than English at home in coming years.<sup>10</sup>

Even looking over the span of a little more than a decade, changes in language use are evident. Several languages or language groups experienced major growth between 2000 and 2011 (Figure 4). South Asian languages in particular experienced high levels of growth. “Other Asian languages,” a group comprised mostly of the South Asian languages, Malayalam, Telugu, and Tamil, grew by 115 percent, and Hindi grew by 105 percent.<sup>11</sup> “Other Indic languages” (languages such as Punjabi, Bengali, and Marathi) grew by 86 percent. The slowest growing South Asian languages were Gujarati (52 percent) and Urdu (42 percent).<sup>12</sup>

“African languages,” which includes languages such as Amharic, Ibo, Yoruba, and Swahili, also experienced significant growth of 111 percent.<sup>13</sup> This indicates that the number of speakers in this language group more than doubled. In comparison, the growth of Spanish

<sup>10</sup> See <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Ortman\\_Shin\\_ASA2011\\_paper.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Ortman_Shin_ASA2011_paper.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> The percentage change for “Other Asian languages” was not statistically different from the percentage change for Hindi.

<sup>12</sup> The percentage change for Gujarati was not statistically different from the percentage change for Urdu.

<sup>13</sup> The percentage change for “African languages” was not statistically different from the percentage change for “Other Asian languages” or Hindi.



**Table 2.**

**Languages Spoken at Home for the Population 5 Years and Over: 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010**

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))

Characteristics	1980	1990	2000	2010	Percentage change 1980–2010
<b>Population 5 years and over</b> . . . . .	<b>210,247,455</b>	<b>230,445,777</b>	<b>262,375,152</b>	<b>289,215,746</b>	<b>37.6</b>
Spoke only English at home . . . . .	187,187,415	198,600,798	215,423,557	229,673,150	22.7
Spoke a language other than English at home <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	23,060,040	31,844,979	46,951,595	59,542,596	158.2
<b>Spoke a language other than English at home<sup>1,2</sup> . . .</b>	<b>23,060,040</b>	<b>31,844,979</b>	<b>46,951,595</b>	<b>59,542,596</b>	<b>158.2</b>
Spanish or Spanish Creole . . . . .	11,116,194	17,345,064	28,101,052	36,995,602	232.8
French (incl. Patois, Cajun, Creole) . . . . .	1,550,751	1,930,404	2,097,206	2,069,352	33.4
Italian . . . . .	1,618,344	1,308,648	1,008,370	725,223	-55.2
Portuguese or Portuguese Creole . . . . .	351,875	430,610	564,630	688,326	95.6
German . . . . .	1,586,593	1,547,987	1,383,442	1,067,651	-32.7
Yiddish . . . . .	315,953	213,064	178,945	154,763	-51.0
Greek . . . . .	401,443	388,260	365,436	307,178	-23.5
Russian . . . . .	173,226	241,798	706,242	854,955	393.5
Polish . . . . .	820,647	723,483	667,414	608,333	-25.9
Serbo-Croatian . . . . .	150,255	70,964	233,865	284,077	89.1
Armenian . . . . .	100,634	149,694	202,708	240,402	138.9
Persian . . . . .	106,992	201,865	312,085	381,408	256.5
Chinese . . . . .	630,806	1,319,462	2,022,143	2,808,692	345.3
Japanese . . . . .	336,318	427,657	477,997	443,497	31.9
Korean . . . . .	266,280	626,478	894,063	1,137,325	327.1
Vietnamese . . . . .	197,588	507,069	1,009,627	1,381,488	599.2
Tagalog . . . . .	474,150	843,251	1,224,241	1,573,720	231.9

<sup>1</sup> The languages highlighted in this table are the languages where data were available for the four time periods: 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The total does not match the sum of the 17 languages listed in this table because the total includes all the other languages that are not highlighted here.

Note: Margins of error for all estimates can be found in the Appendix Table 2 <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table2.xls](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table2.xls)>. For more information on the ACS, see <[www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980 and 1990 Census, Census 2000, and the 2010 American Community Survey.

speakers (34 percent) was much smaller even though Spanish continued to have the largest number of speakers in 2000 and 2011.

On the other hand, several Indo-European languages experienced a decline during that same time period. The number of Italian speakers decreased by 28 percent. The number of French, Hungarian, and German speakers also declined by about 20 percent.

**LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING ABILITY BY SELECTED SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

