# Introduction

The phrase describing America as "a nation of immigrants" was made famous as the title of President John F. Kennedy's book, published posthumously in October 1964. Almost exactly fifty years later, on November 20, 2014, President Barack Obama quoted this phrase when speaking about immigration reform: "My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once too."[1] Obama's assertion constructs a familial link, an imaginary continuation of a bloodline between the "strangers" of the past and the Americans of today, a spatial and temporal kinship-like connection through which "strangers" and "Americans" are all identified as immigrants.

There are those who oppose such representations. Samuel Huntington, in his final (2004) book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, which views Latino immigration as a major threat to American identity and culture, argues that whereas today's newcomers are immigrants, *in*-migrating to the already established polity and society of the United States, the first Europeans were settlers, not immigrants. They did not come to join – and presumably assimilate to – an existing community or state with established territorial jurisdiction, government, laws, and customs. Rather, they came to settle in what they presumed to be *vacuum domicilium* ("uninhabited land," Anderson 2014: 42) and to develop from the ground up their own society, with their own institutions, physical structures, and way of life. In Huntington's words, "Settlers leave an existing society, usually in a group, in order to create a new community, a city on a hill, in a new and often distant territory ... Immigrants, in contrast, do not create a new society. They move from one society to a different society ... Before immigrants could come to America, settlers had to found America" (Huntington 2004: 39–40).

Huntington's argument rests on a number of problematic assumptions (cf. Newton 2008). It not only accepts the early settlers' claim to the American lands as based on a mandate from God to find and settle a new "Promised Land," not only ignores the fact that there *were* existing and

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[1] www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/11/20/we-were-strangers-once-too-president-announces-new-steps-immigratio, accessed April 12, 2016.

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developed societies and polities in North America and that the settlers *chose* not to assimilate to them but, instead, to destroy them – but it also seeks to justify an America in which present-day immigrants are expected to assimilate to the white, European, English-speaking, Christian, heteronormative mainstream (cf. Schmidt 2002; Schmidt 2000). Perspectives such as Huntington's, echoed every day by anti-immigration politicians, invent and propagate the fiction that early white English settlers had a "right" to American lands, and that today's often non-white, non-English-speaking immigrants form a different category of people, who should not be trusted with citizenship and who threaten the "American way of life."

Formulations such as Kennedy's and Obama's "nation of immigrants" seek to debunk these fictions by representing all Americans as immigrants and, by logical extension, all immigrants as Americans. But these alternative narratives are also problematic because they paint a harmonious picture of an America unified over space and time into a bonded immigrant family, sharing the same concerns and cares, and in so doing they gloss over the conflicts and battles produced by highly unequal power relations within American society. In reality, it is indeed impossible to establish a clear definitional boundary separating the immigrant from the American, but neither is it the case that immigrants and Americans are synonyms for one large category. Rather, the meanings of "immigrant" and "American" have always been contested, negotiated, and enacted discursively – as well as through violence and material control – on the frontier, on plantations, in battle, in factories, in mines, on railroad construction sites, in big-city tenements, in the courts and prisons, and in schools. The central theme of the present book is that language has been a crucial site for this contestation since the days of the first European settlements, and my aim here will be to explore language in America from this perspective, demonstrating that "immigrant" and "American" have been and continue to be overlapping, conflicting, fluid, and mutually constitutive categories. Furthermore, I aim to show that the complexity, fluidity, and hybridity of immigrant/American – or immigrant-American – identities has always been negotiated and enacted through hybrid language forms and practices, which in turn challenges the mainstream notions of languages as fully discrete, self-contained entities, and of clear dichotomies between monolingualism and multilingualism or between native speaker and language learner.

## Language Ideology in the United States

In her discussion of Sudanese women refugees' experiences with learning English in America, Warriner (2007) makes the important point that discourses surrounding English and English learning invoke and naturalize assumptions about belonging and about rights to access material and nonmaterial resources

in society. She writes, "Citizens and noncitizens are defined and constructed in relation to each other, often in ways that index (and further promote) ideologies of language, race, and difference" (Warriner 2007: 346). The African refugee women in her study have internalized the portrayal of immigrants who master English and are rewarded with a chance to share in the American dream: the women expend considerable energy on studying English even when they see no clear benefits to their own lives as a result.

