

# 1 The Origins of the English-Only Movement

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“If there is an epicenter to the language earthquake, it is Miami and Dade County, Fla., where more than half of the people consider Spanish their first language” (Turbak, 1994, p. 55). A journalist wrote these words in a retrospective article surveying the English-only movement’s victories and losses. Dade County had both in spades.<sup>1</sup> But why would someone call Dade County, Florida, the epicenter, and what were the aftershocks? On November 4, 1980, voters made English the official language of Dade County via ballot initiative. The new language policy was blunt: The government would begin “prohibiting the expenditure of County funds for the purpose of utilizing any language other than English, or promoting any culture other than that of the United States” (Dade County, 1980, November 2, p. 326). The ordinance passed handily, with 59.1 percent of the vote (Fisher, 1983, October 2). This campaign created a new playbook, one that has endured for more than forty years. Activist Emmy Shafer founded Citizens of Dade United, the group that led this campaign. In doing so, Shafer showed that English-only policies were not just possible but popular, and people took notice. Shafer’s policy lasted almost thirteen years, before the county government chose to repeal it in 1993 (Martin, 1993, May 19). Citizens of Dade United was soon eclipsed by larger organizations, such as U.S. English and ProEnglish, and by a spate of newer policies. But how did we get here?

In the early years of the English-only movement, people began to recognize the appeal of local language policies, although they vacillated over whether local policies should be an end unto themselves (as in Dade County) or whether they could and should lead to something larger, like a constitutional amendment. The rise of multiple English-only organizations made it possible for people to collaborate and test out various approaches, to see what worked and what did not, and to change tack accordingly, in a way that was different from earlier periods in US history. While this sort of coordination led to a

<sup>1</sup> Dade County contains the city of Miami, Florida. In 1997, the name was changed to “Miami-Dade County,” but the language policy under discussion passed when it was still just called Dade.

string of successes, there were also pitfalls, which have continued to plague the movement ever since.

I tell the story of the English-only movement's early years in five parts. First, I very briefly touch on US language policy before 1980. Second, I analyze how and why Shafer catalyzed the policy in Dade County. Third, I examine Senator S. I. Hayakawa, the public intellectual who brought a sense of legitimacy and visibility to the English-only movement. Fourth, I turn to John Tanton, the activist who made capital out of people like Shafer and Hayakawa to become the architect of U.S. English and related organizations. Finally, I show how ProEnglish rose from the ashes of internal strife within U.S. English, and I explain how the two organizations came to operate independently.

In laying out this origin story, my aim is to show that the English-only movement has understood language policy as a local practice since the beginning (Pennycook, 2010). In other words, there was no "local turn," no moment when they turned their attention from the national to the local. The strategies I discuss in later chapters have been present since the very beginning. At the same time, people do refine their strategies over time, and the English-only movement of today is generally savvier than it used to be. The early years were rife with internal conflicts and external criticisms, and understanding those dynamics is important, too, particularly since such clashes continue to play out in cases like Frederick County's undoing of its English-only policy (Chapter 4). Looking at any origin story can offer valuable insight into what things were like before the edges were sanded down.

### Finding Origins

The historical record can seem patchy, but this patchiness is part of the story. Some early accounts of English-only policies may seem invisible to some scholars, precisely because most of those accounts are in memoirs, oral histories, literature, and scholarship in fields such as Indigenous studies, race and ethnic studies, and linguistic anthropology, not in mainstream nonfiction or scholarship in fields such as sociolinguistics or applied linguistics. Official English can seem like a national issue because only the national-level politicians and organizations have their papers archived (often because they are the only ones asked). Research on the English-only movement may emphasize Congress in part because Congress keeps the most accessible records and transcripts, while local and state governments do not. Research on language policy may not discuss ghostwriting in part because ghostwriters are, by definition, not going to be the people with their name front and center on the policy text or in the surrounding news coverage. Official English can seem like it was most popular in the 1980s because during that time the people involved were trying to get as much publicity as possible, whereas before and after they tended to operate more under the radar.

I am guilty of biases myself: For years, I had read that Citizens of Dade United had placed advertisements in the *Miami Herald* newspaper in 1980, but I could never find them. I only found them when I stopped looking in the front pages and instead turned to the “Neighbors” section at the back, a section that appears to be oriented toward women readers in the neighboring suburbs. There are gaps like this with any subject, as shown by work on feminist historiography (Russell, 2018) and public memory (Tupas, 2003; Trimbur, 2006), but they may be especially clear-cut in this particular policy movement. For example, the papers of Hayakawa, Tanton, and the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) are archived, while those of Shafer and Citizens of Dade United are not. Many papers from U.S. English are archived, but those of ProEnglish are not. To piece this story together, then, I draw on as wide a range of materials as possible, not just the usual suspects of institutional archives and academic databases (Groundwater, 2020).

### Language Policy before 1980

While English-only policies did not take off until the nineteenth century, there were precursors: By the eighteenth century, some people in the United States were aware of the Enlightenment theory of societal monolingualism as a path toward more efficient and rational communication (Bauman and Briggs, 2003), British ideologies about the English language and the law (Schiffman, 1996; Pennycook, 1998), and anti-German sentiments (Baron, 1990; Kibbee, 2016). Furthermore, most government discourse was already in English, most people knew English, and anglophone enslavers in particular expected enslaved people to use English. Still, outside the context of slavery, prescriptivism regarding English was more likely to focus on distinguishing American English from British English than on distinguishing English from other languages (Heath, 1976; Baron, 1982). Of course, it was not only settlers who were creating language policies in the region. For example, within the Cherokee Nation, new, community-driven, policies and initiatives emerged in the nineteenth century to promote both Cherokee literacy (Cushman, 2011) and higher education in English (Legg, 2014).

Eventually, however, language policies began to explicitly promote English at the expense of all other languages. Colonies and Indigenous nations were the first to bear the brunt of these policies. The United States began occupying the Philippines in 1898, after winning the Spanish–American War, and then implemented English-only schools starting in 1901; soldiers were the first teachers (Tupas, 2003, p. 7). In an even more extreme development, eradicating Indigenous languages altogether became part of the mission of government and church-run boarding schools for Indigenous children (Spack, 2002; Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006). According to one 1886 report by the

Commissioner of Indian Affairs, “Indians should be taught the English language only ... the language of the greatest, most powerful, and enterprising nationalities under the sun” (Morgan, 2009, p. 91). These schools were not few and far between: Lajimodiere (2019) lists 366 different boarding schools across 29 different states. (While none of these schools existed around the towns I study in Maryland, in some parts of the United States and Canada these schools are *the* exemplars of local language policy.)

Calling these institutions “schools” is a bit of a misnomer, because they were more like prisons. For example, many of the early children at the Carlisle Indian School had parents who were of “military interest,” in that they were “the children of detained prisoners of war” and other “incarcerated” Indigenous leaders (Klotz, 2021, p. 97). Hunger strikes, escape attempts, and suicides were common (Klotz, 2021). Children were not the only targets, as the US government also began coercing Indigenous adults into developing English literacy (Morgan, 2009). While these early English-only policies were damaging, it is also important to highlight the resistance and survival of Indigenous teachers and students at these colonial institutions (Enoch, 2002; Weiden, 2019; Gansworth, 2020; Jimenez, 2021).

Before long, even settlers were not safe from English-only policies. Near the turn of the twentieth century, as part of the Americanization movement, the descendants of earlier waves of European immigration began to criticize the language practices of newer waves of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, often on anti-Catholic or antisemitic grounds (Bonfiglio, 2002; Pavlenko, 2002), and to reject even more harshly the practices and even the existence of Asian Americans (Hoang, 2015, p. 10). English was becoming a marker of American identity for the first time, such that not even European Americans could pass as American, or even necessarily white, unless they used English only (Dayton-Wood, 2008). The sort of literal and figurative “borderland subjectivity” that groups like the francophone Acadians had previously enjoyed was becoming illegal (Peters, 2013, p. 578). Peters (2013) points to laws like Rhode Island’s 1922 Peck Act, which “required parochial schools to make English the primary language of instruction” (p. 570). The new value of English was so strong that even sign language and deaf people came under attack (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 176). By the start of World War I, the tenor and scope of US language policy had already changed significantly.

During World War I, the focus of language policy shifted from all immigrants and heritage languages toward Germans and German. Although German had once been “the most prestigious modern language” in the United States, by 1917 that status had changed (Crawford, 2000, p. 21). During and even after World War I, city and county governments passed ordinances “prohibiting German instruction” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 179) and “forbidding the use of German” more generally (Baron, 1990, p. 110). Aside from such governmental

language policies, businesses, churches, and telephone communication also became more monolingual in English, through some combination of choice and outside pressure (Bailey, 2012, p. 151). These local language policies were not enforced for long after the war, as people stopped learning and using European heritage languages, immigration restrictions tightened (culminating in the Immigration Act of 1924), and the idea of English-only communities became taken for granted. Americanization was so successful that for the descendants of the European immigrants most affected, memories of these events have “been forgotten or repressed,” such that some “third- and fourth-generation descendants have come to assume that their grandparents and great-grandparents all willingly deserted their ancestral tongues” (Wiley, 1998, p. 236).