**Age and English-Speaking Ability**

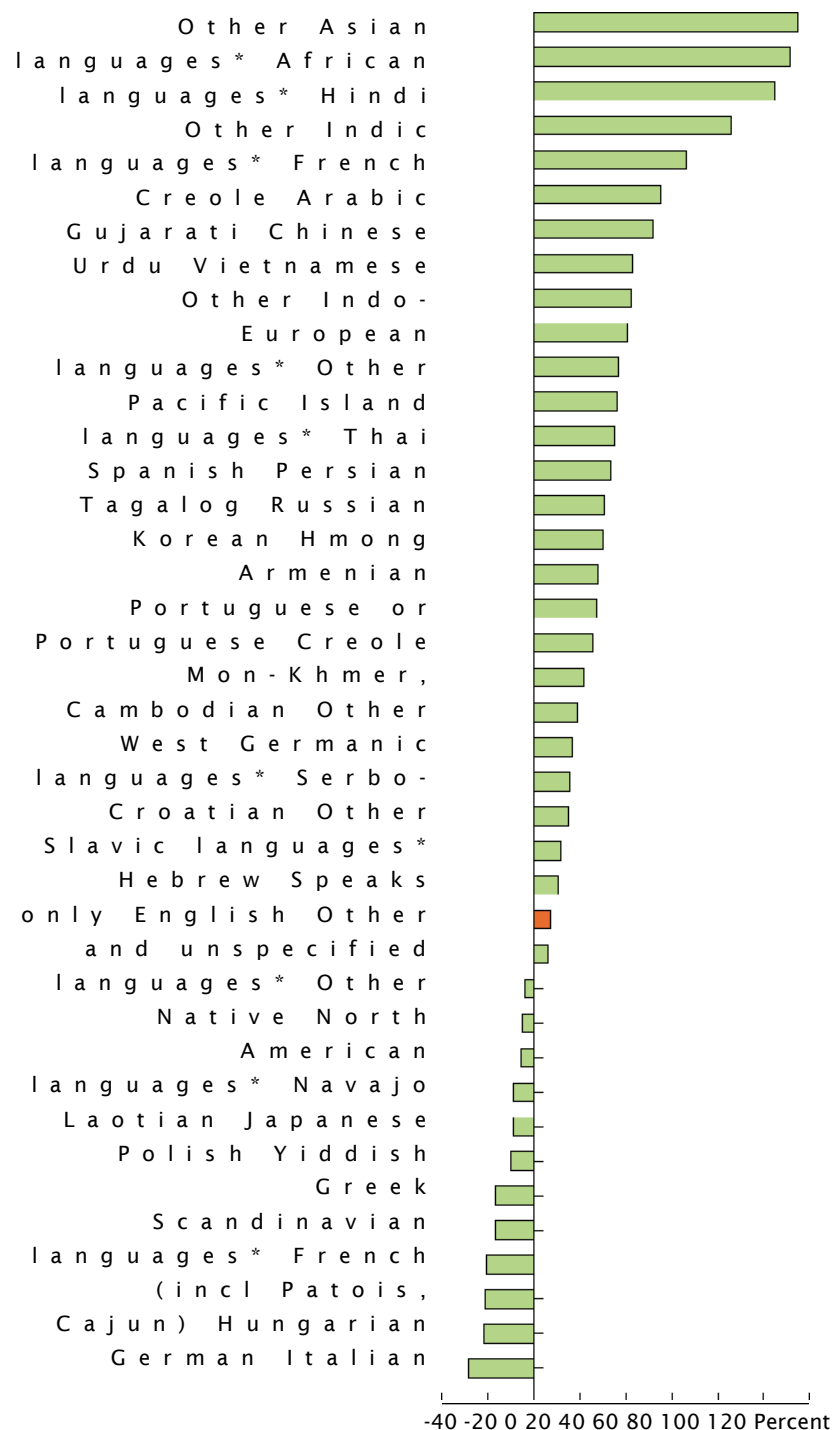
Table 3 shows language spoken at home and English-speaking ability for Spanish and non-Spanish speakers for selected demographic

and social characteristics. Spanish speakers were less likely to speak English “very well” (56 percent) than those who spoke another language (61 percent). However, both groups’ English-speaking ability varied by demographic characteristics. Those who were young and were native born were more likely to speak English “very well.” Of the population 15 to 19 years old, 83 percent of those who spoke



Figure 4.  
**Percentage Change in Language Spoken at Home:  
 2000–2011**

(Population 5 years and over)



\*For examples of specific languages within these groups, see Appendix A of the 2011 subject definitions, located at [www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data\\_documentation/SubjectDefinitions/2011\\_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/SubjectDefinitions/2011_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 2011 American Community Survey.

Spanish and 81 percent of those who spoke a language other than Spanish spoke English “very well.”

### Race and Ethnicity and English-Speaking Ability

Spanish speakers who were non-Hispanic White, Black, or Asian were more likely to speak English “very well” compared with those who were Hispanic.<sup>14</sup> The difference between non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics who spoke English “very well” was 27 percentage points. There was also variation in English-speaking ability among those who spoke a language other than Spanish. Among those who spoke a language other than Spanish, Asians were least likely to speak English “very well.” However, none of the differences between groups was as large as the difference between Spanish-speaking Hispanics and Spanish-speaking non-Hispanic Whites. Differences are also present across detailed race and Hispanic-origin groups, as examined in a recent Census Bureau report.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). This report shows data using the first approach (race alone). This report will refer to the White-alone population as White, the Black-alone population as Black, the Asian-alone population as Asian, and the White-alone-non-Hispanic population as non-Hispanic White. Use of the single-race population does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. In this report, the term “non-Hispanic White” refers to people who are not Hispanic and who reported White and no other race. The Census Bureau uses non-Hispanic Whites as the comparison group for other race groups and Hispanics. Because Hispanics may be any race, data in this report for Hispanics overlap with data for racial groups.

<sup>15</sup> See [www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acsbr09-19.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acsbr09-19.pdf).



Table 3.