The language ideology that sees English as intrinsic to Americanness, and English learning as a requirement for Americanization, has become deeply entrenched as part of America's national identity narrative. Proponent of assimilation Samuel Huntington argues forcefully that America's core culture is Anglo-Protestant and claims, incorrectly and misleadingly, that "until the appearance of large concentrations of Spanish-speaking immigrants in Miami and the Southwest, America was unique as a huge country of more than 200 million people virtually all speaking the same language [English]" (Huntington 2004: 60). The US English movement and legislation making English the official language of 32 states, as of March 2016, are based on similar assumptions (Citrin et al. 1990). The US English website outlines its position by invoking the English-as-path-to-success claim: "U.S. English believes that the passage of English as the official language will help to expand opportunities for immigrants to learn and speak English, the single greatest empowering tool that immigrants must have to succeed."[2] Pavlenko (2002) cites a study by Bigler (1996), in which Euro-American senior citizens "stated that their grandparents became full-fledged Americans by willingly assimilating, learning English, and restricting the native languages to the privacy of their homes, and that any other course of action would threaten national unity and culture" (Pavlenko 2002: 164). Pavlenko points out that this idealized story erases two centuries of relative tolerance towards multilingualism, the subsequent active construction of the American identity and spirit as embodied in the English language, the aggressive promotion of English monolingualism, and the forced nature of the language shift that took place in immigrant communities as a result.

In contrast to the dominant narrative, language, and English monolingualism in particular, came to be associated with Americanness relatively late, in response to the Great Migration of 1880–1924 and to the rise in xenophobic feeling surrounding World War I. Before that, as Pavlenko (2002) observes, "American national identity was historically founded on the assumption that whatever one's origin or native language, one could become an American by declaring a desire to do so and committing oneself to a set of liberal political principles, which include democracy, liberty, equality, and individual

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[2] www.usenglish.org/view/3, accessed June 30, 2016.

achievement" (Pavlenko 2002: 165). This perspective, to be sure, requires some qualification, since the option to "become an American" was made available in the Naturalization Act of 1790 only to "free white persons," and was closed to slaves, free Africans, Asians, and Native Americans. And while African Americans became citizens after slavery was abolished, their treatment as *de facto* non-citizens continued. Other non-whites were formally barred from citizenship until well into the twentieth century. Restrictions based on race necessarily involved issues of language, since languages are closely bound up with ethnic categories and group identities. Accordingly, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars developed theories that posited the polysynthetic features of Indigenous languages, often baffling to Europeans and absent from classical languages such as Greek or Latin, as evidence of Native Americans' supposed racial inferiority (Harvey 2015). Meanwhile, in popular culture, such as in minstrel shows, the Chinese-English pidgin spoken by Chinese migrant workers in the mid-nineteenth century was imitated, mocked, and became established as a marker of the Asian "perpetual foreigner" who was imagined to possess various undesirable, un-American qualities (Lee 1999; Leland 1892).

Nonetheless, Pavlenko (2002) is correct in observing that it was only in the early twentieth century that "English fluency – and eventually monolingualism in English – [became] a constitutive aspect of an American identity" (Pavlenko 2002: 165). As more immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe arrived in the United States and settled in large urban and industrial centers, their presence sparked concerns over the changing ethnic makeup of the American population. Commentators, journalists, educators, and politicians began noticing and criticizing these new immigrants' relative poverty, low levels of education, non-Protestant religious practices, and supposed inability to grasp the principles that govern a democratic society (Schmid 2001; Willey 1909). While the pseudo-science of eugenics provided the basis for questionable classifications of peoples into hierarchically ordered "races," language quickly became the symbolic measure of racial superiority or inferiority. English was portrayed as a superior language that was especially well suited for expressing ideas of democracy, liberty, and the Protestant ethic (Pavlenko 2002; Schmidt 2002). Furthermore, English was constructed as a marker of native-born Americans, as opposed to the new immigrants, whose languages were often described as harsh and "barbaric" (Willey 1909). Immigrants were now expected to assimilate and to prove their willingness to do so by learning English and abandoning their native and heritage languages. In 1906, the first English-language requirement for naturalization was adopted "with the explicit purpose of limiting the entrance in the United States of southern and eastern Europeans" (Schmid 2001: 34–35), but with the outbreak of World War I, German speakers also came under intense censorship. A 1917 amendment to

the Espionage Act required every foreign-language newspaper to provide Congress with English translations of all news articles relating to the war (Schmid 2001: 36). The previously robust German-language schools were often closed down, and many states adopted laws requiring English-only instruction in schools (Pavlenko 2002; Schmid 2001). Various local English-only initiatives also appeared: for example, "in Findlay, Ohio, the city council imposed a fine of $25 for speaking German on the streets" (Schmid 2001: 36).