With German receding, US institutions eventually turned their attention to Spanish. For example, Chicana writer Anzaldúa (1987) was born in 1942 in south Texas, and she remembers growing up and “being caught speaking Spanish at recess – that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler” (p. 53). She continues: “At Pan American University,<sup>2</sup> I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents” (p. 54). Anzaldúa’s career of writing across English and Spanish is a sign that these attempts to limit Spanish were painful but not necessarily successful. Latinx Americans continued to use Spanish as well as English in places like the American Southwest, Puerto Rico, and eventually New York City, just as they had been for years.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a string of legal victories for language and literacy rights, each of which catalyzed major backlashes. Before this period, there had never been any federal support for languages other than English (Baron, 1990, p. 87), but new laws such as the Bilingual Education Act (1968) and the amended Voting Rights Act (1975) inadvertently created an occasion for Americans to debate anew the appropriate role for language policy in their communities. In Miami, “the first modern bilingual public school” opened in 1963 (Provenzo, 1990, p. xi) and a 1973 ordinance made Dade County officially bilingual and bicultural. Meanwhile, court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), and *MLK Children v. Ann Arbor* (1979) suggested that students of all races and linguistic backgrounds should have access to an equal education, although those rulings were never completely put into practice (Smitherman, 1981; Schiffman, 1996; Prendergast, 2003; Hoang, 2015). At the university level, more colleges adopted open admissions policies, and in 1974 the Conference on College Composition and Communication declared “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (Wible, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Pan American University was in Edinburg, Texas, near where Anzaldúa grew up, and later became part of what is now the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

While it did not have to do with language directly, another key new law was the Hart–Celler Act of 1965. Hart–Celler was pivotal in two opposite ways (Ngai, 2015). On one hand, it reopened the door for many people to immigrate legally from Asia, Africa, and Europe, for the first time in over forty years. On the other hand, it placed harsh restrictions on migration from the Western hemisphere for the first time ever (Dick, 2011, pp. 43–44). Where once it was unremarkable for people to move back and forth across the US–Mexico border (and the US–Canada border), now after Hart–Celler it was more likely to be considered illegal.

Many people in the United States resented all these new policies, especially given that the US students and citizens who stood to benefit were not the European immigrants of a previous era but rather people of color. Immigrants from Asia and Africa were about to become scapegoats for all sorts of societal ills (again). Latinx people were about to become criminalized in a way they had not been before. The kind of stigma Anzaldúa experienced growing up was about to become a whole lot more common.

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In sum, while 1980 saw the start of a more organized English-only movement, there had been language policies in the United States for much longer. These older policies, however, do not feature heavily in most histories of the United States, or even necessarily in early studies of language policy. For example, in the opening pages of his landmark book about Norwegian language policy, Haugen (1966) warns anglophone readers that “the ideas and motivations underlying a program of language planning are so remote from the experience of educated Americans or Englishmen that they may find it difficult even to understand them” (p. 2). In other words, he suggests that language policy might literally be a foreign concept to most scholars in the United States and England, because the English language has never been subject to much intervention. Haugen was right in the sense that the United States has never had an official national language and that multilingualism was common for much of US history, but there is also more to it than that. In part, the assumption about the United States not having a language policy may have been due to timing: At the same time that Haugen, Das Gupta (1970), Rubin and Jernudd (1971), and others were forming the field, the United States was in a relative lull in between the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924 and the Hart–Celler Act of 1965 (since immigration took time to ramp up after 1965).

Another factor, however, is that US language policies have always emerged more locally. Language policy in the United States has been so decentralized, uneven, and inconsistent that it can appear *laissez-faire* or nonexistent when viewed through a national lens. I bring up Haugen not because I think Haugen (1966) was wrong but because he was usually right – his *Language conflict*

*and language planning* is one of my favorite books. (I also think Haugen may have just included that passage because he was trying to persuade skeptical academic readers that he was studying something truly novel.) But if he was addressing a particular academic audience, that raises the question of why that audience might have believed that the United States had no language policies to speak of.

My sense is that the field of language policy prioritized the national scale for a long time, whereas US language policymakers have always thought more locally. This national lens makes sense in the context of newly independent nations that began embarking on language planning in the twentieth century,<sup>3</sup> but in the US context, I believe it obscures more than it reveals. US language policymakers tend to value and highlight the local scale, either as a model for, a haven from, or an authentic counterpart to some larger scale. In other words, it is not as though people in the United States usually work locally but frame their work as national, nor is it the other way around. Instead, US language policy is often local all the way down, even as it is inevitably connected to other scales too. Because US language policies tend to be so varied, Schiffman (1996) suggests that “nothing can be more challenging to the language-policy analyst, I think, than to try to make sense of US language policy” (p. 211). Even beyond language policy, federalism and local control are baked into US society in complex ways – unlike in some nations, things like taxes, rights, election procedures, and education systems vary significantly by state, county, and city. In his work on cities and counties that pass anti-immigration policies, Hopkins (2010) stresses the importance of “politicized places”: small communities where big issues become salient. In the United States, language policy succeeds in those politicized places, and Miami was about to become one of those places.

### **Emmy Shafer and Citizens of Dade United**

Dade County’s English-only policy was Shafer’s brainchild. In 1980, Shafer began trying to undo Dade County’s 1973 Bilingualism/Biculturalism Ordinance, because she was dismayed by the fact that the people she encountered at government offices, malls, and hospitals often used Spanish more than English (Rimer, 1980, October 26; De Lama, 1980, November 2). She proposed the idea for an “Anti-Bilingualism Ordinance,” cofounded the organization Citizens of Dade United with fellow activist Marion Plunsky (Rimer, 1980, October 26), and then had her lawyer Jeff Rosenthal draft the text of the ordinance (Fisher, 1983, October 2). Leading up to the election, she placed

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Das Gupta (1970) on India, the various case studies in Rubin and Jernudd (1971), Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) on Israel, and Park (2021) on South Korea.



ads in the “Neighbors” section of the *Miami Herald*. One such ad included slogans like “STOP wasting our TAX DOLLARS to promote bi-lingualism” and “ONE LANGUAGE ... ONE COMMUNITY” (Citizens of Dade United, 1980, October 19). The latter offers an intriguing twist on the well-known refrain in language policy, “one nation, one language,” which I focus on more in Chapter 3. From the beginning, the policy was popular: Citizens of Dade United needed to collect 26,213 signatures to get the issue on the ballot; they collected more than 137,000 (Rimer, 1980).

Shafer’s team consisted of herself, Plunske, Rosenthal, treasurer Sharon Haider, and a cadre of “housewife volunteers” (Rimer, 1980, October 26). In leading a conservative grassroots organization of almost exclusively white women, and advertising to suburban women, Shafer was following the road map of activists like Phyllis Schlafly, whether consciously or unconsciously (Critchlow, 2005). This feminized approach to language policy did not really catch on outside Dade County, but it does still surface in related causes, like Moms for Liberty, an organization that advocates against critical race theory (Williams, 2022, November 7). And Citizens of Dade United did eventually grow to include more people, particularly since Plunske left and Shafer grew “disgruntled and depressed” that the English-only policy was not always being strictly enforced (Fisher, 1983, October 2). Mark Benson became Vice President and Enos Schera became Secretary (and eventually the acting leader). Citizens of Dade United continued until 2015 (Schera, 2015).

When Shafer’s measure passed, the resulting English-only ordinance was what Crawford (2000) calls “arguably the most draconian language law in US history” (p. 26). Unlike most other modern government language policies, there were none of the typical exceptions for public health and safety, which meant that things like multilingual “hurricane warnings” were banned (Crawford, 2000, p. 26). Another news article reported that “the fire department was prevented from distributing fire prevention information and hospitals could distribute information on prenatal care only in English” (Blake, 1990, February 25). An even harsher element of the policy, bordering on vindictive, was that it was not just about saving time and money in the future: The government removed signs and other materials that had already been translated and printed (Crawford, 2000, p. 26). This impulse to enforce the English-only policy, no matter the cost, raises the question of why Shafer was so highly motivated.

Her motivation was not so much that she was pro-English or anti-multilingualism as she was anti-Cuban and anti-Haitian. Shafer was specifically frustrated with Cuban refugees who used Spanish and, to a lesser extent, Haitian refugees who used Kreyòl. The *Wall Street Journal* puts her mindset this way: “About four years ago, 160,000 Cubans and Haitians washed up on Miami’s shores, and Emmy Shafer decided she had had enough” (Nazario, 1984, May 30). This description clarifies who Shafer was targeting, but the



expression “washed up on Miami’s shores” is less clear. The expression makes it seem as though these people’s arrival was some sort of random occurrence, as though the Caribbean ocean currents just happened to be especially strong in 1980. This framing is misleading as well as dehumanizing (as though these people were just flotsam and jetsam). In reality, the situation was more complex.

There had been two earlier cohorts of refugees seeking to escape Cuban president Fidel Castro’s repressive government, first from 1959 to 1962 and then from 1965 to 1973 (Crawford, 1992, p. 92). These early refugees included middle-class professionals who bristled against the communist government. The US government was generally willing to have them, both because of their class status and because it was a way to shame Cuba on the world stage. And, for a while, the federal government put its money where its mouth was: Up until 1974, the federal government provided “nearly \$1 billion in resettlement assistance,” much of which went to Dade County (Crawford, 1992, p. 93). At first, the situation seemed like a win-win: Refugees were able to leave Cuba, and the Miami economy boomed in return (Crawford, 1992, p. 94).