## Language Spoken at Home by English-Speaking Ability by Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics for the Population 5 Years and Over: 2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions,

see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))

Characteristics	Population 5 years and over (Number)	Spoke a language other than English at home (Percent)	Spoke a language other than English at home					
			Spoke Spanish			Spoke a language other than Spanish		
			Population 5 years and over (Number)	Spoke English "very well" (Percent)	Spoke English less than "very well" (Percent)	Population 5 years and over (Number)	Spoke English "very well" (Percent)	Spoke English less than "very well" (Percent)
<b>Total</b>		<b>20.8</b>	<b>37,579,787</b>	<b>56.3</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>22,997,233</b>	<b>61.4</b>	<b>38.6</b>
<b>Age</b>								
5 to 14 years	41,131,310	21.8	6,451,625	76.2	23.8	2,535,007	77.6	22.4
15 to 19 years	21,822,474	22.3	3,412,795	82.7	17.3	1,449,462	80.6	19.4
20 to 39 years	83,350,155	25.6	13,853,503	55.3	44.7	7,450,076	68.9	31.1
40 to 59 years	85,944,236	19.5	9,795,839	42.9	57.1	6,980,244	53.9	46.1
60 years and over	59,275,916	14.6	4,066,025	38.7	61.3	4,582,444	45.3	54.7
<b>Sex</b>								
Male		20.9	18,914,621	55.6	44.4	10,952,898	63.1	36.9
Female		20.7	18,665,166	57.0	43.0	12,044,335	59.8	40.2
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>								
White alone		15.2	24,469,328	57.4	42.6	8,688,628	69.4	30.6
Non-Hispanic White alone		5.8	2,174,426	80.9	19.1	8,588,900	69.4	30.6
Black alone	36,354,608	8.3	881,899	68.1	31.9	2,128,247	64.8	35.2
Asian alone	14,148,367	76.7	77,751	74.3	25.7	10,777,195	53.0	47.0
Hispanic (of any race)	46,782,479	74.7	34,745,940	54.3	45.7	203,075	68.6	31.4
<b>Nativity Status</b>								
Native		10.6	19,487,953	80.9	19.1	7,185,626	84.8	15.2
Foreign born:								
Naturalized citizen	18,094,967	79.0	5,431,946	44.8	55.2	8,856,595	54.4	45.6
Not a citizen	22,048,387	89.0	12,659,888	23.4	76.6	6,955,012	45.9	54.1
<b>Educational Attainment<sup>1</sup></b>								
Less than 12th grade	29,089,305	42.9	9,609,518	21.1	78.9	2,855,281	24.0	76.0
High school graduate	58,653,211	16.6	6,321,485	48.1	51.9	3,423,791	44.3	55.7
Some college, or associate's degree	59,838,341	14.6	5,029,756	69.8	30.2	3,726,173	61.7	38.3
Bachelor's degree or more	58,890,813	18.0	3,279,205	73.5	26.5	7,321,209	71.4	28.6
<b>Employment Status<sup>2</sup></b>								
In labor force:								
Employed		21.0	17,955,542	52.2	47.8	11,542,775	63.7	36.3
Unemployed	16,060,624	22.6	2,452,052	55.8	44.2	952,685	61.1	38.9
Not in labor force	88,717,824	19.6	9,994,210	49.1	50.9	7,418,060	51.3	48.7
<b>Poverty Status</b>								
Below the poverty level	43,341,948	29.6	9,377,171	49.3	50.7	3,468,021	49.7	50.3
At or above poverty level		19.3	27,482,262	58.5	41.5	19,057,584	63.2	36.8
<b>Disability Status</b>								
With a disability	39,172,917	14.9	3,586,682	47.2	52.8	2,253,901	45.6	54.4
No disability		21.7	33,993,105	57.3	42.7	20,743,332	63.1	36.9
<b>Health Insurance</b>								
With health insurance coverage		17.5	24,079,286	65.0	35.0	18,715,248	64.0	36.0
No health insurance coverage	46,817,901	38.0	13,500,501	40.9	59.1	4,281,985	49.9	50.1

<sup>1</sup> Educational attainment is displayed for the population 25 years and over.

<sup>2</sup> Employment status is shown for the population 16 years and over and does not include those in the Armed Forces.

Note: Margins of error for all estimates can be found in the Appendix Table 3 <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table3.xls](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table3.xls)>. For more information on the ACS, see <[www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.





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## Citizenship and English-Speaking Ability

English-speaking ability varied by citizenship status among Spanish speakers much more than it did among those who spoke other languages. Among Spanish speakers, 45 percent of foreign-born naturalized citizens spoke English “very well” compared with 23 percent of foreign-born noncitizens. Among those who spoke a foreign language other than Spanish, the gap between foreign-born naturalized citizens and foreign-born noncitizens was smaller—only 9 percent.

## Other Characteristics and English-Speaking Ability

Education, employment status, poverty status, disability status, and health insurance coverage were also correlated with English speaking ability. Seventy-three percent of Spanish-speakers with a bachelor’s degree or more education spoke English “very well,” compared with 71 percent of those who spoke a language other than Spanish for this same education level.

