

Independent Study: Speaking English-only in work environment

Eglantina Bushgjokaj

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Background

We are living in city where the cultural and racial compositions are so diverse. California it brings the diversity, millions of people who speak different languages. How is the perception of people in the public and private setting where the language spoken is not English Only?

I would like to explore more on the subject of foreigner languages in work place environment. What was observed and what different countries do? What guidelines different agencies have? What is the best solution on behalf of our clientele, public?

I will bring some perspectives from private, public setting, pros and cons group perspectives , European Union experience, the Law, recommendations on language diversity that will enhance our strategies, activities. I will focus in a specific target group – Filipino. Hutnik (1991, p. 20) elaborates: “With rapid modernization, technological advance, and increased mobility, it is now possible to choose one’s ethnic identifications in a self-conscious way. Most people have multiple group affiliations that may be emphasized or minimized according to the situation.”

For confidentiality reasons, few data and names of the institutions has been modified and symbolized by “X”.

Introduction:

The rapid changes on the population of the United States of America of non English speakers has brought in 1990, 32 million people in the U.S., or about six percent of the population five and older, spoke a language other than English at home. By 2000,

that figure increased to 47 million people or about 20 percent of the population five and older.

The report of the Department of Human Resource of City and County of San Francisco (2004) it shows that has been an increase of Asian and Filipino workforce. The increase has been significantly of 6.2 percent from the 1980 to 2005. Based also in the workforce of our company we have seen these changes. However, as we increased the number of this particular group we have been noticing that the Language policy has been an issue lately. In private setting or government one, in California a vast majority of people speaks other languages rather than – English in home or work environment. The main idea is that we should have an effective customer service for having a good business. We should take appropriate action to solve this issue.

Private setting:

We have been receiving feedback from our customers that is difficult for them to approach a customer service representative when our employees are talking to each other or customers in other languages as Tagalong. Our employees in the other side has been expressing their opinion as being apart of the organization that the group of Filipino people get together and start speaking in their native language. We have been receiving few complaints that our employees have noticed /understand that their coworkers- Filipino were talking on their “back”. The private setting has almost 50 employees and the clientele that they serve; assist is more than 300 a day. Located in an area close to the downtown of the San Francisco city, population is diverse.

I would like to bring **this issue** as a part of our policy that has to be a functional part of our business and our society. It has been an issue lately that our employees are speaking – other languages in front of our customers and during business hours without the request of any of our clients. A recent Inter – office memo has been disturbed to our manager by emphasizing that our employees have to talk English in the presence of our customers. Many customers have been complaining that is hard for them to approach a customer service representative if they are talking in another language, in our case “Tagalong”. Based on the interview that I had with Human resource personnel, our employees can talk on their native language because is part of the law and we need to discuss this issues to our employees and to get a common understanding.

Government Setting

I was very interested to know how is “X” – hospital is handling these situations. In the first look of an observer, you can see how diverse is the work force and clients that are served each day. I wanted to know more in depth how the issue of English only policy can be applied in such a gigantic setting.” X” is on of the first hospitals in the city of San Francisco and based on the information via e-mail with one of the representatives of “X” ,I got some more insights issues of foreigner languages.

More than 500 patients per day come at “X” and the number of employees that are working is more than 5000. So in a hub of diverse population and based on the information from representatives of “X”, 30% of patients speak limited English. The Interpretation language center is in “X”, they provide over 5,000 languages encounter per

year in different languages, which is a significant number for the hospital. (Interview, 2007) Based on all these information and a diverse population that is everyday at “X”, there might be many issues for speaking other languages rather than English at work – environment, in our case the hospital.

Based on Ginsberg (2006) the registered nurses for City and County of San Francisco, the highest percentage are hold from Filipino nurses. One of the questions that I asked was; do employees speak English Only during their working hours (not including breaks or lunches). The response was that employees do not speak English only and the “X” did receive some complaints on regard to speaking other foreign languages (not English) at work. The complaints are dealt as Human resource issues and they talk to staff involved to clarify and train more on the cultural differences.