Still, many Anglos started to feel resentful, not least because Cuban refugees did not seem to feel sufficient shame about using Spanish. According to Crawford (1992), “Unlike Mexican Americans, they had never been humiliated at school for speaking their native tongue or persuaded that their children must speak only English to get ahead. ... [T]hey felt no need to forsake Spanish as a token of loyalty to the United States” (p. 96). In other words, they had not had experiences like Anzaldúa’s (1987) school punishment for using Spanish. Some people in the United States are willing to embrace newcomers, but only if the newcomers are willing to prostrate themselves. There seemed to be a desire to put Cuban refugees in their place.

This already tense situation erupted in 1980, when a third cohort of Cuban refugees arrived, as well as a new cohort of Haitian refugees. The circumstances were changing. From his vantage point in Michigan, Tanton would later observe, “The Cuban refugees created a beneficial disaster which has helped get immigration on the national agenda” (Dammann, 1981, p. 336). On the US end, the federal government had already tapered down its funding for refugee resettlement. So, people who the government may have helped in the past were now neglected, or worse, incarcerated (Jaynes, 1981, September 23; Hamm, 1995). Perceptions of race, class, health, and criminality played a role. In the US racial imaginary, many of the earliest Cuban refugees read as white-collar and white-adjacent. In contrast, the later Cuban refugees of 1980 were more likely to have been seen as Black, working class, disabled, and/or incarcerated (Hamm, 1995, p. 75). The Haitian context was somewhat different, in that people were fleeing the repressive government of President Jean-Claude Duvalier, as well as the instability and inequality spurred by an

earlier period of French slavery and colonialism (Trouillot, 1990). The racial dynamic in the United States was such that once Haitians arrived in the United States, white Americans either did not know or did not care about this history; they simply noticed that these refugees were Black. For people like Shafer, this demographic shift was the last straw.

Notice that in this situation, there is almost no way for refugees to win. For many white onlookers in Miami, the lighter-skinned Cuban refugees seemed too elite; the Black Cuban and Haitian refugees seemed too wretched. Lorimer Leonard (2017) finds a similar unwinnable dynamic today: “[I]f migrants appear to need too *little* help,” that can become an excuse to say that “they do not belong,” because they cannot really be refugees (emphasis in original) (p. 125). In Miami, another factor in play was stereotypes about Latino masculinity in general. For example, in a front-page article in the *Miami Herald* just two weeks before the election, Shafer’s colleague Marion Plunske joked that one of her critics had told her, “What you need is a good Cuban man,” to which she replied, “too bad there aren’t any” (Rimer, 1980, October 26). With quips like these, the media seemed to find Citizens of Dade United an irresistible subject.

Perhaps because of all this media coverage, other activists took notice. Almost immediately, Roger Conner and Gerda Bikales started following what was going on in Dade County. Both were proteges of Tanton, and both worked for FAIR, Tanton’s relatively new organization in Washington, DC. None of these three were working on language policy yet, but Conner (1989) remembers feeling uneasy:

There was a group called Citizens of Dade County United [*sic*]. It was a group that was simply filled with free-floating anger, hostility, and anxiety. They wanted to drive around and blow horns and tell the Cubans to get the you-know-what out. It was sort of the blue collar, lower middle-class to upper middle-class whites, who had a feeling that the control of their community had been wrested from them.... And I tell you, it was like a mean breeze, a cold breeze, when you felt it. (p. 56)

Conner found the whole campaign to be unseemly. Hayakawa, the first sponsor of an English-only constitutional amendment, felt much the same. When a reporter asked Hayakawa for his thoughts on Dade County’s policy, he replied, “I wouldn’t go that far myself” (Nazario, 1984, May 30).

However, some of Conner’s and Hayakawa’s colleagues saw great potential in Shafer’s work. Conner (1989) recalls that “Gerda Bikales, who was on our staff at the time, began coming into my office within a couple of weeks to say something big was happening in Miami, and we ought to do something about it” (p. 51). They did respond, and quickly, by placing an advertisement in the *Miami News* that provided readers with two templates that they could cut out of the paper: one to send a letter to President Carter asking him “to stop the boats” and “declare a ceiling on refugee admissions,”

and the other a letter to sign up for their mailing list (FAIR, 1980, May 16). In 1980, that was as far as the organization went: They capitalized on the issue, but they did not actually work *with* Citizens of Dade United. Tanton did not forget about Shafer, though. Three years later, Tanton (1983, July 7) asked Bikales, “Are we in touch with Emmy Shafer, the lady who led the 1981 [*sic*] Dade County referendum against the spread of Spanish?” Tanton went on to suggest that Bikales give Shafer a call to talk strategy and ask for her mailing list.

The reason why people like Tanton remembered her is because she and her colleagues accomplished something no one else had done in recent memory. In making English the only official language, they showed that this sort of language policy was possible. Shafer also demonstrated the importance of community organizing and community-specific talking points. Still, she was a polarizing figure, and Citizens of Dade United was a polarizing organization. Whereas people like Hayakawa and Conner saw Shafer as someone who went a bit too far, people like Tanton and Bikales saw her as someone worth emulating. Nevertheless, in the coming years, all these people would work together on a whole host of English-only policies, even Hayakawa. I turn now to Hayakawa’s journey.

### **Senator S. I. Hayakawa and the English Language Amendment**

In 1981, when Hayakawa decided he wanted to make English the only official language, it took the movement to a whole new level of visibility and credibility. As someone who had already been a public intellectual for forty years, Hayakawa was uniquely poised to make the case for Official English around the country (Yan-Gonzalez, 2022). He had the experience, the *bona fides*, and the reputation the movement needed. His fame was not primarily from his term in the US Senate (1977–1983), although that was part of it. While many other early figures in the English-only movement (including Shafer) were relatively new to questions of language, Senator Hayakawa had been studying language for a long time.

Before he became a politician, Hayakawa was a teacher, scholar, writer, and university president. He earned his BA from the University of Manitoba, his MA from McGill University, and his PhD, in English, from the University of Wisconsin. While at Wisconsin, he started teaching freshman composition and working as an assistant on the landmark *Middle English dictionary*.<sup>4</sup> Hayakawa’s (1941) defining achievement was *Language in action*, a book

<sup>4</sup> In Hayakawa (1939), his biographical statement includes that he is “a staff member of the *Middle English Dictionary* which is in process of compilation at the University of Michigan” (p. 197). This dictionary was an enormous undertaking and was completed only in 2001.

with six editions and translations in at least nine languages.<sup>5</sup> The book became a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection and then, ultimately, a college textbook.<sup>6</sup> Hayakawa's editor, James M. Reid (1947), wrote to say the book was "selling exceedingly well ... in the colleges." As a Japanese-Canadian-American scholar who happened to publish this book the same month as Pearl Harbor,<sup>7</sup> his success was anything but guaranteed.

At Wisconsin, and later at Illinois Institute of Technology, the University of Chicago, and finally at San Francisco State University,<sup>8</sup> Hayakawa published articles, reviews, and notes in top US journals. These publications appeared in journals such as *American Literature*, *American Speech*, *College Composition and Communication*, *English Journal*, *PMLA*, *Poetry*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Hayakawa, 1932, 1936, 1939, 1942, 1943, 1949, 1962). He also founded and edited the journal *Etc.: A Review of General Semantics*, a somewhat slight journal that nevertheless published luminaries such as Read (1955) and Gilman and Brown (1958). Through *Etc.*, Hayakawa also published Stanley Diamond (1957). Diamond was an activist who would go on to work for Hayakawa and eventually even become the chairman of U.S. English. Hayakawa's books were favorably reviewed in venues such as *English Journal*, *The New England Quarterly*, *The New York Times*, and the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.<sup>9</sup> He received tenure from San Francisco State College on November 29, 1966 (Wilson, 1966). Capping off his academic career, the Conference on College Composition and Communication favorably cited a later edition of *Language in action* (by then retitled *Language in thought and action*) in the groundbreaking Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) Resolution (CCCC, 1974). Some scholars find his scholarship to be lacking (e.g. Nunberg, 1992), perhaps because he never limited himself to one discipline or because he later became so controversial, but in my view there is no way around the fact that he was a successful scholar.

More importantly for the English-only movement, he was the rare academic who crossed over to the mainstream. Over the years, he did several stints as a newspaper columnist, first for the *Chicago Defender* (a Black

<sup>5</sup> The languages were, in chronological order, Chinese, Japanese, Swedish, Korean, Portuguese, Finnish, Spanish, French, and German (Hayakawa, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> On the Book-of-the-Month-Club's role in US society, see Radway (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Within a week of Pearl Harbor, Hayakawa's publisher wrote to say that they were not going to drop him, but the impulse to send that letter implies that it had been something on people's minds (Davis, 1941, December 12). While almost all Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War II under Executive Order 9066, Hayakawa was not incarcerated because he was living in Chicago, rather than on the West Coast.

<sup>8</sup> When Hayakawa started teaching, Illinois University of Technology was still known as the Armour Institute of Technology, and San Francisco State University was still called San Francisco State College.