## LANGUAGE CONCENTRATIONS IN STATES

Languages spoken at home are not evenly distributed throughout the nation. Some areas have high percentages of speakers of non-English languages, while others have lower levels. Table 4 shows the proportion of people who spoke a language other than English at home across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as the English-speaking ability levels in those states. English-speaking ability varied across states. In West Virginia, only 2 percent of people 5 years old and over reported speaking a language other than English at home, while 44 percent of people in California reported the same.

Levels of English-speaking ability were also different across states. In Montana, a large percentage of those who spoke a language other than English at home (84 percent) reported speaking English “very well.” In Alabama, this percentage was 55 percent.

Quite often, concentrations of specific language groups were found in certain areas of the country. An examination of some of these patterns is provided in the 2007 version of this report (Shin and Kominski, 2011).<sup>16</sup> In the short term, the factors creating these concentrations include points of entry into the United States and family connections facilitating chain migration (Alberto Palloni et al., 2001).<sup>17</sup> In the longer term, internal migration streams, employment opportunities, and other family situations can sometimes facilitate the diffusion of language groups within the country.

## LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN METROPOLITAN AND MICROPOLITAN AREAS

Just as languages are dispersed unevenly across states, some languages are concentrated in certain metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. Large metropolitan areas such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago generally have large proportions of people who speak a language other than English at home because of the economic opportunities in these places or because they act as gateway points of entry into the country. Not all of the high levels of language clustering occur in the largest metropolitan areas, however. Many smaller metropolitan

areas also had high proportions of people who spoke a language other than English at home.

Figure 5 shows a geographic distribution of the proportion of people who spoke a language other than English at home across metropolitan and micropolitan areas. In general, metropolitan and micropolitan areas within the west, south, and northeast tended to have higher levels of foreign-language speakers. Metropolitan and micropolitan areas located in the midwestern states tended to have lower levels of foreign-language speakers, with the exception of Illinois.

Table 5 presents the distribution of the languages other than English for the 57 metropolitan areas where one-fourth or more of the population 5 years and older speak a language other than English at home. Twenty-two of these metropolitan areas are located in California, and 12 are in Texas. The remaining 23 are in various states, such as Florida, New Mexico, Arizona, and New Jersey. The Laredo, Texas, metropolitan area had the highest percentage of the population who spoke a language other than English. The great majority of these non-English language speakers spoke Spanish (99 percent). Other metropolitan areas with at least 90 percent Spanish speakers among those speaking a language other than English included several cities located on the border with Mexico, including Brownsville-Harlingen, McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, and El Paso in Texas; Yuma, Arizona; El Centro, California; and Las Cruces, New Mexico. Spanish speakers were less than 40 percent of all non-English language speakers in only three of the listed metropolitan areas. This included Honolulu, Hawaii, where 88 percent spoke Asian and Pacific Island languages,

<sup>16</sup> See <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/ACS-12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/ACS-12.pdf)>.

<sup>17</sup> Alberto Palloni et al., 2001, “Social Capital and International Migration: A Test Using Information on Family Networks,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 106, No. 5: 1262–1298.



Table 4.

**Language Spoken at Home and English-Speaking Ability by State: 2011**

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))

