Conclusion

By some measures, the English-only movement has failed. The United States has never had an official language, and probably never will. There is nothing in the US Constitution about an official language. Every year, senators and members of Congress put forth the latest version of a national language policy (currently called the English Language Unity Act), but the bill never passes, no matter which party is in power or who is president. Most state and local governments provide at least some services in multiple languages. Some sovereign Indigenous nations within the borders of the United States prioritize language policies that include Indigenous language maintenance and revitalization. When Congress does take action on language, it tends to result in laws that explicitly endorse languages other than English, like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Native American Languages Act.

By other measures, the English-only movement has succeeded. It is so successful that it can almost rest on its laurels. It is socially acceptable in the United States to be monolingual in English only. One can take English for granted. The United States may not have an explicit language policy, but I can walk into any government building (including any public school), I can log on to any government website, and I can read any government document and generally know what I will hear and what I will see: English. When I teach any university course, as a professor, students already know what language my syllabus will be in, what language class discussions will be in, and what language I will use most of the time: English. If you poll people in the United States, many think English already is our official language. No one has to tell people that English has won: People in the United States know it because we live it and breathe it.

What scholars of language policy have long recognized, though, is that neither of these depictions of English in the United States fully captures what is going on. The situation is more complicated – the English-only movement has had victories and losses. People face linguistic constraints, but they also have some control over their language use. Language policies do not always match linguistic culture (Schiffman, 1996). When I was a student first learning about English and language policy, I had a hard time holding these somewhat

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conflicting patterns in my head. One day, I was reading about how English is a language of imperialism, colonialism, and global capitalism, while the next I was reading about how US language policy is more decentralized and haphazard than in many other countries (and all of these facts are true). But how to make sense of it? When I think about US language policy writ large, the image is very fuzzy. My aim in this book has been to show that if one looks locally, the situation becomes clearer.

The United States does not have a national language policy, nor is there some overarching national language ideology. Instead, there are just a lot of instances of people working locally to shape how people learn, use, and view language in particular situations. What's more, if you listen to them, so many people in the English-only movement are very open about this fact. With few exceptions, they do not necessarily aspire to make English official at larger scales. They are invested in focusing locally, both because they care about what happens in their communities and because the more localized the policy, the less likely it is to attract scrutiny. To make policies happen, people have developed a wide range of strategies around writing and pitching their policies, from forming nonprofit organizations to ghostwriting to templates to choosing genres to downscaling their work as much as possible. These strategies first emerged in Citizens of Dade United, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), and U.S. English, and spread eventually through ProEnglish and in a variety of local governments. People like Emmy Shafer, Senator S. I. Hayakawa, John Tanton, and all of their colleagues walked so that the policymakers of the twenty-first century could run. And yet English-only policies still receive significant push-back. While sometimes protests are fleeting, in Frederick County people were able to work together to actually undo their county's English-only ordinance. They flipped the economics script, they drew attention to racism and xenophobia, they questioned whether English can really be legislated in the first place, and they highlighted the importance of collaboration.

There are several avenues for future work on language policy, in terms of both future research and future language advocacy. Regarding the specifics of the English-only movement, I feel I have just scratched the surface. To give a few examples, I came across several references to the fact that, in the early 1980s, Gerda Bikales wrote a 180-page white paper about US language policy that she gave to John Tanton and that that white paper helped him decide to start U.S. English. However, I have never found a copy of that white paper. Similarly, I know that someone leaked John Tanton's memo to the press, but I still do not know who. Finally, I know that local governments use ProEnglish's template, but I still do not know how people make the initial contact. There are countless stories still out there.

There are also several relevant organizations that I have not discussed in depth, generally because they did not have as many policy wins, or

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because they are limited to K–12 education contexts, or because they simply were beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say, there is more to say about organizations like English First, the National English Campaign, the English Language Political Action Committee, the U.S. English Legislative Task Force, the U.S. English Foundation, the Immigration Political Action Committee, NumbersUSA Action, the NumbersUSA Education and Research Foundation, the NumbersUSA Support Organization, the Center for Immigration Studies, the Immigration Reform Law Institute, VDARE, and English for the Children, not to mention Citizens of Dade United, FAIR, U.S. English, and ProEnglish. There are also several more regional iterations of organizations that were beyond the scope of my study, like Arizonans for Official English, Alaskans for a Common Language, and Nashville English First. I hope future research will account for these organizations. Even more important, however, are the larger questions at hand about how people write and negotiate policies, both in terms of future research and in terms of future language advocacy.

Future Directions for Research on Local Language Policy

In addition to my own immediate work, I also see three broader questions about local language policy for future consideration. First, how do local language policies in governments compare to ones in other sites, including classes, schools, programs, departments, organizations, and workplaces? In asking this question, the goal is not to invite taxonomies. After all, most of my participants are serving in leadership roles outside government, whether as schoolteachers, business owners, or volunteers. So, it is not as though government language policymakers have no ties to other policy domains. At the same time, because my research has focused so heavily on governments, less is known about how people write and negotiate other kinds of local language policies. More research is needed on how these kinds of policies develop and play out, within and across institutions, and over time.

