

Measuring shifts in attitudes about language use and language policy

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MOTIVATION

- Attitudes about multilingualism have been shifting in the United States, with popular press reporting on the cognitive and social advantages to knowing more than one language (Fan et al 2015, Freedman et al 2014, Umansky & Reardon 2014, et alia).
- First and second generation immigrants are very aware of the economic and cultural value associated with proficiency in Standard American English (Fitzgerald 1993; Hakimzadeh & Cohn 2007).
- A reflection of these shifts in both demographics and language attitudes is a measure on the California ballot this November, seeking to strike down a previous law limiting access to multilingual education in the state (see box below).

QUESTIONS

- Will getting information about and engaging with issues of language policy shift opinions? What are the preexisting attitudes about multilingualism and multilingual education?
Specifically:
1. How desirable do UC San Diego students find it to be bilingual? Does learning about multilingualism and language attrition make them more or less favorable towards multilingualism?
 2. What are students' pre-existing attitudes towards the Multilingual Education Act, which is on the ballot in California this fall, and how do these shift after taking a class on language policy in the United States?
 3. What types of explanations do students give when discussing their opinion about the Multilingual Education Act before and after learning about language policy?

BACKGROUND: MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

1974: *Lau v Nichols* mandates support for non-English-speaking monolinguals in public schools (establishes ESL/ELL programs)
 1998: Proposition 227 prohibits non-English languages to be the medium of instruction in California public schools unless a waiver is obtained
 2006-2015: Studies show that dual-immersion programs are most effective in getting non-English-speaking children to be proficient in English
 2016: Proposition 58 would repeal Proposition 227 and allow California public schools to educate students in languages other than English

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were UC San Diego undergraduates students enrolled in LIGN 8: Languages and Cultures of America during Summer Session I, July '16. 75% of students were in the course to fulfill a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion requirement. 70% of students went to high school in the United States, and 50% of students grew up in California. For most students, Prop. 227 was in effect throughout their schooling.

METHODOLOGY

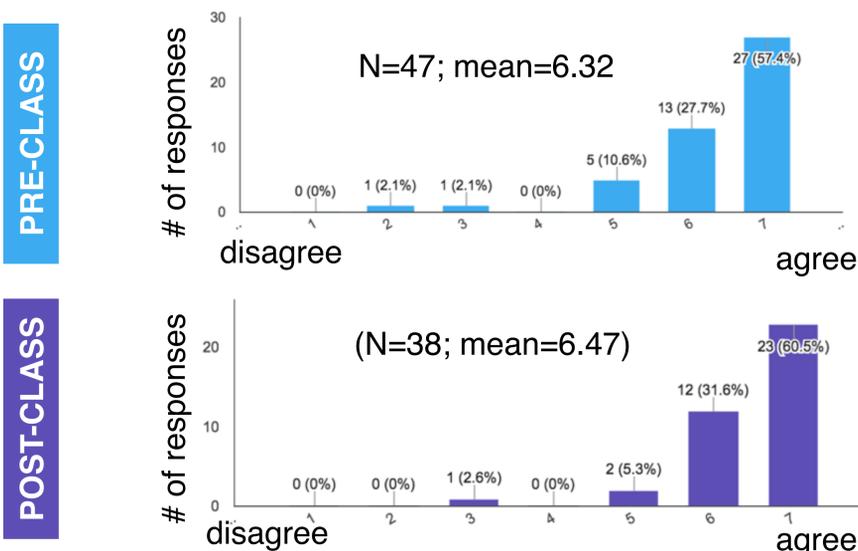
Students took an anonymous survey (conducted via Google Forms) before and after the course. They were asked to:

1. rate how much they agreed with the statement "It is desirable to grow up speaking more than one language"
2. rate how likely they were to vote YES on Proposition 58 this November
3. state two reasons why

students took the post-class survey immediately after an in-class debate about Prop 58, for which they were assigned to argue either for or against the proposition.

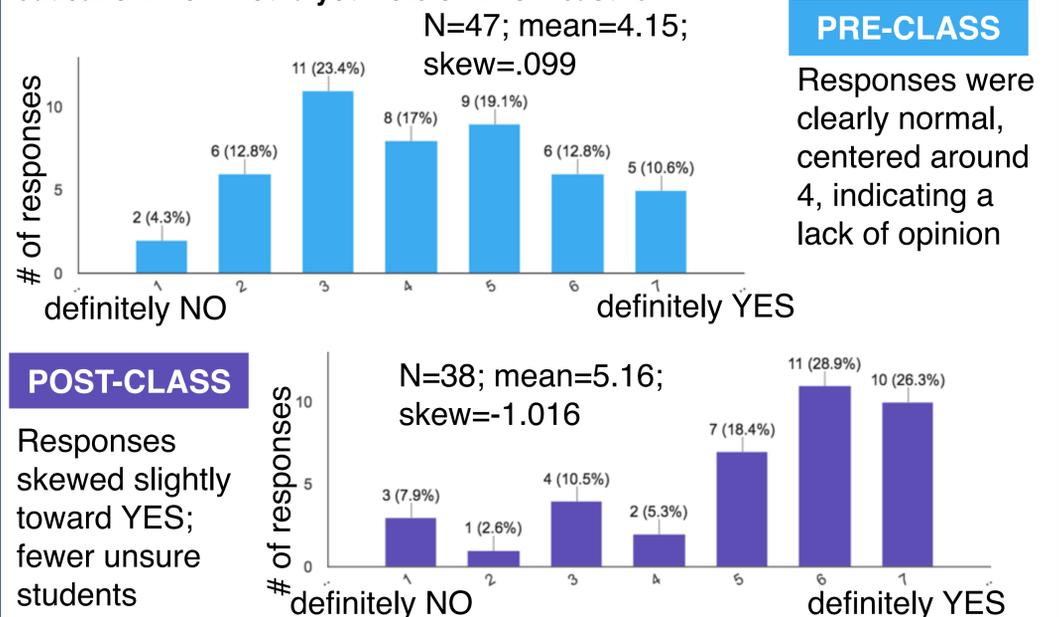
RESULT 1: CONSISTENTLY POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTILINGUALISM

"It is desirable to grow up speaking more than one language"



RESULT 2: SHIFT FROM AMBIVALENT TO SLIGHTLY POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS PROP 58

There will be a statewide ballot measure this November which will allow non-English languages to be used as the language of instruction in public education. How would you vote on this measure?



RESULT 3: STUDENTS SHIFTED FROM OPINION-BASED TO FACT-BASED EXPLANATIONS IN THE POST-CLASS SURVEY

More students used fact-based explanations in the post-class survey (66%) than did so in the pre-class survey (35%); in addition, many of the explanations in the pre-class survey were more difficult to categorize as being fact- or opinion-based; several students said they simply did not know.

DISCUSSION & FUTURE WORK

Students' positive attitudes towards multilingual education is in line with previous research (Lee 2006).
 Conducting the survey before and after the debate would have shown more directly the effect of arguing for or against a particular side on attitudes, which some students said confused their opinions.
 A larger sample would allow for more fine-grained analyses of how these results might vary based on nationality, immigration history, and level of multilingualism

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