State	Population 5 years and over (Number)	Spoke a language other than English at home		English-speaking ability (Percent)			
		Number	Percent	Spoke English "very well"	Spoke English "well"	Spoke English "not well"	Spoke English "not at all"
<b>United States</b>		<b>60,577,020</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>58.2</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>7.0</b>
Alabama	4,504,275	235,830	5.2	55.4	19.0	20.2	5.3
Alaska	668,687	111,319	16.6	69.2	20.9	8.6	1.3
Arizona	6,034,541	1,629,853	27.0	65.5	15.7	12.9	5.9
Arkansas	2,740,313	204,666	7.5	54.7	23.0	17.0	5.2
California	35,158,257	15,390,211	43.8	55.7	19.4	16.6	8.4
Colorado	4,775,755	798,923	16.7	62.0	18.1	14.5	5.4
Connecticut	3,384,503	724,026	21.4	61.5	19.2	14.4	5.0
Delaware	851,887	115,717	13.6	65.1	17.1	12.5	5.4
District of Columbia	581,764	87,516	15.0	72.5	16.2	8.6	2.7
Florida	17,983,218	4,959,186	27.6	57.0	19.2	15.5	8.3
Georgia	9,141,183	1,214,783	13.3	57.2	19.3	17.8	5.7
Hawaii	1,286,790	323,915	25.2	52.4	27.5	17.5	2.7
Idaho	1,466,499	152,712	10.4	62.4	15.6	15.9	6.1
Illinois	12,042,289	2,730,437	22.7	57.3	20.7	15.9	6.2
Indiana	6,088,598	501,711	8.2	60.1	21.0	14.7	4.2
Iowa	2,864,107	208,066	7.3	59.1	19.5	15.6	5.8
Kansas	2,669,198	304,111	11.4	59.3	19.0	16.2	5.5
Kentucky	4,090,258	197,131	4.8	58.1	21.2	16.7	4.0
Louisiana	4,261,861	371,986	8.7	67.2	16.4	11.5	4.9
Maine	1,261,967	83,579	6.6	76.8	13.0	8.3	1.9
Maryland	5,465,168	914,110	16.7	62.9	19.9	13.6	3.6
Massachusetts	6,224,979	1,370,449	22.0	59.6	20.3	13.9	6.2
Michigan	9,292,794	847,255	9.1	64.8	19.1	12.4	3.7
Minnesota	4,992,262	540,623	10.8	60.6	20.3	13.8	5.2
Mississippi	2,773,115	105,186	3.8	55.7	16.9	19.0	8.4
Missouri	5,629,071	362,210	6.4	62.0	20.8	12.9	4.3
Montana	937,750	43,660	4.7	83.7	13.2	2.7	0.4
Nebraska	1,711,659	176,008	10.3	54.1	19.4	20.1	6.4
Nevada	2,538,136	754,531	29.7	57.8	21.3	15.3	5.6
New Hampshire	1,250,588	97,479	7.8	70.5	18.8	8.4	2.3
New Jersey	8,285,611	2,520,761	30.4	57.4	20.7	15.4	6.4
New Mexico	1,937,824	707,597	36.5	72.5	13.9	9.1	4.6
New York	18,307,740	5,506,992	30.1	55.3	20.9	16.9	6.9
North Carolina	9,029,678	966,322	10.7	56.3	18.7	16.9	8.1
North Dakota	637,666	32,380	5.1	71.6	18.4	8.8	1.2
Ohio	10,836,508	721,796	6.7	64.9	20.8	11.4	2.9
Oklahoma	3,527,312	329,017	9.3	58.8	17.4	17.1	6.8
Oregon	3,633,190	540,456	14.9	57.8	19.0	15.6	7.6
Pennsylvania	12,021,912	1,237,714	10.3	62.6	19.7	13.3	4.4
Rhode Island	995,856	211,150	21.2	58.8	21.0	13.7	6.5
South Carolina	4,376,509	289,004	6.6	58.6	20.2	15.2	6.0
South Dakota	765,534	50,335	6.6	66.2	16.5	14.7	2.7
Tennessee	6,003,565	414,669	6.9	57.8	20.7	17.0	4.4
Texas	23,721,334	8,221,202	34.7	58.1	18.2	14.8	8.9
Utah	2,554,924	380,382	14.9	64.4	17.3	14.2	4.1
Vermont	595,658	29,402	4.9	71.4	20.1	6.5	2.0
Virginia	7,588,188	1,132,310	14.9	62.8	20.1	13.4	3.7
Washington	6,390,691	1,186,543	18.6	57.1	21.2	15.6	6.0
West Virginia	1,751,216	40,310	2.3	64.7	22.0	12.1	1.3
Wisconsin	5,362,567	467,555	8.7	62.1	19.0	14.3	4.6
Wyoming	529,136	33,934	6.4	72.8	14.0	10.5	2.7

Note: Margins of error for all estimates can be found in the Appendix Table 4 <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table4.xls](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table4.xls)>. For more information on the ACS, see <[www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.