From this information, I got into conclusion that:

- Training on diversity is very important tool for all work settings and definitely is key for the “X”
- The cultural differences and acceptance are described as component of resolving the issue of foreign languages. The rapid changes needs on going training for the all employees on understanding the cultural differences and most important accepting those.
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients had some barriers ,and because of these language barriers “ healthcare access is delayed, incomplete, and not understandable which can lead to many serious issues for both patients and providers” (Interview,2007)

Pros

- “Pro-English” believers think that the EEOC is acting illegally. Moreover, by continuously attacking English language workplace rules the EEOC is pursuing a policy diametrically opposed to Pro English's goal of preserving English as our common language?” In the article “Pro English in the workplace” (2007), it has been emphasized that we are living and working in USA, the common language of this country is English, so the new comers need to learn English language.
- Based on the report from Greg (2005), the author is deeming that the bilingual programs are wasted funds and are not serving their purposes of “maintaining cultural heritage’ but “But bilingual education fails to provide students with the basic education they need to explore culture. The result is often students culturally illiterate of both of their cultures. “ So the idea is that the training should be done in English only .It is hard to train any ethnic groups in a new setting if you are not allowing them to share their tributes, cultures. The process of learning requires at least a match on your own culture or somehow a similar finding, otherwise people get overwhelmed with new information’s.
- In another article from Fox (2007), it was a successful story of tailoring English only policy, by a taxi company justified by business necessity. The article emphasized that the rule was only on the dispatch office – where the information

to all taxi drivers was delivered on English. This is a good example for an English only policy.

Cons

As we might know, working in an environment where your language is not so welcomed and your peers are from a diverse cultural heritage, each one of us would like to establish the identity and the position. We all hold on our spirit our thoughts and expressions, that somehow in our native language (those who speaks more than one language), it does sounds and rhymes better on its native words rather than trying to translate it in another language. If employees are holding on these ties –speaking English only, it does affect the “morale, performance, the service to our customers and at the bottom line the productivity”. (Vickers, 2000)

- Based on Morrison & Sullivan (2006) in a Melrose hotel in New York , 13 employees got \$ 800,000 because their complained for a hostile work – environment which include allegation that Hispanic employees were subject to an English- only rule. This is one of the cases where the English only policy did not work. Their rule did not increase the performance of the employees but it did give some legal rights to the groups of thirteen employees for a lawsuit.
- The City of Altus, Oklahoma , adopted an “English only” policy that required the employees to communicate in English in all work-related communications , except when necessary to communicate with a member of the public **with** limited English skills” (Hacht, Kabata , Denis 2006) . A group of 30 employees complained this discriminatory policy .Later on the case was appealed at US court of 10-th circuit

in Denver, reversed it and had a jury to determine the impact of the English only policy. The implication of those complaints as we are aware maintain a huge cost: time spent and other expense related too.

- “The Afrikaans community in general has also expressed growing dissatisfaction at English hegemony “(Giliomee & Schlemmer, 2001).Language and racism in South African Schools. The article mentioned that the using English in South African countries is like a ghost of apartheid.
- Employers must understand that discriminatory English-only rules can hurt productivity, morale and ultimately their bottom line," are the words from an attorney who is litigating several cases on the article written by Miriam (2005).

Does the same language mean the same culture?

As Mary Kissel (2004) of Career Journal in Europe points out , 'same language' does not necessarily mean 'same culture'. In addition, she explained that how the language might have the same words in different setting means differently. One of the examples that she mentioned is, if you are in a school in England the word “good “means “needs to try one more time “in USA it has it’s first meaning. Mary Gowan, a professor of management science at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., who trains students on the ins and outs of working abroad. The problems often start with the language. Although your colleagues may speak English, their words and phrases may not carry the same emphasis or meaning as they do in the U.S.