English monolingualism thus became a central feature of true Americanness in government and popular discourses. The federal government proclaimed July 4, 1915 as "Americanization Day." A civics text published in 1918 for naturalization candidates asserted that "unity of speech will bring unity of thought, unity of feeling, unity of patriotism" (cited in Carnevale 2009: 66), and the Bureau of Naturalization appealed to prospective citizens with the slogan of "One language, one country, one flag" (66). Public schools and workplaces offered evening courses in English for immigrants, and some employers made attendance at these compulsory (Carnevale 2009: 67). Second-generation children were encouraged to teach English to their parents, while parents were pressured to give up speaking heritage languages at home. Pavlenko (2002), whose article provides a comprehensive analysis of how the language ideology of English monolingualism was produced, also observes this reversal of generational roles:

Now it was no longer the children who had to learn the language of the parents, but parents who had to learn English in order to be able to communicate with their offspring, or in the words of Julia Richman, the district superintendent of New York's Lower East Side schools, "cross the bridge to join [their] child on the American side" (Pavlenko 2002: 181–182).

Simultaneously, bilingualism came under attack from researchers in education and psychology, who through various now-discredited tests "demonstrated" the intellectual inferiority of bilingual children (Schmid 2001). Even linguists were suspicious of bilingualism, viewing it as compromising a person's overall linguistic ability (Jespersen 1922). And even though linguists and other scholars have since reversed their assessment of bilingualism, a suspicion of using languages other than English outside the private sphere of the home persists among policy makers and the general population.

The myth that English has always been the language of the United States and that English monolingualism is necessary and desirable in America's public spaces has been thoroughly naturalized. While proponents of linguistic pluralism support immigrants' language rights, heritage-language maintenance, bilingual education, and bilingual ballots (cf. discussion by Schmidt 2002), the expectation that immigrants should learn English for the benefit of both themselves and of American society is almost never seriously questioned in

mainstream debates. Proposals for immigration reform routinely make reference to immigrants' need for learning English. Thus, for example, at the start of President Obama's second term in office, various proposals for immigration reform – none of which resulted in legislation – included some version of a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, which in turn specified "learning English" as a prerequisite for qualification. This rather vague requirement is presented as a matter of course alongside such specific criteria as a criminal background check and paying a monetary penalty. The requirement is problematic on a number of levels: the path-to-citizenship proposals do not specify what "learning English" consists of or how it is to be facilitated, and the undocumented children and young people at whom such proposals are directed typically have spent the majority of their lives in the US and are fluent and sometimes monolingual in English. The fact that learning English is nonetheless specified as a criterion for potential citizenship eligibility reflects, on one hand, the persistent stereotype that undocumented immigrants do not speak English, and that immigrants in general refuse to learn it, and on the other hand, the assumption that one must learn English to become American (at the very least, one has to keep trying).

The rationale for the insistence that Americans must all speak English to each other is linked to the belief that a multilingual or plurilingual community is inevitably plagued by conflict (Schmidt 2002). This belief is rooted in the European nationalist ideology in which one people corresponds to one language. Speaking one shared language is an important step in constructing the imagined community of the nation state (Anderson 1982; Hall 1992). The reality that multilingual communities have existed peacefully for millennia all around the world – and if they were not at peace, it was not because of multilingualism – is ignored by English-language assimilationists. For example, a 1984 recruiting brochure published by US English unquestioningly invokes and links the assumptions that multilingualism is detrimental to a society's functioning, and that the United States is an English-speaking country:

The United States has been spared the bitter conflicts that plague so many countries whose citizens do not share a common tongue. Historic forces made English the language of all Americans, though nothing in our laws designated it the official language of the nation. But now English is under attack, and we must take affirmative steps to guarantee that it continues to be our common heritage. Failure to do so may well lead to institutionalized language segregation and a gradual loss of national unity (citied in Schmidt 2002: 144).