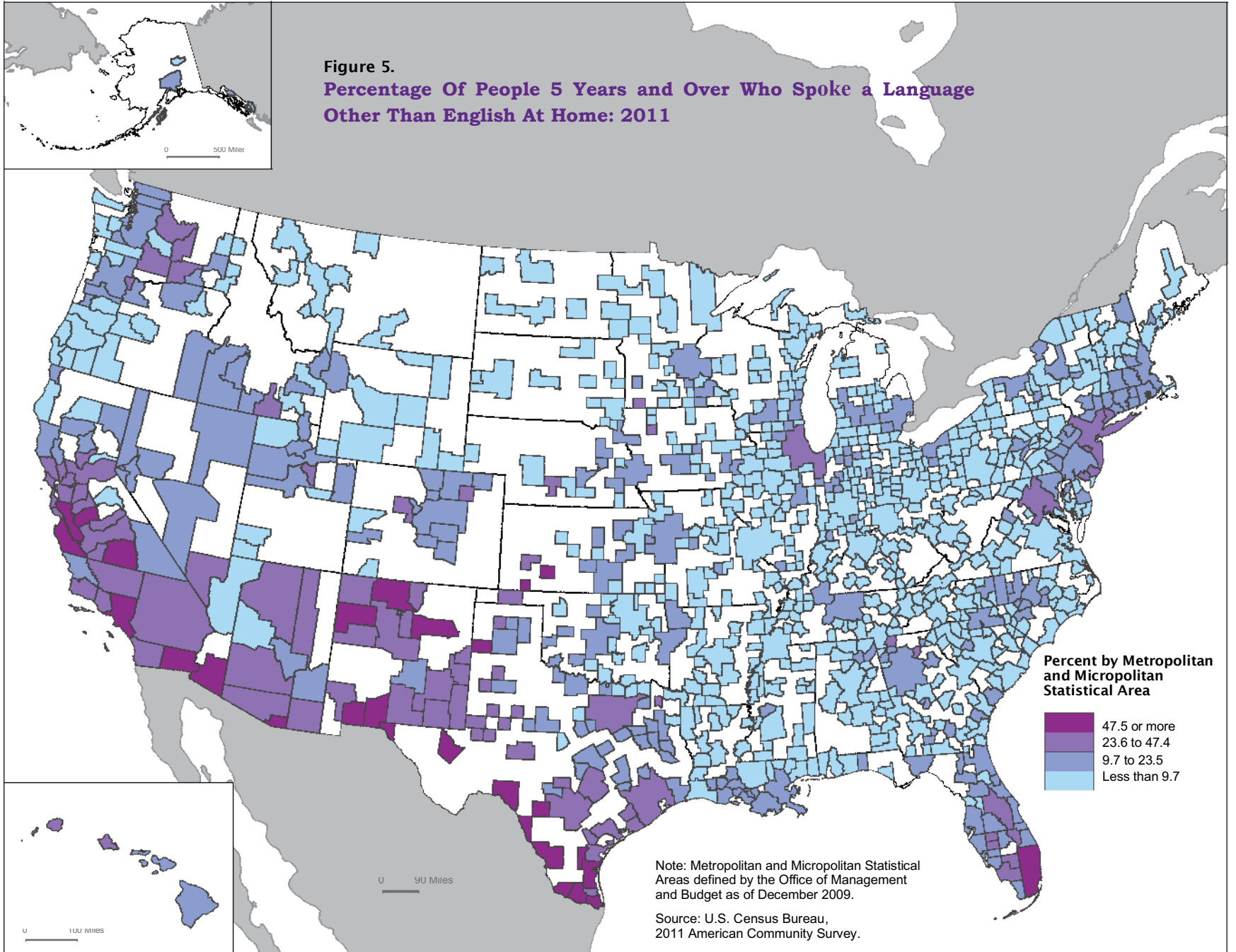


Table 5.

### Distribution of Speakers of Non-English Languages for Selected Metropolitan Areas: 2011—Con.

(Metro areas where 25 percent or more of the population 5 years and over spoke a language other than English. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))

Metropolitan areas	Population 5 years and over (Number)	Spoke a language other than English at home		Language spoken of those who speak a language other than English at home							
				Spanish		Other Indo-European languages		Asian and Pacific Island languages		Other languages	
		Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent	Number	Per- cent
Laredo, TX . . . . .	230,506	212,319	92.1	209,847	98.8	581	0.3	1,832	0.9	59	0.0
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX . . . . .	720,446	614,621	85.3	605,325	98.5	2,668	0.4	5,885	1.0	743	0.1
El Centro, CA . . . . .	163,107	118,711	72.8	116,345	98.0	366	0.3	1,705	1.4	295	0.2
El Paso, TX . . . . .	754,849	547,397	72.5	532,372	97.3	7,459	1.4	6,654	1.2	912	0.2
Brownsville-Harlingen, TX . . . . .	377,563	263,074	69.7	260,237	98.9	1,049	0.4	1,578	0.6	210	0.1
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA . . . . .		6,571,923	54.3	4,413,269	67.2	640,467	9.7	1,398,593	21.3	119,594	1.8
Salinas, CA . . . . .	388,612	208,721	53.7	183,699	88.0	5,929	2.8	16,365	7.8	2,728	1.3
Las Cruces, NM . . . . .	197,651	104,655	52.9	100,672	96.2	2,470	2.4	1,068	1.0	445	0.4
Yuma, AZ . . . . .	185,598	96,918	52.2	93,220	96.2	1,997	2.1	994	1.0	707	0.7
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, FL . . . . .		2,740,101	51.3	2,139,173	78.1	486,727	17.8	70,605	2.6	43,596	1.6
Visalia-Porterville, CA . . . . .	407,905	206,897	50.7	189,574	91.6	4,774	2.3	11,603	5.6	946	0.5
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA . . . . .		877,451	50.5	334,549	38.1	142,287	16.2	380,937	43.4	19,678	2.2
Merced, CA . . . . .	237,573	119,028	50.1	97,433	81.9	12,157	10.2	8,660	7.3	778	0.7
Fresno, CA . . . . .	863,371	382,344	44.3	291,503	76.2	26,979	7.1	59,346	15.5	4,516	1.2
Odessa, TX . . . . .	127,828	55,765	43.6	53,895	96.6	984	1.8	661	1.2	225	0.4
Madera, CA . . . . .	141,380	60,691	42.9	55,539	91.5	2,278	3.8	2,557	4.2	317	0.5
Bakersfield, CA . . . . .	778,854	327,031	42.0	289,041	88.4	15,927	4.9	17,834	5.5	4,229	1.3
Modesto, CA . . . . .	479,014	200,726	41.9	151,626	75.5	21,636	10.8	10,649	5.3	16,815	8.4
Hanford-Corcoran, CA . . . . .	141,291	58,722	41.6	51,884	88.4	2,568	4.4	3,581	6.1	689	1.2
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria, CA . . . . .	399,458	162,367	40.6	136,637	84.2	11,151	6.9	12,538	7.7	2,041	1.3
Riverside-San Bernardino- Ontario, CA . . . . .		1,615,123	40.5	1,322,026	81.9	81,921	5.1	180,171	11.2	31,005	1.9
San Francisco-Oakland- Fremont, CA . . . . .		1,670,902	40.5	678,359	40.6	269,017	16.1	685,063	41.0	38,463	2.3
Stockton, CA . . . . .	641,685	253,878	39.6	168,367	66.3	30,977	12.2	50,263	19.8	4,271	1.7
Yakima, WA . . . . .	225,246	88,659	39.4	84,221	95.0	1,538	1.7	2,067	2.3	833	0.9
New York-Northern New Jersey- Long Island, NY-NJ-PA . . . . .		6,981,683	39.1	3,518,126	50.4	2,025,713	29.0	1,095,595	15.7	342,249	4.9
San Antonio, TX . . . . .		777,946	38.2	714,314	91.8	31,512	4.1	23,358	3.0	8,762	1.1
Napa, CA . . . . .	130,131	49,664	38.2	39,493	79.5	2,820	5.7	6,973	14.0	378	0.8
San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA . . . . .		1,106,849	37.7	729,347	65.9	89,904	8.1	235,773	21.3	51,825	4.7
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX . . . . .	5,604,644	2,091,768	37.3	1,617,957	77.3	174,242	8.3	242,529	11.6	57,040	2.7
Corpus Christi, TX . . . . .	402,206	147,850	36.8	139,200	94.1	2,994	2.0	4,807	3.3	849	0.6
Santa Fe, NM . . . . .	137,904	50,245	36.4	45,075	89.7	2,367	4.7	1,020	2.0	1,783	3.5
Oxnard-Thousand Oaks- Ventura, CA . . . . .	776,660	282,683	36.4	222,652	78.8	21,593	7.6	32,297	11.4	6,141	2.2
Farmington, NM . . . . .	117,861	42,444	36.0	14,150	33.3	741	1.7	372	0.9	27,181	64.0
Las Vegas-Paradise, NV . . . . .		614,625	33.6	423,841	69.0	52,000	8.5	120,260	19.6	18,524	3.0
Santa Cruz-Watsonville, CA . . . . .	249,132	80,238	32.2	66,016	82.3	6,350	7.9	7,111	8.9	761	0.9
Naples-Marco Island, FL . . . . .	311,342	99,321	31.9	73,660	74.2	19,639	19.8	5,105	5.1	917	0.9
Albuquerque, NM . . . . .	838,920	263,567	31.4	214,162	81.3	14,614	5.5	8,972	3.4	25,819	9.8
Yuba City, CA . . . . .	154,104	48,278	31.3	31,649	65.6	10,586	21.9	5,830	12.1	213	0.4
Midland, TX . . . . .	129,109	39,627	30.7	36,494	92.1	1,107	2.8	1,647	4.2	379	1.0
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX . . . . .		1,809,206	30.0	1,381,478	76.4	156,259	8.6	207,267	11.5	64,202	3.5
Orlando-Kissimmee, FL . . . . .		595,470	29.2	433,912	72.9	106,337	17.9	45,711	7.7	9,510	1.6
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI . . . . .	8,876,347	2,580,089	29.1	1,547,235	60.0	627,153	24.3	288,927	11.2	116,774	4.5
Tucson, AZ . . . . .	927,411	264,996	28.6	218,043	82.3	18,044	6.8	16,123	6.1	12,786	4.8