<sup>9</sup> See Williams (1941), Conrad (1942), Hazlitt (1942), and Goldberg (1946).

newspaper) (1942–1947) and eventually through a nationally syndicated column (Hayakawa, 1970, February 14). He first ventured into the political fray on December 2, 1968, when he pulled the plug, literally, on the sound system at a protest at San Francisco State College organized by the Black Students Union and the Third World Liberation Front. He had just become the college's acting president, and he would go on to become the college's official president from 1969 to 1973.

Attempting to silence students and other activists became something of a pattern for Hayakawa (Maeda, 2009; Hoang, 2015). This side of him surprised some people, with one anonymous (1968) political cartoon even joking, "Man, I thought Hayakawa's thing was words." However, as Maeda (2009) points out, "From the 1930s through the 1980s, Hayakawa displayed a remarkably consistent commitment to assimilation, integration, and a shared public sphere as solutions to the problem of racism" (p. 42). In other words, Hayakawa criticized racism, but he thought that clearer communication was the solution. At various points, he criticized the burgeoning Asian American student movement (GIDRA, 1969), people who protested the Vietnam War (Anonymous, 1969, February 2), and Japanese Americans who were seeking redress for incarceration during World War II (Hayakawa, 1981, August 4). In his testimony on Japanese internment, Hayakawa (1981, August 4), said, "Of course the relocation was unjust" and "heartbreaking," but at the idea of redress, "my flesh crawls with shame and embarrassment" (pp. 13–14). By the time his university presidency ended, his transition into a firebrand was nearly complete, and it had paid off. In Hayakawa's (1974) CV, he lists then governor (future president) Ronald Reagan as a reference, and Reagan would go on to support his Senate run in 1976.

While Hayakawa was clearly embroiled in many issues of the day, he did not focus on multilingualism or immigration before or during his Senate campaign. Crawford (1992) comes to the same conclusion in the context of *Language in action*: "Oddly, the book never mentions bilingualism, a problem that seems to have escaped the author's notice until he entered politics" (p. 4). Hayakawa shared his agenda frequently, in news interviews and even a newsletter for children in California, but language never came up. I genuinely do not believe that he had his sights set on Official English until well into his Senate term.

A year and a half into his term, however, Senator Hayakawa started to fixate on two things: bilingual ballots and bilingual education. The first time he publicly broached these topics seems to be on the Senate Floor on August 23, 1978, and again at a press conference the next day, August 24, 1978 (Barbieri and Hayakawa, 1978, August 23). The Associated Press (1978, August 25) recounted how Hayakawa described bilingual ballots as "ridiculous," in an article reprinted in newspapers around the country. Perhaps surprisingly, his claim was not that no real citizen would need a bilingual ballot (a common refrain

today). Rather, this was his reasoning: “Tens of thousands of Spanish-language ballots have to be discarded unused after California elections, he said, because voters who don’t read English well enough to vote usually are too embarrassed to ask for a ballot in their native language” (Associated Press, 1978, August 25). However, rather than work on reducing that stigma, he instead advocated for getting rid of bilingual ballots altogether. In the same press conference, Senator Hayakawa also took on bilingual education. Bilingual education can mean a lot of different things, but he was specifically criticizing programs that place an “emphasis on preserving the minority person’s native language” (Associated Press, 1978, August 25). From his perspective, there could be a role for using someone’s native language to help transition to English, but maintaining the first language would be pointless. While Hayakawa pointed to bilingual ballots and education as problems, he did not yet have a clear proposed solution in 1978. By 1981, he would.

Hayakawa and his staff got to work on deciding what the optimal topic and genre would be for a new language policy. While he interacted with a wide range of people through the Senate, he worked particularly closely on this issue with legislative assistants Betty McKay and Patty White,<sup>10</sup> as well as legislative aide George Brazier.<sup>11</sup> McKay and White appear to have led the way on strategy, and Brazier seems to have been a ghostwriter. Hayakawa (1982, December 18) described how Brazier “wrote statements ... and drafted and followed legislation.” The team had some stumbles. In 1979, Hayakawa introduced a bill that would have repealed the bilingual ballots aspect of the Voting Rights Act, but that did not go very far (McKay, 1979, August). In a memo to Hayakawa, McKay (1980, June 3) lays out why the optics are not ideal: “Statutes requiring English literacy as a condition of access to certain areas of American life have generally been designed to resist the entrance of certain racial groups” and “will be viewed by many as having been motivated by racism.” Trying to specifically target voting rights or bilingual education was risky; talking about the English language in more symbolic terms proved safer.

The other main decision they had to make was about genre. As Hayakawa (1981, April 14) explained in a TV news interview, “What I’ve done so far is have my staff research the matter. They’ve come to the decision that a Constitutional Amendment is better than the law,” in part “so that it will last over the generations.” I find this genre choice surprising, and wish I could have been a fly on the wall for those conversations. Pursuing a constitutional

<sup>10</sup> Toward the very end of Hayakawa’s term, White became the legislative director (Shurtleff, 1982, July 28). White had a particularly sterling reputation: A performance review described her as “Superb; has brilliant judgment and good analytical ability; can write; good management technique” (Orly, 1980, September 12).

<sup>11</sup> Brazier appears to have been the most junior of the group. When he applied for the job, he was twenty-three years old (Brazier, 1979).

amendment was by far the more ambitious option. An editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (1981, May 6) called the English Language Amendment (ELA) “radical,” not because of the underlying ideology but because it was not the “ordinary” process. There are hundreds of traditional bills passed every year, whereas the United States has only ever ratified thirty-three constitutional amendments. One possible explanation is that they never assumed that the policy would pass in any form; they just wanted to raise awareness by throwing a Hail Mary. A note from White (1981, May 11) to Brazier supports this theory, because White says, “I think it’s time we started dealing with the Hayakawa amendment as though we could move it.” The subtext is that she did not originally think it had a chance.

On April 27, 1981, Hayakawa officially introduced the ELA in the Senate. The proposed language was:

Sec. 1. The English language shall be the official language of the United States.

Sec. 2. Neither the United States nor any State shall make or enforce any law which requires the use of any language other than English.

Sec. 3. This article shall apply to laws, ordinances, regulations, orders, programs, and policies.

Sec. 4. No order or decree shall be issued by any court of the United States or of any State requiring that any proceedings, or matters to which this article applies be in any language other than English.

Sec. 5. This article shall not prohibit educational instruction in a language other than English as required as a transitional method of making students who use a language other than English proficient in English.

Sec. 6. The Congress and the States shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation. (Hayakawa, 1981, April 27)

While the ELA would go through a few more minor revisions,<sup>12</sup> this first effort was important because it attracted the most media attention and because it was so different from what had come before. While policymakers do not still use this policy as a template (in terms of the exact wording), the overall approach endures. This policy is less bombastic than the one in Dade County. While the effect of the policy would be similar, the rhetoric is more measured. Hayakawa’s team was pleasantly surprised by the public reception.

To marshal the growing public support for the ELA, Hayakawa looked to local governments. The chain of correspondence was complex, but essentially

<sup>12</sup> Eventually, they lost confidence in the constitutional amendment genre and returned to an older idea of attaching Official English to a larger immigration bill (Brazier, 1982, August 17). This strategy did not go anywhere.



there were three phases: soliciting letters, replying to those letters, and asking for formal resolutions. First, Hayakawa introduced the ELA, and thousands of constituents wrote to his Senate office with their thoughts on the policy proposal. This back-and-forth is typical, but what happened next was more innovative. Second, Hayakawa's office made note of any constituent letters where the writer mentioned that they were a "local official" and wrote back to them, asking them to write with more details specific to their local government (Brazier, 1982, April 6). For example, the form letter included a question about how many bilingual ballots the local government had to print. Third, Hayakawa shifted from requesting information to requesting that city and county governments pass formal resolutions of support. In a speech to a group of county supervisors, Hayakawa (1981)<sup>13</sup> explains, "One of my campaigns to gain support for this amendment is to get county supervisorial boards behind me, and I have gathered some 30 so far. In the near future, I would like to talk to you about the bill, explain its provisions, with the hope of securing your approval and a resolution supporting it." Later that year, Hayakawa's office compiled a list of forty-four cities, counties, and school boards that had indicated their support. Most of these local governments wrote letters of support, which I do not count as language policies *per se*.

However, there were at least six cities and one county in California that passed more formal resolutions supporting making English the only official language of the United States:

- City Council, Holtville
- City Council, Huntington Park
- City Council, Palos Verdes Estates
- City Council, Placentia
- City Council, Signal Hill
- City Council, South Gate
- County Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles County

Surveying these resolutions and letters of support, these communities vary widely in terms of size, geography, and demographics. A letter of support from Tulelake, California, caught my attention because that was the location of the most notorious Japanese internment camp during World War II. Some local governments supported Hayakawa because their community was already relatively monolingual; others seemed to support him precisely because their community was not monolingual and they resented that. That same spread continues today. It is important to take these local documents with a grain of salt, of course. They may not have known that Hayakawa was not going

<sup>13</sup> This source is undated, but based on context it is from 1981.

to run for reelection, and they may have simply wanted to ingratiate themselves to their senator. As I discuss in Chapter 2, this dynamic also continued to play a role: Some people vote for language policies not for any ideological reason but out of a sense of collegiality or obligation. Whatever their motivations, Hayakawa's constituents kept writing to him, and he kept saving that correspondence. That cache was about to catch the attention of the Tanton. When Tanton (1981, December 2) realized that Hayakawa's mailing list was "a virtual goldmine," it sparked the next phase of the English-only movement (emphasis in original).