Second, how do contemporary local language policies compare to historical examples? In Chapter 1, I argued that these policies are not new, although they have changed in some ways. For example, I mentioned that the World War I-era laws were more German-oriented and more restrictive than contemporary ones, by extending into domains like church and telephone conversations. However, with the exception of Peters (2013), there are few in-depth studies of local language policies in the United States before 1980. Future research could shed light on the prevalence of local language policies throughout US history, what those policies dictated, and how people interpreted, enforced (or not), reacted to, and either abandoned or maintained them. In addition to looking back, it will also be important to examine future policies.

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Third, how do US policies compare to ones outside the United States? I consider this issue to be the most significant gap. While this question is beyond the scope of my present study, it is crucial that language policy researchers not center on the United States or treat the United States as the default. It is also important to note that even within and across US borders, there are Indigenous nations, many of which are actively engaged in language maintenance and revitalization and in bilingual education (McCarty, 2013). Some of the questions may be similar across borders, such as what counts as "local"; whether language is a problem, right, or a resource (Ruíz, 1984); and who gets to shape language policy, but the answers will vary considerably. Outside the United States, the legal systems, economies, language ideologies, language practices, and histories involved tend to be different.

Future Directions for Research on Policy and Writing

For those interested in policy and writing, the sophisticated policy writing processes in the English-only movement raise questions about how policymaking unfolds more generally. As an entry point, I will admit that there was one moment during my research when I wondered if maybe I was studying the wrong area of policy. Before I started my fieldwork, I was watching a live-streamed local government meeting where an English-only policy was on the agenda. Before the language policy discussion could begin, there were other topics for the county to cover. I was tapping my toes on the floor and clacking my fingernails on my laptop, waiting for this phase to end, so that I could see what was, for me, the main event: language policy in the making.

However, I stopped fidgeting when at one point a middle-aged man stood up from the audience and walked to the podium. The whole room grew quiet, and I sensed that people in the room knew who this man was and why he was about to speak. I wondered what he was about to say. He said his son had just died of an opioid overdose. The county did offer some resources to help people struggling with opioid addiction, but he pointed out that it was not enough. Dozens of young people were overdosing and dying. Families were desperate to find their loved ones beds in rehab centers, but there were no beds. Or if there were, they were out of state or they were not covered by health insurance. One of the local elected officials thanked him for his comments and said that they knew it was an issue they needed to keep working on. I could have heard a pin drop. I felt ashamed for having been so impatient as I waited for the meeting to get to the language issue. This man's comments reminded me that language policy is just one topic within the larger policy landscape.

I wish I knew what communities could and should do about all the intractable policy issues they face, like education, the opioid crisis, climate change, homelessness, and the pandemic, but I can speak to policy research methods.

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Of course, scholars have studied all these policy topics and more, and I drew inspiration from many of these studies as I completed my own (Asen, 2015; Graham, 2015; Loehwing, 2018; Lejano and Nero, 2020). While every policy context is different, I hope that experts in these and other areas of policy will find useful threads in my work. For example, I would predict that some of the writing processes I discuss in Chapter 2 are widespread, especially ghostwriting, using templates, and making genre choices. One implication of my study is that public and professional writing is highly collaborative and often anonymous. For anyone studying policies and related texts, I think it is worth asking who all are actually doing the writing, which genres they are using and why, and where they are getting templates and other writing assistance. There are opportunities to combine writing studies research with the work in political science on writing as a form of legislative subsidy (Hall and Deardorff, 2006). These practices are not tied to particular political ideologies – on the right, organizations like American Legislative Exchange Council have been generating templates for decades; on the left, there are readily available templates for policies around gun control and sanctuary cities.

At an even more foundational level, I think it is always important to include rough drafts in policy analysis if possible, not just final drafts. One scholar who does excellent cutting-edge analysis of policy revisions and amendments is linguist Peter Joseph Torres. Torres (2021) studies, for instance, how a group of state policymakers in California increased their use of "shall" and decreased their use of "may" as the opioid crisis ramped up, in an apparent attempt to make state-level policies more restrictive. There needs to be more work in this vein.

If policy writing is characterized by so much copying, ghostwriting, and collaboration, it also raises questions about other arenas of professional writing. Future research is necessary in order to see just how common, consistent, or longstanding these kinds of writing practices are in other kinds of social movements, legal and political discourse, workplaces, and digital spaces. And these writing practices are not limited to extracurricular writing; some kinds of academic discourse fit these patterns as well. Teachers copy each other's syllabi and other materials, universities copy each other's policies (Nizza, 2008, March 31), committees collaboratively write documents, researchers coauthor articles, no one claims credit for content on departmental websites, and students work and study together. As with language policies, these academic examples are not necessarily problematic, but they are worth analyzing in more depth.