See note at end of table .





Table 5.

### Distribution of Speakers of Non-English Languages for Selected Metropolitan Areas: 2011—Con.

(Metro areas where 25 percent or more of the population 5 years and over spoke a language other than English. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))

Metropolitan areas	Population 5 years and over (Number)	Spoke a language other than English at home		Language spoken of those who speak a language other than English at home							
				Spanish		Other Indo-European languages		Asian and Pacific Island languages		Other languages	
		Number	Per-cent	Number	Per-cent	Number	Per-cent	Number	Per-cent	Number	Per-cent
Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT . . .	870,100	247,017	28.4	127,732	51.7	88,781	35.9	22,751	9.2	7,753	3.1
Vallejo-Fairfield, CA . . . . .	390,169	110,111	28.2	63,385	57.6	9,557	8.7	35,825	32.5	1,344	1.2
Austin-Round Rock, TX . . . . .		464,933	28.1	366,576	78.8	46,107	9.9	45,774	9.8	6,476	1.4
Sacramento—Arden-Arcade—Roseville, CA . . . . .		568,262	28.0	262,979	46.3	128,150	22.6	167,443	29.5	9,690	1.7
Trenton-Ewing, NJ . . . . .	345,584	96,326	27.9	44,888	46.6	29,193	30.3	19,118	19.8	3,127	3.2
Atlantic City, NJ . . . . .	257,871	70,762	27.4	42,378	59.9	14,272	20.2	11,783	16.7	2,329	3.3
Kennewick-Richland-Pasco, WA . . . . .	242,237	66,106	27.3	55,038	83.3	6,040	9.1	4,581	6.9	447	0.7
Honolulu, HI . . . . .	901,726	243,991	27.1	17,736	7.3	11,328	4.6	214,043	87.7	884	0.4
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV . . . . .		1,420,987	26.7	638,181	44.9	333,850	23.5	300,327	21.1	148,629	10.5
Gainesville, GA . . . . .	169,018	45,018	26.6	40,731	90.5	1,841	4.1	2,374	5.3	72	0.2
Victoria, TX . . . . .	106,954	28,441	26.6	25,185	88.6	959	3.4	1,802	6.3	495	1.7
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ . . . . .		1,037,554	26.2	806,286	77.7	90,785	8.7	93,206	9.0	47,277	4.6
Dalton, GA . . . . .	132,462	34,332	25.9	32,380	94.3	560	1.6	137	0.4	1,255	3.7
Wenatchee, WA . . . . .	104,787	26,968	25.7	24,815	92.0	664	2.5	727	2.7	762	2.8

Note: Margins of error for all estimates can be found in the Appendix Table 5 <[www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table5.xls](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Table5.xls)> .