### John Tanton and U.S. English

Tanton (1989, October 4) believed that "[e]nvironmental, population, immigration, and language policy issues are inextricably intertwined." That is not how people typically think about language policy, but Tanton was not a typical person. He came to language policy through his work in other social movements and activist organizations. As far back as the 1950s, Tanton was active in movements for conservation and population control, but it was not until 1980 that he started realizing language policy could be part of the equation. He began working on environmental conservation through local organizations in Petoskey, Michigan, as well as through chapters of the Audubon Society and Sierra Club (Tanton, 1976, November).

Tanton came to believe that overpopulation was one of the primary threats to the natural environment. In 1965, he and his wife Mary Lou Tanton started the process of opening a Planned Parenthood office in Petoskey (Tanton, 1976, November).<sup>14</sup> In 1969, he wrote to a professor of medicine at the University of Michigan to inquire about the existence of "any legislation which would allow a court to order sterilization" of local women who were having children outside of marriage (Tanton, 1969, March 10).<sup>15</sup> He started chairing a new population committee in the Sierra Club's Mackinac chapter that same year (Tanton, 1976, November). Tanton went on to chair a similar Sierra Club committee at the national level in 1971 (Berry, 1971, March 24). On that Sierra Club committee, he met one of his closest mentors, the ecologist Garrett Hardin (Tanton, 1989, p. 14). As his interest in population issues grew, he left some of his prior volunteer roles and devoted more time to a new organization, Zero Population Growth (ZPG), starting in 1973 (Tanton, 1976, November). All the while, he also worked as an ophthalmologist.

<sup>14</sup> Today, Planned Parenthood generally advocates for reproductive justice, not involuntary sterilization. Even in the 1960s, Tanton's approach was not the norm.

<sup>15</sup> The professor wrote back and discouraged the practice of involuntary sterilization, while acknowledging that it was legal in some cases (Eliot, 1969, March 17).

In these early roles, Tanton was testing out some of the genres and writing strategies that he would later incorporate into the English-only movement. As early as medical school, he joined an academic honors society and “rewrote the organization’s constitution and compiled the first directory” for members (Rohe, 2002, p. 24). According to a profile by the journalist Tom Dammann (1981), Tanton “helped write” Michigan’s 1970 Environmental Protection Act (p. 332).

In addition to refining his writing, Tanton was also starting to think more locally. He once wrote and proposed a county ordinance that would ban mobile homes outside of designated areas (Tanton, 1974, June 14). He also helped initiate and raise money for several local environmental lawsuits to stop new development in his corner of Michigan. While this expression did not exist at the time, in today’s terms Tanton was becoming a NIMBY (“not in my backyard”).

Mixing environmentalism and eugenics may seem unusual today, since I am writing this book in a moment when the two movements are associated with very different segments of the political spectrum. However, in the 1960s and 1970s this set of interests was not uncommon (Robertson, 2012). Jonathan Franzen’s (2010) bestselling novel *Freedom* may be the most recognizable portrait of this sort of politics. The novel follows Walter Berglund, a Tanton-esque protagonist who is a staunch environmentalist, “annually renewing Student-level member of Zero Population Growth” in college in the 1970s (p. 119); Walter later goes on to promote population control (p. 223). Tanton was not alone in wanting to prevent some people from reproducing in the name of the environment.

Eventually, however, Tanton’s work started to grow beyond purely environmental and population-focused causes. While ZPG primarily focused on sterilization and family planning worldwide, Tanton began to consider immigration to be the more problematic and more solvable source of new people in the United States. At the time, talking about reducing immigration as a way to reduce the population felt like “a forbidden topic” (Tanton, 1989, p. 13). ZPG allowed Tanton to study the possibility of adding immigration reform to its agenda in the future, but its lack of enthusiasm for this project ultimately spurred him to form FAIR in 1978 (Tanton, 1989, p. 16).

The aim of FAIR was to minimize immigration into the United States. Starting up FAIR (and the related FAIR Congressional Task Force) was how Tanton started working with many of the people he would collaborate with over the rest of his career, including Roger Conner, Barnaby Zall, Kathy Bricker, Gerda Bikales, K. C. McAlpin, and Bob Park. While Tanton served as Chairman and focused on big-picture strategy, Conner came on as Executive Director in 1978, managed the day-to-day, and drew on his background in law (Conner, 1989). In 1979, Conner decided to hire Zall because the other

finalist for the position “didn’t have Barnaby’s facility with writing at all” (p. 38). Their colleague William C. Paddock (1993) remembers Zall as “brilliant” and FAIR as “lucky” to have him (p. 17). Zall was talented, and he seemed to know it. When another colleague, Dan Stein (1994), recalls meeting Zall back in 1982, he wryly comments that Zall “fancied himself the greatest lawyer since Perry Mason and the greatest lobbyist since Jack Valente [*sic*]” (p. 18).<sup>16</sup> Bricker also played an instrumental role when she joined in 1980, initially as Tanton’s assistant. Tanton (1989) recalls, “Finding Kathy Bricker was a big event in my organizational life in terms of being able to get more done” in Petoskey. Bikales was a “jill-of-all-trades,” policy analyst, and a prolific writer who worked out of FAIR’s Washington, DC, office (Conner, 1989, pp. 96–97). McAlpin and Park both started as lobbyists for the FAIR Congressional Task Force (p. 107). All of these people eventually went on to work with Tanton on either U.S. English or ProEnglish or both, but they spent several years at FAIR first.

Understanding FAIR is crucial to understanding U.S. English. I say so not because of shared beliefs but because of shared resources. In public, FAIR and U.S. English kept each other at arm’s length.<sup>17</sup> Internally, they shared a lot. They shared an office.<sup>18</sup> They had a joint office Christmas party.<sup>19</sup> They shared computer services.<sup>20</sup> They shared their mailing lists.<sup>21</sup> They applied for a grant together.<sup>22</sup> The FAIR Congressional Task Force and U.S. English shared a phone bill.<sup>23</sup> FAIR had U.S. English on speed dial.<sup>24</sup> For most of the 1980s, it could be difficult to tell where FAIR ended and U.S. English began.

<sup>16</sup> Perry Mason is a fictional lawyer in novels and on TV. Jack Valenti was a real lobbyist who worked for President Lyndon Johnson and later for the Motion Picture Association of America. Stein’s quip is akin to someone feeling they are the best detective since Sherlock Holmes.

<sup>17</sup> Conner (1983, January 17) wrote in a memo to Tanton and Bikales, “In public or quasi-public utterances, we should avoid the idea that FAIR wanted to raise the spectre of bilingualism as a reason to limit immigration, and set up this group to do so. This smacks of trying to raise the issue while keeping FAIR’s skirts clear. Also, telling people that you decided to raise bilingualism as a way to curtail immigration could hurt you and FAIR.”

<sup>18</sup> Starting in late 1983, FAIR signed a lease for an office space which it “split with USEnglish” (Stein, 1994, p. 45; see also McAlpin, 1983, November 1).

<sup>19</sup> A FAIR employee wrote in a memo, “The Christmas party will be held jointly with U.S. English” (Wilkinson, 1987, November 16).

<sup>20</sup> See Tanton (1984, March 11) and McAlpin and Bikales (1985, March 18).

<sup>21</sup> Tanton (1989) explained, “I thought that setting up U.S. English would turn out to be a supportive move for FAIR, as it has been. It’s turned out that the list of donors that U.S. English developed has proved to be an excellent list for FAIR to mail to for recruits, better than any other list, as a matter of fact” (p. 58).

<sup>22</sup> Conner and Bikales (1985, February 14) submitted a jointly authored grant application to the Kresge Foundation for new computing services. At the time, Conner was the executive director of FAIR and Bikales was the executive director of U.S. English.

<sup>23</sup> The company C&P Telephone (1983, December 17) addressed its monthly bill to an account called “FAIR Congressional Tsk Frce-US English.”

<sup>24</sup> See FAIR (1987, February 11) and FAIR (1989, May 2). It is notable that it kept U.S. English on speed dial both before and after Tanton resigned from U.S. English.

Even though FAIR's mission was nativist, the organization garnered external support from mainstream public figures.<sup>25</sup> It also received ample funding from several benefactors, as well as from direct mail fundraising. The first key benefactor was Sidney Swensrud, whose family foundation donated "at least \$2.7 million" to FAIR over the years (O'Connor, 2021, p. 35). The most generous benefactor was Cordelia Scaife May, an heiress to the Mellon family fortune and the person behind the Colcom Foundation (O'Connor, 2021, pp. 28–29).<sup>26</sup> In a 1980s letter to a family member, May described Cuban refugees in dehumanizing terms: "They breed like hamsters" (Kulish and McIntire, 2019, August 14). Essentially, May had a similar mindset as Shafer, except that May was worth almost a billion dollars. May's foundations donated at least \$5.8 million to FAIR and other Tanton organizations in the 1980s, including at least \$650,000 just to U.S. English (Crawford, 1992, p. 158). This funding source seems to have endured: Since 2006, the Colcom Foundation has donated "approximately \$138 million into the Tanton network" (O'Connor, 2021, p. 30). Tanton's team was aware that receiving funding from May was not ideal for their image. When an apparently naïve staffer tried to draft a comprehensive history of FAIR to distribute to new staff (perhaps for a sort of employee handbook), Bricker (1985, August 8) worried that this person may have been a little too candid about where FAIR got its funding: "I wonder if it would be a good idea for her to judiciously prune out the references to people like Mrs. May and the amounts of money given."