Such strongly held beliefs have motivated the dismantling of bilingual education across the United States, the popular fears that the sound of other, especially non-European, languages in American public spaces will somehow de-Americanize US society, and the appropriation and caricature of the most visible non-English

variety in performances of what Hill (2008; 2001) terms "Mock Spanish" (see also Zentella 2003).

As Schmidt (2002) observes, "far from being ethnically neutral and inclusive in its impact on racialized language minority groups, a mandatory assimilationist policy underlines and reinforces the social structure of racialized inequality" (Schmidt 2002: 154). He also points out that in the "new racism" described by a number of analysts (e.g. Bobo 1997; Goldberg 1993; Solomos and Back 1995), "specific cultural forms have come to signify racialized identities, particularly where traditional biologically-based racist attributions have become socially and politically disreputable" (Schmidt 2002: 154). Language has become one of the most readily targeted of such cultural forms. Discrimination at the workplace and in education based on real or perceived accents is common and often accepted as reasonable (Lippi-Green 2012). However, language forms – accents, languages, dialects, non-standard speech, bilingual practices, and so on – are frequently invoked as code for ethnicity and race. Urciuoli (1996), for example, analyzes the racialization of Spanish in New York, pointing out that "Bilingual neighborhoods are equated with slums, an equation familiar to people who live in them" (Urciuoli 1996: 26). The US Census has used mother-tongue data as an index of race since 1913. Because it doesn't ask which language a person or family speaks, but rather if they speak languages other than English, the census continues to construct English as the norm; moreover, if a language other than English is reported, the census asks for an assessment of its speakers' English competence (Leeman 2004). Assessing the dominant American language ideology that is currently reflected in and reproduced by the US Census, Leeman (2004) argues that language has become an acceptable stand-in for race:

In the evolution of the current language ideology, language has taken on a dual role. On one hand, language continues to index racialized identities, in particular, Asian and Latino identities. On the other hand, the language-race link has been loosened, allowing language to be portrayed as a component of culture and thus largely as a question of personal choice. It is this duality of language as both a hereditary characteristic and a cultural behavior that permits linguistic discrimination to step in as a surrogate for racial discrimination; because language is constructed as a changeable attribute, discrimination based on language is portrayed as more benign than discrimination based on characteristics seen as unchangeable, such as race or gender. In turn, this portrayal is associated with judicial hesitancy to recognize linguistic rights or to rule in favor of bilingual plaintiffs forbidden from speaking non-English languages at work (Leeman 2004: 526).

The United States, however, is a multilingual, not an English-speaking, country, as can be demonstrated by various statistics of languages spoken by American families (Lippi-Green 2004; Bayley 2004; Medvedeva 2012; Schmidt 2002; Pavlenko 2002). While the dominant ideology is that of

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English as the American language, the reality of many Americans' day-to-day lives is defined by multilingual encounters and practices. Furthermore, this situation is not a recent development, since multilingualism has always been a feature of American life. This book, in part, attempts to tell a small part of the story of this American multilingualism from the colonial times to the present day.

### Theoretical Approaches

Of the several theoretical themes and concepts that inform the analysis presented in this book, in the remainder of this introduction I would like to outline three that appear most influential in structuring my discussion. The first of these is the view of identity as discursively produced in interaction, and also the relationship between this socially negotiated identity and an individual's internal sense of self. The second one is the notion of hybridity, including hybrid identities and hybrid languages. Finally, the third is the rejection of binaries such as monolingual/multilingual or native/non-native speaker in favor of a more fluid approach to language and languaging. This also applies to the larger theme of this book, which is the complexity and fluidity of immigrant-American identities that I discussed in the opening of this introduction. The overview below is necessarily very brief, as one cannot do justice to these complex concepts in only several pages, but it is intended to situate the book within the current theoretical landscape in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.

#### *Identity*

The concept of identity employed in this book is rooted in recent tradition in sociocultural anthropology and cultural studies, which views identities as complex, fluid, relational, negotiated in social interaction, and enacted through sociocultural practices (e.g. Bucholtz and Hall 2004; De Fina 2007; Klein 2009; Kyratzis 2010; Riley 2007; Baran 2014; Baran 2013; Holliday et al. 2004; Barker 2000; Hall 1992; Cameron 1997; Butler 1990). This perspective stands in contrast to essentialism, which assumes that "those who occupy an identity category . . . are both fundamentally similar to one another and fundamentally different from members of other groups . . . [and] that these groupings are inevitable and natural" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 374). In the essentialist perspective, qualities associated with these groupings – for example, "femininity" or "Americanness" – are attributes of their members, and are reified as objectively definable and verifiable. When someone classified as a member of an identity category does not exhibit the qualities associated with it, they are defined as deviant or inauthentic. This essentialist view is related to "the