In addition to writing processes, I would also predict that downscaling is common in other areas of policy. Language is a local practice (Pennycook, 2010), but when do policymakers play that up, and when do they not? And why? Blommaert (2010) posited that upscaling was the key scaling practice for understanding the era of globalization; I have essentially argued the opposite

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in the context of English-only policies, but what about other contexts? Lejano and Nero (2020) suggest that people who may be skeptical of global climate change can nonetheless be engaged by stories of how their local climate is changing, and I think that is an area for further research. Importantly, none of these processes are inevitable. It takes a lot of work, both discursive and nondiscursive, to make something seem local. Furthermore, nothing is ever localized for good. The key question is not so much "is this local?" or "how do local things connect to larger context?" but rather "how did people come to treat this as local, and to what effect?"

Future Language Advocacy

For those interested in changing the language policies around them, I believe there is much to learn from the writers in this book. The two main takeaways are to look locally and to work collectively. I have never witnessed a successful language policy engineered by one person in isolation. Talking to people, reading other language policies, forming relationships, swapping ideas, getting feedback, picking between different genres, changing your mind and your strategies in response to local circumstances, and dealing with failure are all part of the process. As someone who was voted "Most Shy" in high school, I wish this were not the case, but it is.

However, I will note that it is possible for this collective work to be asynchronous and distributed. For example, over the years I have gradually revised the language policies in the courses I teach, in consultation with colleagues like Yu-Kyung Kang (2022) and Ligia Mihut (2019), as well as through my professional organizations. My current language policies draw some of their framing from the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Students' Right to Their Own Language Resolution (CCCC, 1974), and when I need additional inspiration, I revisit everything from the classic (e.g. Sledd, 1969) to the cutting-edge (e.g. Kilfoil, 2015; Gere et al., 2021; Franz et al., 2022). Even then, I customize every policy to my own linguistic repertoire, and I vary the policy depending on the particular class. Here are two examples from the syllabi of courses I have taught:

1. This is a course in academic writing, which can be done in any language and in many modes. In your work for this course, you have the right and you are welcome to use the language varieties and styles that best fit your own goals and audiences. You are also encouraged to cite sources in languages other than English. I know English, can read Spanish, and can figure out how to translate short passages in other languages. If you want to write an extended text in a language other than those two, please provide a translation so I can access your work.

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2. This is a course in grant writing, which can be done in any language and in many modes. You have the right and you are welcome to use the language varieties and styles that best fit your own goals and audiences, in conjunction with those of any campus or community partners you work with. You are also encouraged to cite sources in languages other than English. I know English, can read Spanish, and can figure out how to translate short passages in other languages. If you want to write an extended text in a language other than those two, please provide a translation so I can access your work.

While these policies are brief and only a modest adjustment from the English-only norm of most college courses, they still have taken years to evolve, and that was only because I benefited from the expertise of dozens of people in my field. So, now one can imagine how many orders of magnitude more time and energy it would take to change something at the level of a program, institution, workplace, or government. This work can take its toll.

For people who may not have the time or energy, or who may not be able to exercise the professional autonomy to change things in their immediate surroundings, it is still possible to support people who are doing this work. I have been heartened by the fact that in all the places I have lived, from Washington to Illinois to Mississippi to Massachusetts, there are always local leaders who want to support culturally sustaining K–12 education, accessible adult basic education, government services that meet people where they are at, and ample public funding for all of the above.

In every community, there are also people who are already working toward increasing access to all the programs that would make it so more people have the opportunity to learn English and other languages (which, as Tollefson [1989] pointed out, are often sorely lacking). Such programs range from Medicare for all, to debt-free higher education, to housing for all, to universal basic income. Sometimes the people already working toward change are on the school board, sometimes they are the mayor, sometimes they are on a city or county council, sometimes they are a state representative, sometimes they direct a local organization, sometimes they are volunteering in a church basement, and sometimes they are involved in local mutual aid, but they are there. Asking "what can I do to help?" is often a welcome starting point. We are also living in a golden age of public writing around issues of language and justice, and one way to support more liberatory approaches to language is to seek out projects like *Vocal Fries: The Podcast of Linguistic Discrimination* (Figueroa, 2022).

If I sound like I am declining to recommend that people try to fix US language policy on the national level, that is because I am. That is one thing I have in common with most of my participants. My reasoning is not just that I think a national policy would be unlikely and unwieldy but also that the most punishing language policies I encounter on a regular basis are not coming from my

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federal or state government but from my own specific fields. I often joke that the most English-only environments most students ever encounter are in the kinds of classes I teach, but it is not really a joke. Everywhere I have taught, my students come to school with rich communicative repertoires, able to make meaning and interact with people across contexts. And after they leave campus, I know they live and work in rich linguistic environments where people know language is more of a resource than a problem, whether those environments be their homes, restaurants, daycares, schools, hospitals, stores, offices, social media, or any number of other spaces. However, those years of standardized tests and college English classes can be something of an English-only bottleneck. It weighs on me that, historically, English classes are often as much about gatekeeping as about anything else, and more about language policing than linguistic liberation. And so, when I talk about language policy as a local practice, I am not just talking about policies *out there* but also *in here*. There is a lot of work to do.

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