While FAIR started as a part-time activity for Tanton, in 1980 he decided to take a nine-month-long sabbatical to work on activism full time, and it was during this time when he became interested in language policy. His plan was to move to Washington, DC, work on lobbying for FAIR, and tour the country to drum up additional supporters and donors (Dr. Tanton to take FAIR fight to Washington, 1981, July). This was also the first year his archive included writing about "bilingualism," in a grant application for FAIR (1980, July 1), and about "language policy," in a letter to a colleague about driver's license tests in multiple languages (Tanton, 1980, November 5). This sabbatical was about to change the course of Tanton's life.

Three moments in Tanton's sabbatical spurred him to turn to language issues. First, his children enrolled in a public school in a Washington, DC, suburb. An article in the *Petoskey News-Review* reported that the Tantons "had some experience with the problems immigration brings to a community as

<sup>25</sup> Its National Board of Advisors included the investor Warren Buffett, naturalist Roger Tory Peterson, former president of the National Audubon Society Elvis J. Stahr, former US senator Walter Huddleston, former governor of Illinois Richard Ogilvie, former governor of Colorado Richard D. Lamm, and tenured professors from Stanford University, New York University, Duke University, and Yeshiva University (FAIR, 1985, July).

<sup>26</sup> Colcom is short for "cold comfort" (O'Connor, 2021, p. 35).

well. They lived in Arlington, Va., which has a heavy Vietnamese concentration and often received notices from [one daughter's] school which were written in five languages" (Holmes-Greeley, 1982, July 27). He (and the Petoskey journalist, it seems) considered linguistic pluralism to be one of "the problems immigration brings to a community." Elsewhere, Tanton (1981, November 3) referred to the DC area as "the urban wasteland." (Interestingly, Arlington, VA, has much in common with the diverse Maryland suburbs on the other side of Washington, DC, and the way Tanton described Arlington is the way some of my participants describe Montgomery County.) This sabbatical appears to have been his first sustained experience in a multilingual urban environment, and the experience was not a positive one.

Second, at work in DC and on lobbying and fundraising trips around the country, Tanton described meeting people who were not all that sympathetic to his anti-immigration lobbying, until the question of language came up. Through these conversations, he realized that English-only policies could be a way to drum up interest for his broader agenda. In one letter, for instance, Tanton (1983, April 5) wrote, "I repeatedly ran into people who were uncertain about immigration, but were resolute in their feelings on the kindred issue of bilingualism." In these situations, then, he gradually came to understand that many Americans were hesitant to enforce strict immigration laws, or to enact new ones, but they were much more ready to enforce and enact policies that would limit the use of the languages used by those immigrants, whether in "the public schools" or "the provision of government services and documents."<sup>27</sup> He seems to have realized that while language was not his first priority, other people considered it to be an important issue and that such people could eventually be brought on board to his other causes.

The final and most important development was that Tanton learned about Hayakawa. Initially, Tanton was interested in Hayakawa for his mailing list. Hayakawa had something priceless: a ready-made list of likely voters who cared about language and immigration. According to a memo, Tanton (1981, December 2) first learned about this list when he met Stanley Diamond on November 19, 1981, at Diamond's office in San Francisco. That was the same memo where Tanton called this mailing list "a virtual goldmine." The day after writing that memo, Tanton asked lawyer Barnaby Zall if he could legally obtain that mailing list, but Zall (1981, December 3) replied that "there are ethical + election law problems in the way." So, Tanton proposed that maybe he could invite Hayakawa to join a new organization and that they could collaborate in that way. Tanton knew an opportunity when he saw one.

<sup>27</sup> He told similar stories in six other letters within the span of a year (1982, December 7; 1983, January 17; 1983, March 22; 1983, April 13; 1983, June 29; 1983, December 3).

The process of courting Hayakawa's team took place gradually over several years, from 1978 to late 1982. I say "courting" and "team" because this process was not about Tanton and Hayakawa meeting as two people already on the same page. Tanton and FAIR appear to have initiated every step of the process. For example, Hayakawa never reached out to FAIR; FAIR reached out to Hayakawa. Similarly, Hayakawa never came to FAIR; Tanton and his employees always went to Hayakawa's Senate offices. Tanton often met with one of Hayakawa's staff, as though Hayakawa himself were too aloof or too busy; when Hayakawa was there, though, Tanton was always there too. In what I believe was the first contact between FAIR and Hayakawa, Conner (1978, November 13) wrote to Hayakawa to express admiration toward the senator's criticism of "bilingual education programs" and to ask if Hayakawa could send him more information. I do not know if Hayakawa's office replied at the time, but a few years later, Tanton started trying harder.

Tanton made his first attempt at that November 1981 meeting with Stanley Diamond. He also wrote individually to Diamond to say, "I hope you will want to work with us," which presaged the fact that Diamond would later lead the California English Campaign and then U.S. English (Tanton, 1982, March 29). Bikales (1982, February 18) reached out to Hayakawa's legislative assistant Patty White and said, hopefully, "We look forward to an exploratory meeting with the Senator." Based on Hayakawa's (1982) day calendar, Hayakawa and Tanton met for the first time on March 15 and then again on May 10. In the minutes from that first meeting, Bikales (1982a, March 15) wrote that Hayakawa "seems agreeable" to Tanton's and her idea for "our new organization, 'USEnglish.'" Later that fall, she wrote to Garrett Hardin to say that "getting USEnglish off the ground" was "taking longer than it should, because Senator Hayakawa is not the easiest person to activate" (Bikales, 1982, October 20). Soon after, Bikales (1982, November 10) wrote to another colleague that part of the motivation was that "we should have 'ethnic' names associated with U.S. English. Hayakawa and Bikales are good ones to start with, I suppose." Amid all these details, the takeaway is that the relationship was asymmetric: Tanton and his colleagues really wanted Hayakawa on board, and Hayakawa seems to have let himself be brought on board. While Hayakawa was smart and talented, they did not really want him for that. They wanted his name and his mailing list.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention that Hayakawa may not have had his full faculties at the time. In a rough draft of the minutes from that first big meeting, Bikales (1982b, March 15) included this passage:

It quickly became apparent that Hayakawa is sluggish and forgetful. He could not recall the names of the Congressman [*sic*] who will be introducing his bill in the House; in a number of instances, he misinterpreted questions that arose; he wanted to refer to a favorite passage in a book he has on hand, but couldn't locate the book on his shelves.



He speaks very slowly and very quietly. ... One can see why the Republican command insisted on his retirement. Alan and Patty are obviously well aware of his condition, and solicitous about his welfare.

That whole passage is scratched out in the rough draft and does not appear in the more polished draft (perhaps because a copy was being sent to Alan and Patty). Hayakawa may not have been in a position to take on a role at U.S. English, at least not at this specific time in 1982.<sup>28</sup> A market research report on Hayakawa's prospects for reelection indicated that while voters liked his proposed ELA, some voters considered him "Too old/senile" (Market Opinion Research, 1981, May). That same month, a letter to the editor criticized Hayakawa for his "advanced state of senility" (Haro, 1981, May 1). As Bikales alluded, Hayakawa did not run for reelection. Serving only one term is anomalous for a senator; the mean length of service in the Senate is 11 years, and senators run for reelection 88.5 percent of the time (Congressional Research Service, 2021). I cannot say how Hayakawa felt at the time, but I can say that if I had a meeting with someone who seemed that forgetful, I would not try to convince them to take on a new job.

Nevertheless, the planning and recruitment process continued apace. This process took a little more than a year, during which time Tanton came up with the name "U.S. English,"<sup>29</sup> hired more people, decided that operations would happen in Petoskey, Washington, DC, and San Francisco, and designed letterhead, a newsletter, pamphlets, and fundraising letters. Tanton also set up a new umbrella organization. This organization took a while to settle on a name: It was initially called the "Conservation Workshop, Inc." in 1981, then renamed the "Futures Workshop, Inc." in 1982, then renamed "U.S." in 1983, then renamed "U.S., Inc." in 2019.<sup>30</sup> The original Tax ID number for U.S. English (and U.S., Inc. as the umbrella organization) was 38-2418377.<sup>31</sup> (I return to this number shortly, because ProEnglish used the same one). Once Tanton (1982, June 9) had designed the organizational structure, he offered Hayakawa the position of "Honorary Chairman or Honorary President, whichever you

<sup>28</sup> There are later appearances where he speaks lucidly and at length, such as a 1986 C-SPAN interview, and so his condition may very well have been temporary or a misinterpretation on Bikales' part (Hayakawa, 1986, October 24).