Diversity in European Union

From the research and classes on enforcing diversity, the European Community has been enforcing law and regulation to accommodate heterogeneous groups as: The Translation Service of the European Commission has been scrambling to establish field offices and hire sufficient numbers of qualified content-area translators for the nine new languages incorporated in 2004.¹ Kanton C Wilkinson (pg 226)

What was for me as a great surprise the pilot project that EU (European Union) has been establishing lately in Belgium, classes of 8 years old pupils .! The project illustrates how interaction operates in classes where there is no single shared common *language*. The goal is to integrate heterogeneous groups while showing respect for *language diversity*(Miller & Hugo,2004)

On the article from Dick (2000), At the Heart of much bigger EU, he notes the changes that are going toward all the small and big states of Europe. The author is predicting what will be happening in the mid century, four major players: China, India, EU and USA. The first counties will have probably 2 billion populations each and EU will have 500 million and USA 350 million population. The author predicts that even the small country of Belgium will speak English and the difficulties between Dutch and French speaker will disappear.

Based on Global research Incorporation, it was presumed that by 2005 for every one user who is native speaker of English, there will be three –non-English speaker on line. In addition, sales on European websites that decide to set up a monolingual site – they might discover that they are losing sales to sites that are communicating in client’s languages. (Vickers 2000)

Ideas outside the box

English the language of international communication” is mentioned on the article “if the whole world should speak English”. The changes that are requested in all French schools to learn English as a mandatory language. In addition, the debate on the Indian population that after 2050 estimated to be 1.7 billion compare to China population of 1.4 billion. Based on the article the necessity is for English as a common language. Based on the changes on the European Union and the predictions of Dick (2000), and on personal opinion may be English will be the language of communication, and at the same time different nations will maintain their native language as a sign of their identity.

California Law

Based on Section 601 of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 78 Stat. 252, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, provides:

"No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." *Supreme Court*

The City and County of San Francisco finds that the cultural and racial composition of the City and its workforce is among the most diverse in the nation. Therefore, it is desirable to reaffirm its policy, which fosters acceptance and prevents inter group tensions

as related to the use of languages other than English in the provision of public services and the employment of individuals whose primary language is not English.

The City and County of San Francisco reaffirms its equal employment opportunity policy (EEOC) that ensures the opportunity for employment of an ethnically and culturally diverse workforce wherein individuals shall enjoy equal application of the terms and conditions of employment, including the right to speak their primary language.

Recommendation:

We should be focused more on training our employees on diversity cultures; how we will do that? “By making sure that we will go over expectations, making policies clear, training our employees in anonymous hot line, raising awareness carefully, recruit broadly “(Naff, 2006)

We can organize a big meeting where every one is responsive for participating; our employees should watch video on diversity and discussing it, this will enforce the New orientation Hire –training. This would increase the morale, participation and looking toward the performance of our employees.

Organizing and celebrating the national holidays for all groups , so we can integrate each one , this will promote diversity .During our meetings we should talk , as is said to” break the ice “ in two – three most common languages that are used in our setting.

We should have some guidelines that during “business interaction “the primary language should be English but when is necessary to facilitate the communication with our customers, “Other” languages are required and welcomed. So the main points are our

advocacy on training our employees and making sure that diversity is very important in running our business.

The training should address such topics as how we:

- view others and ourselves,
- in-group versus out-group status,
- barriers to cross-cultural communication,
- stereotyping (Pakiela, 2002)

From the interview with the representatives of “X” hospital I noted that the” all employees on understanding the cultural differences and most important accepting those”. Therefore, it looks that understanding and accepting the cultural differences are the keys to diversity.

From the government and private sector ,the idea of ongoing training for cultural differences is needed but it has not being applied yet, so it might be a focus for the future.

Conclusion

The issues of Languages – rather that English are part of the identity for each employee of any organization. The diversity is the rapid modernization, technological advance but is necessary to have the policies and guidelines that will keep the “show” going. The company expectations and trainings are the key tools to emphasize the diversity. The English only guidelines can be emphasized to our employees on interaction with diverse customer’s base. We value and accept the cultural differences, and we would like that our customers are satisfied with the service and the communication in English or other required language on the time of their visit in our work environment. As I did

mention on this paper the languages spoken at the work environment, it does affect the moral, performance, productivity and our customers, public.

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