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey . For more information on the ACS, see <[www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)> .

and San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, California, where Spanish speakers were also outnumbered by those who spoke Asian and Pacific Island languages. The other metropolitan area was Farmington, New Mexico. In this area, the overwhelming majority spoke the Native American language of Navajo.

New York and Los Angeles stand out for the large number of speakers of languages other than English that reside there—more than 6 million in each metropolitan area. In the New York metropolitan area, about 50 percent of those who spoke a language other than English spoke Spanish. Another

29 percent of these people spoke Other Indo-European languages. In the Los Angeles metropolitan area, over two-thirds of those who spoke a language other than English spoke Spanish.



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## SUMMARY

This report provides illustrative evidence of the continuing and growing role of non-English languages as part of the national fabric. Fueled by both long-term historic immigration patterns and more recent ones, the language diversity of the country has increased over the past few decades. As the nation continues to be a destination for people from other lands, this pattern of language diversity will also likely continue. Given the patterns of location and relocation over time, local areas may see specific or diverse changes in the languages spoken in any given locality.

## SOURCE OF THE DATA

Estimates in this report are from the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS). The population represented (the population universe) in the 2011 ACS includes both the household and the group quarters populations (that is, the resident population). The group quarters population consists of the institutionalized population (such as people in correctional institutions or nursing homes) and the non-institutionalized population (most of whom are in college dormitories).

## ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling error and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.<sup>18</sup> This means the 90 percent confidence interval for the difference between estimates being compared does not include zero. Nonsampling error in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures in sample selection, the wording of questions, interviewing, coding, data processing, and data analysis.

The final ACS population estimates are adjusted in the weighting procedure for coverage error by controlling specific survey estimates to independent population controls by sex, age, race, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for

<sup>18</sup> The tables reporting the margins of error for all the tables in this report can be accessed at [www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/2011/appendix.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/2011/appendix.html).

bias due to over- or undercoverage, but biases may still be present, for example, when people who were missed differ from those interviewed in ways other than sex, age, race, and Hispanic origin. How this weighting procedure affects other variables in the survey is not precisely known. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources. For information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, please see the "2011 ACS Accuracy of the Data" document located at [www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data\\_documentation/Accuracy/ACS\\_Accuracy\\_of\\_Data\\_2011.pdf](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf).

## MORE INFORMATION

Detailed tabulations, related information, and historic data are available on the Internet at the Language Use page on the Census Bureau's Web site at [www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/index.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/index.html). For additional questions or comments, contact the Education and Social Stratification Branch at 301-763-2464 or e-mail Camille L. Ryan at [Camille.L.Ryan@census.gov](mailto:Camille.L.Ryan@census.gov).



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## APPENDIX A.

### LANGUAGE QUESTIONS USED IN DECENNIAL CENSUSES

**2000:** (Collected for all ages; retained for persons 5 years old and over)

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

What is this language?

How well does this person speak English (very well, well, not well, not at all)?

**1990:** (Persons 5 years old and over)

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

What is this language?

How well does this person speak English (very well, well, not well, not at all)?

**1980:** (Persons 3 years old and over; tabulated for 5 years old and over)

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

What is this language?

How well does this person speak English (very well, well, not well, not at all)?

**1970:** (No age for question, tabulations limited)

What language, other than English, was spoken in this person's home when he was a child?

(Spanish, French, German, Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_, None, English only)

**1960:** (Foreign-born)

What language was spoken in his home before he came to the United States?

**1950:** (Not asked)

**1940:** (For persons of all ages; asked under the category of "Mother Tongue [or Native Language] of Foreign Born")

Language spoken at home in earliest childhood.

**1930:** (Foreign born; asked under the category of "Mother Tongue [or Native Language] of Foreign Born")

Language spoken in home before coming to the United States.

**1920:** (Foreign born)

Place of birth and mother tongue of person and each parent.

Whether able to speak English.

**1910:**

Mother tongue was collected for all foreign-born persons, to be written in with place of birth; also collected for foreign-born parents. Specific instructions on correct languages to write in and a list of appropriate European languages were provided to the enumerator. Similar instructions may have carried over to 1920.

Whether able to speak English; or, if not, give language spoken.

**1900:** (All persons 10 years old and over)

"Can speak English" was asked after the two questions "Can read" and "Can write."

**1890:** (All persons 10 years old and over)

"Able to speak English. If not, the language or dialect spoken" was asked after the questions "Able to Read" and "Able to Write."

**1790-1880:**

No evidence of language questions or English-ability questions.

*Note: The universe used for data collection may not be the same as in tabulations. In some cases, data were tabulated for foreign-born only or White foreign-born only. Consult publications.*

[www.mla.org/map\\_main](http://www.mla.org/map_main)

[www.ethnologue.com/](http://www.ethnologue.com/)