<sup>29</sup> In the early years, there were two different spellings, "U.S. English" and "USEnglish." The latter had the benefit of a double meaning: either "U.S. English" or "Use English," but now people typically just use the former.

<sup>30</sup> See Tanton (1981, June 3, 1982, April 1), Tanton and Bricker (1983, May 23), and Calloway (2019, March 19).

<sup>31</sup> For example, one of U.S. English's (1983) earliest fundraising letters says, "U.S. English is a project of the Futures Workshop, a nonprofit, tax-exempt public interest organization. Your contribution is tax-deductible. Refer to IRS Identification Number 38-2418377." U.S. English (1985, May/June) also includes this Tax ID number and states, "U.S. English is a project of U.S., Inc." See also Tanton (1985, August 5).

prefer,” and assured him that either would come with “no official duties.” Hayakawa became something of a figurehead; he would sign off on letters and attend meetings, but it appears that he did not write or consult on most of those letters (Bricker, 1986, February 10). In mid-1982, someone created a detailed to-do list in preparation for U.S. English meeting its “goal” of being “in full operation by January 1, 1983.” There were nineteen items on the to-do list, from “Apply for tax exempt status” to “Write basic brochure” to “Write goals and principles,” each associated with a particular person or pair taking responsibility for that item, but Senator Hayakawa was nowhere on the list (U.S. English, 1982).

Just a few months after U.S. English debuted, Hayakawa seemed to regret getting involved. He wrote to Tanton that he wanted to back out, but Tanton was not going to give up easily. In a three-page-single-spaced letter, Tanton (1983, May 7) responds to Hayakawa, “I was saddened to receive your letter instructing us to remove your name from formal association with U.S. English.” Tanton tries to placate him by saying that he would not have to attend board meetings; all Tanton would need is “the loan of your good name to validate for a skeptical public our cause.” He concludes, “I hope you will stay on board.” I have not found any follow-up correspondence, and so I do not know how it is that Hayakawa’s name was not removed. Whatever happened, Hayakawa’s name is still central to U.S. English’s brand. Tensions continued between different cliques within the organization: Stanley Diamond complained about a “serious lack of communication” between U.S. English’s San Francisco office (Hayakawa’s city) and the other offices (where Tanton spent more time) (Bricker, 1986, April 18). Up until 1989, though, the infighting stayed just that: internal.

While U.S. English tried to keep Hayakawa contained, Tanton focused on writing materials that would reach a range of audiences, from politicians to potential donors. Tanton (1994b) believed that “[i]mmigration reform requires a lot of writing” (p. 165). He put that philosophy into practice by spending much of his time drafting, revising, circulating, and giving feedback on materials for U.S. English and his other organizations. Journalist Sara Gay Dammann (1986, November 19) photographed Tanton at his desk in Petoskey, where he likely did some of this writing (Figure 1.1). I find this photo meaningful on two levels. This photo shows one of Tanton’s workspaces *and* it suggests that being a writer was part of his public image. To put it another way, some activists are photographed giving speeches or marching in the street, but not Tanton. He is photographed at his desk or, even more often, outdoors in nature (S. G. Dammann, 1981, September).

U.S. English’s first project was Proposition O, a successful 1983 San Francisco ballot measure that directed that the local government ask Congress and the president to make ballots English-only (Woolard, 1989; HoSang,



Figure 1.1 John Tanton with pen and paper at his desk in Petoskey, Michigan, in 1986. Reproduced by permission of Sara Gay Dammann

2010, p. 135). U.S. English considered Proposition O to be a model for other parts of the United States. Immediately after the proposition passed, Tanton (1983, November 10) wrote, “On to the state level now!” The following week, in another letter, he elaborated, by saying, “An isolated vote in San Francisco,

if not picked up on and coordinated by a group with a larger perspective, will simply go nowhere. We are for example looking into the possibility of an initiative in Florida” (Tanton, 1983, November 16). In this model, local policies are a means, not an end; the point is to move up to higher scales. Tanton (1983, April 26) often quoted Justice Louis Brandeis’ description of states as laboratories of the nation. Proposition O therefore fit Tanton’s notion that local policies were valuable as templates and test cases. In an attempt to formalize this process, U.S. English sought a “Coordinator to Secure County Chairmen,” although it is not clear whether the position ever came to fruition (Tanton, 1985, June 3). The U.S. English newsletter began to feature “the text of an ideal state level ELA,” with the intention of “invit[ing] members in states where it has not been introduced to contact their own state legislator and push it” (Tanton, 1985, March 15). Throughout the early years of U.S. English, the organization operated under the premise that language policy ideas would seem more authentic if they seemed to come from the grassroots, rather than from them.

Hayakawa, for his part, suggested to a resident of Monterey Park, California, that the town should pass an official language ordinance. Crawford (1992) interviewed that resident, Frank Arcuri, and he described him as a man who already “relished combat on numerous local issues” but who had not heard about the “new” idea of official language laws before 1985 (p. 7). In Monterey Park, the focus was not so much on ballots as on signs in languages other than English, especially Chinese (Fong, 1994; Saito, 1998).<sup>32</sup> While the details were different in Monterey Park and San Francisco, the pattern was the same: Someone from U.S. English would suggest a local English-only law or a proposition but then leave it to the people in that community to be the most visible sponsors.

The people making and living with those policies, however, did not always see themselves as in service to Tanton’s broader mission, nor did they always adhere to his playbook. As the modern English-only movement became more popular, it became more difficult for U.S. English to steer the decision-making of local governments. Tanton (1985, February 6) decided against encouraging local chapters of his organizations, because they seemed too “unmanagab[le].” Similarly, when he began working with English-only activists in Florida (some of whom had also worked with Shafer), he took great pains to try to influence them but also to distance himself from them, such that if they did anything embarrassing he would not share the blame. For example, after one of these activists, Robert Melby, did an NBC television interview with Bryant Gumbel to promote an English-only policy, Tanton wrote him a

<sup>32</sup> The policy situation in Monterey Park continues to change. The law was revised in 1989 (Horton and Calderon, 2010) and then reconsidered again in 2013.

long letter with suggested talking points and strategies, since he had found Melby's performance too angry and abrasive. He encouraged Melby to adopt a calmer tone, make fewer blunt pronouncements, and ask more rhetorical questions. Tanton ended the letter by reminding Melby that "we should make every effort to keep the FEC [Florida English Campaign] and U.S. English separate in people's minds and in fact. No one should speak for U.S. English or the Florida English campaign who has not been ... found able to perform in front of the media" (1985, February 7). This kind of exchange, in which English-only organizations and local activists would collaborate but not necessarily agree or want to advertise that collaboration, became a common feature of English-only campaigns.

Over the course of the 1980s and through the 1990s, several states and dozens of cities and counties considered or passed English-only legislation. Some of these governments had U.S. English's assistance, some had help from other emerging English-only organizations such as English First and, later, ProEnglish, while some seem to have based their policies merely on word of mouth or news coverage. Geographically, there is no clear-cut pattern, but generally these policies emerged in conservative areas of liberal states, like the wealthy suburbs of Chicago, rural counties in Wisconsin, towns in Eastern Washington, and, on a personal note, my town in Massachusetts. In states that already had or were making English the official language, city and county policies may not have seemed as necessary (e.g. there has been only one in Arizona). In his quantitative study of local anti-immigrant policies between 1990 and 2000, Hopkins (2010) includes English-only policies as one subset of these policies and finds that they tend to appear in communities that are "wealthier," "larger," and with a higher percentage of immigrant residents (p. 54). While there are exceptions, the paradigmatic place for these policies is a red pocket in a blue state that used to be wealthy, with few immigrants, and recently became ever so slightly less wealthy and more ethnically diverse.

Dade County exemplified this pattern, and it continued to be a touchstone. During her time as Executive Director of U.S. English, for instance, Bricker (1989, November 10) wrote a memo where she says, "We are watching Dade County's plan to make language discrimination a two-way street, so a person has the same appeal rights whether Spanish or English-speaking." The context is that her legal counsel, Barnaby Zall, had pointed out that there was no legal precedent for a monolingual English speaker filing a discrimination claim if they did not get a job where bilingualism was a requirement. Bricker was noting that Dade County was trying to change that, so that it would be effectively illegal for an employer to make bilingualism a job requirement. For its part, FAIR (1996) put a photo of Citizens for Dade United activists on one of its training guides for grassroots organizers.

### Reckonings at U.S. English and the Rise of ProEnglish

Gradually, the cracks in U.S. English started to show. Something had to give. This period of tumult, between 1988 and 1994, could have been the end, but instead the movement emerged more sustainable and more savvy. Despite Tanton's worries about wild cards at the local level, coordinating between U.S. English and local governments had actually worked fairly smoothly. In a reversal of fortune, it was not a local activist but Tanton himself who would almost bring the movement down. It began when someone leaked one of Tanton's old memos to the press. The timing was strategic: The memo was from 1986, but the press received it only in the lead up to a key Arizona election in October 1988 (Crawford, 1992, p. 150). In this memo, Tanton (1986, October 10) lays out his fears of a "Latin onslaught" and asks rhetorical questions like "Will the present majority peaceably hand over its political power to a group that is simply more fertile?" Once the memo went public, Tanton promptly resigned from his role as Chairman. Linda Chavez also resigned around the same time, only a year after she had become President of U.S. English. Chavez (1991) remembers that the memo "struck me as anti-Hispanic" (p. 92). Two years later, Tanton (1990, June 8) apologized to Chavez, saying, "I always felt sorry that through no fault of your own, you got caught up in the memo controversy." In large part due to this scandal, Hayakawa and his inner circle worried that Hayakawa's reputation would be tarnished too. In 1990, Hayakawa wrote to Diamond to say that "U.S. English will never fully recover" from the scandal and that he would vote "to dismiss any member of our staff or board who is associated with any Tanton organization."<sup>33</sup> Even after Hayakawa's death in 1992, his personal assistant toward the end of his life explained that she and Hayakawa's widow "both feel very uncomfortable that they [U.S. English] might be using his name. ... [T]here's nothing any of us can do" (Griffiths, 1993).