Enlightenment subject," who, as Stuart Hall explains, "was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual . . . whose 'centre' consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same . . . throughout the individual's existence" (Hall 1992: 275). Much of the debate surrounding immigration in the United States – as elsewhere – is built on essentialist assumptions, such as, for example, that a "true American" speaks "unaccented" English and conforms to white, Anglo-Saxon cultural norms.

Hall contrasts the Enlightenment subject with "the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'movable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us . . . Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about" (Hall 1992: 277). Thus defined post-modern subject inspires the understanding of identities as produced and negotiated in social interaction, enacted in discourse, and situated in context (Holliday et al. 2004) by researchers in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics. Bucholtz and Hall (2004), for example, argue that "identity inheres in actions, not in people" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 376), and they develop the analytical framework of tactics of intersubjectivity, which they use to theorize how individuals and groups perform their self-identification with social categories. Similarly, De Fina (2007) argues that "ethnicity should not be regarded as an abstract attribute of the individual, but rather as an interactional achievement grounded in concrete social contexts and evolving with them" (De Fina 2007: 374). The present book also embraces this perspective.

At the same time, however, it is instructive to remember that, as Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 376) point out, essentialist views of identity can be very much real, relevant, important, and salient to members of a particular community. The analyst has to acknowledge that these views represent locally salient ideologies that structure community life and inform how individuals position themselves in relation to identity categories that are meaningful in their social networks. Thus, for example, the frequently encountered belief that Asian accents are difficult to understand relies on essentialism because, among other problems, it conflates people from a number of countries who speak a variety of unrelated languages into one uniform category, and it racializes their linguistic practices by linking "Asian" phenotypical features[3] with the foreign and the inscrutable (Young

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[3] Ideologies of race reify categories such as "Asian" by reinforcing beliefs that certain physical features should be grouped together, and that as a group they can be used to identify members of a particular race. In reality, race is a social construct, not a real or objective attribute of people. I will say more on this in Chapter 2.

1982). As a result, European Americans have been shown to report diffi-culty with understanding Asian American speakers of Mainstream US English because they believe they hear an "incomprehensible" foreign accent (Lippi-Green 2012; Shuck 2006; Rubin 1992; Rubin and Smith 1990). This is so even though Asian Americans are native speakers of American English, and despite the fact that even when speakers do have foreign accents, the extent to which these accents impede comprehension and their aesthetic appeal are subjective interpretations, not objective facts.

On one hand, therefore, the analyst must remember that essentialism informs the intersecting discourses of language, race, gender, class, etc., that circulate in communities, while at the same time not allowing essenti-alist assumptions to become part of his or her own analysis. On the other hand, from the perspective of the individual, there exists a psychological need to maintain a sense of a coherent self. Stuart Hall assesses this need with skepticism: "If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves ... The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy" (Hall 1992: 277). But while Hall appears to dismiss the "narrative of the self" as merely a "comforting story," his observation holds true: individuals develop such personal narratives to make sense of their lives. Accordingly, psychologists have described self-identity as "a self-narrative that integrates one's past events into a coherent story ... [and] the construction of a future story that continues the 'I' of the person" (Polkinghorne 1988: 107). Drawing on this perspective in their study of how people reconstruct their self-identities in a second language, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) write:

The events that happen to people can only make sense if they can be fitted into an existing plot or if the plot itself can be reconfigured or replaced ... Failure to integrate new events into these systems of coherence or to alter the plot of a life story appro-priately, frequently results in confusion, strangeness, and conflict, and can, on occasion, lead to deep cognitive and emotional instabilities that end tragically (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 160).

This book employs the analytical perspective of identities as socially and discursively constructed, situated, and contextualized, as well as complex and fluid. Additionally, talking about the experience of a multilingual individual, as I do later in the book, entails engaging with the psychologi-cal perspective in which the individual's construction of a coherent self-narrative across different linguistic contexts takes center stage. I will also acknowledge and engage with essentialist views of identity that often structure the sociocultural reality in which immigrants in the United States must orient and position themselves.