It is worth pondering why a certain moment becomes a tipping point. As I hope I have shown in this chapter, the memo in question was not necessarily out of the ordinary for the people and organizations involved. The sentiments in that memo are a dime a dozen. So, why was it this moment when people resigned en masse from U.S. English? The only explanation I can think of is that it was not the racism that was intolerable; it was the public embarrassment. If the memo had stayed internal, I doubt anyone would have resigned. Indeed, I have not found any instances of people resigning over this memo when Tanton originally circulated it in 1986. Similarly, if the memo had surfaced someday in an academic article or even a piece of investigative journalism, I doubt anyone would have resigned. However, whoever the leaker was wise enough to

<sup>33</sup> This 1990 letter is appended to Hayakawa's (1989) oral history interview.



pick one of the few moments when the memo would receive not just a little but *a lot* of media attention. In the United States, almost all elections happen in November, and so the “October surprise” is a time-honored tradition in which people release unflattering information about their opponents right before voters go to the polls. Of course, public shaming does not always lead to change, but in this case it did. But U.S. English was not out of the woods yet.

U.S. English went through a second reckoning when Tanton’s successors left too. Kathy Bricker left sometime around 1990 or 1991, and in 1991 she complained to Tanton that she had been pushed out (Tanton, 1991, March 8). Stanley Diamond took over, but in 1992 he too was ousted. The circumstances are somewhat murky, but in Diamond’s case, it seems that colleagues felt that he was blackmailing them (Associated Press, 1992, March 17; Crawford, 1992, p. 172). When Diamond left, former California Republican member of Congress Norman Shumway took over briefly, and then Shumway appointed Mauro Mujica.

Mujica first heard about U.S. English through his wife Dr. Bárbara Mujica. Dr. Mujica had known Hayakawa through academia. She joined the U.S. English Board of Advisors in 1983. She is now Professor Emerita of Spanish at Georgetown University. When I interviewed Mauro Mujica in 2019, he joked that when he first went to U.S. English events, he was just known as “the husband,” but eventually he got more involved.

When Mujica took the helm in 1993, he brought a sense of equanimity to an organization that had been quite volatile. He recalled that initially the U.S. English office seemed shabby and disorganized – “it looked like the Salvation Army.” The disarray was not just on the surface; the organization was in debt. As one example of why they were in debt, Mujica described how U.S. English had organized a direct mail campaign but forgot to include return envelopes in the mailers. That kind of mistake is costly for an organization that does so much of its fundraising through the mail. In an effort to right-size, Mujica let several employees go. He remembered that Barnaby Zall had recommended that he “clean house.” Mujica also described how he had downsized the office, from a 15,000 square foot space to the more modest 1,500 square foot office U.S. English uses today. This smaller office is primarily due to a smaller staff, but Mujica also noted that remote work was a factor (even before the pandemic). Overall, Mujica made U.S. English more sustainable.

At the same time, what U.S. English gained in stability it may have lost in vim and vigor. From his vantage point in Washington, DC, Mujica told me that U.S. English used to have some “crazy guys from Arizona,” and I would not necessarily dispute that characterization. At the same time, that level of passion did get results. Furthermore, the organization seems to have held more events in the past, such as a “National Membership Meeting” complete with “Guest speakers, panel discussions, and workshops” (U.S. English, 1989,



March/April). I have not heard of any events like that happening lately. While U.S. English will still testify at public hearings and make statements to the press (including in the context of city and county language policies), it tends to stay above the fray.

Meanwhile, Tanton's second English-only organization was only too happy to jump in the fray. Tanton launched the new organization, English Language Advocates, in 1994. While Bob Park was the first official chair of English Language Advocates, Tanton still played a central role. For example, in an early press release from the organization, the contact information for the "National Office" is Tanton's address in Petoskey, Michigan (Park, 1997, March 3). Also, Tanton's (1990, October 23) name was on the government paperwork to register English Language Advocates as a new project under the umbrella organization U.S., Inc. When he filed this document, it meant that English Language Advocates was now using the same Tax ID number that U.S. English had been using a decade earlier (38-2418377). Meanwhile, at some point in the 1980s, U.S. English started operating under a different Tax ID number (38-2495938) and a different tax status altogether – 501(c)4, as opposed to a 501(c)3. As far as I know, it is not common for organizations to share a Tax ID number, nor is it common for an organization to operate under different Tax ID numbers at different points in time.

Tanton's new organization really came into its own and into the digital age in the year 2000. One of ProEnglish's strengths has always been crafting policies for state and local governments and putting those texts online as templates. To help make their materials easier to find, the organization changed its name from "English Language Advocates" to "ProEnglish" in 2000. Park's reasoning was prescient: "[H]aving a short, easy-to-remember name" is important "in the era of electronic communications when so many organizations are competing for the public's attention via the Internet" (ProEnglish, 2000a). That same year, ProEnglish (2000b) put a fill-in-the-blank policy template on their website for the first time. Although this template is not explicitly dated, it does mention the year 2000, as well as "Vice President Gore" and "President Clinton," which suggests that it was written before the November 2000 election. In contrast to the policies in Maryland, which are based on a different template (see Chapter 2), this precursor is oriented more toward the federal government: It explicitly criticizes "the Department of Education," "federally coerced bilingual education," "statehood for territories" that use other languages (Puerto Rico, etc.), and it calls for copies to be sent to the state county association, state representatives, senators, state governors, members of Congress, the Speaker of the House, and, most strikingly, Trent Lott, Al Gore, Bill Clinton, and all the living former presidents and vice presidents. At this time, then, ProEnglish still viewed the local as a means to a more nationalist end. While this model may not have been taken up widely, it did establish the practice of publishing and

circulating language policy templates online in the United States and laid the groundwork for the policies I examine in the chapters to come.

## Conclusion

During the first twenty years of the modern English-only movement (1980–2000), people forged relationships, organizations, and strategies that endure today. While the Dade County policy emerged quickly, it is worth noting how long the other policies took to take shape and how many disagreements there were along the way. Hayakawa took three years to develop his proposed ELA, and even then, it never quite passed. Tanton took two years to get U.S. English started and another few months after that to launch his first language policy campaign. Furthermore, even among people who wanted to make English the official language, there were serious disagreements over how best to do that. By the end of this chapter, almost all the people I discussed had become estranged from one or more of their fellow activists. These early years, then, presaged the English-only movement's vulnerabilities as well as its strengths.

Today, FAIR, U.S. English, and ProEnglish are still going. Furthermore, there are people from this phase who continued to play an influential role into the twenty-first century: I touched on McAlpin in the Introduction. I will return to Zall's writing in Chapter 2, and I will expand on Tanton's and Mujica's work in Chapter 3. All three worked on language policy for more than thirty years.

And even though most of the people in this chapter have passed away or retired or otherwise moved on, their influence continues. Shafer and her fellow activists showed that modern voters could and would support an English-only policy. Shafer also showed that you could have your lawyer ghostwrite your English-only policy for you. Finally, she also had the creative idea to start a nonprofit to promote an English-only policy.

For his part, Hayakawa and his staff imagined a world where Official English could be the law of the land across the United States, a world in which the target was not just bilingual ballots or bilingual education or some other narrow domain but all of government communication. This team also showed the importance of genre choice, as they vacillated over whether to pursue a traditional bill or a constitutional amendment. Hayakawa also showed that local governments would be willing to pass resolutions in support of some larger language policy goal. Finally, he showed the value of having a public intellectual support English-only policies. His reputation was so valuable that it may have led people to take advantage of him.

Meanwhile, Tanton was smart enough to notice that Shafer and Hayakawa were on to something. He was perceptive enough to listen, really listen, when he heard everyday people complain about language issues. Ultimately, Tanton was a once-in-a-generation organizer and fundraiser.

In addition to detailing these early innovations on their own, I wanted to show that these innovations were all connected. People and organizations generally do not operate in isolation, and nowhere is that truer than in the English-only movement. Those who lived through these early years are aware of the level of cross-pollination. Tanton's colleagues freely describe him as orchestrating multiple organizations, particularly when they are writing for an insider audience (e.g. Brimelow, 2006, p. 302). In their most public-facing materials, however, FAIR, U.S. English, and ProEnglish do not advertise their common origins. And, to be fair, they do not have as much in common anymore. U.S. English and FAIR no longer share an office. U.S. English and ProEnglish no longer exist under the same umbrella organization. While the organizations have branched out, it is important to recognize that they are each part of each other's origin stories.