

Habla Español? The Growing Number of Spanish Speaking Nordic Americans

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Scholars have most often concentrated on the retention and upkeep of native languages along with the trend in assimilation to American society and the dominant English language. Seldom have we studied other languages that are spoken and maintained by the immigrant communities. This paper examines new data available through the Minnesota Population Center and the newly developed Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data base. By analyzing past and current U.S. Census data, distinct trends in languages spoken at home are encountered helping us project changes to come in years ahead. Questions of dominant languages across the United States reveal that Spanish speaking Nordic Americans are increasing at high rates. Regional clustering of Spanish speakers and surprising findings as to the rank of each national language within each ethnic group are investigated. These findings are significant in helping us gain a better understanding of the changing linguistic practices of each Nordic group.

KEYWORDS: IPUMS, Spanish language, Nordic Americans

Introduction

It is appropriate that I submit the following article to *Siirtolaisuus-Migration* in light of the recent editorial that focused on the growing trend of “Finlanders in America are more and more likely to *habla español* (Söderling 2010, 2)”. It is my hope that the follow-

ing material will lead to further investigation and study that begins to look into the changing linguistic landscape of the Finnish American and entire Nordic American community.

Traditional studies of ethnic groups and their linguistic abilities have focused on the maintenance, loss and/or growth of definite national languages. The Nordic populations in North America are no different. Each group focuses on the every-increasing loss of the national language, and the expansion in use of English. Much has been written about languages in the New World, and the way in which the minority languages assimilate, maintain, or change their language, and among Nordic scholars, these studies have focused on Norwegians (Haugen 1969), Swedes (Hasselmo 1961, 1974), Finns (Virtaranta et al. 1993), and Finland-Swedes (Hulden 1972, Roinila 2000, Österlund-Pötzsch 2003).

The U.S. Census Bureau has asked various questions on language since 1890 (Shin & Bruno 2003, 1). From 1890 until 1970, a question on “mother tongue” (language spoken in the person’s home when he or she was a child) was asked. From 1980 to 2000, the Census asked respondents whether they spoke a language other than English at home. Those who responded “Yes” were asked what language they spoke. The write-in answers to this question allowed for a specific language spoken to be noted, and could have included Finnish, Swedish, Spanish, or any other language (Shin and Bruno, 2003, 1) (Figure 1).

“In 2000, 18 percent of the total population aged 5 and over, or 47.0 million people, reported they spoke a language other than English at home. These figures were up from 14 percent (31.8 million) in 1990 and 11 percent (23.1 million) in 1980. The number of people who spoke a lan-

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guage other than English at home grew by 38 percent in the 1980s and by 47 percent in the 1990s. While the population aged 5 and over grew by one-fourth from 1980 to 2000, the number who spoke a language other than English at home more than doubled (Shin & Bruno 2003: 2)".

The fastest growing ethnic minority in the country involves the Hispanic and Latino population, reaching a total of 48 million in 2009 (Wikipedia 2010). The vast majority is made up of Mexicans (64% of all Hispanics/Latinos in America), followed by Puerto Ricans (9%) and Cubans (3.5%) (Wikipedia 2010). This increase in the Hispanic and Latino population has also led to changes in the linguistic landscape of the country. When I moved to Virginia in 1997 I was surprised to find Spanish language signs at the ATM machines that allows customers to withdraw money from the bank accounts. As a new Finnish-Canadian immigrant to the United States, the presence of Spanish so far "North" surprised me. I may not be the only one who is surprised about the growth of Spanish in the country. The U.S. Census Bureau shows that Spanish has increased dramatically during the 1980-2007 period. In 2000, the Census noted that a total of some 82% of Americans spoke English at home. Spanish ranked second with 10.7% of the population. The growth of the Spanish speaking population has continued to the present, and more recent data from 2007 indicates that Spanish speakers had increased by over 210% from the 1980 Census figures. Thus, in 2007, Spanish speakers represented 11.5% of the American population (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). From the statistics, it is clear that in the United States, Spanish is the most frequently spoken non-English language at home (Table 1).

So how does the growing Spanish language in the country affect other ethnic groups? With the discovery of a new resource data base at the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota, it is now possible to discover the complexities of linguistic abilities and the trends in the use of languages in the homes of all ethnic groups in the United States. Scholars can access the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), which is a treasure trove of data. Several different data bases are available, and draws on every surviving United States census from

11 a. Does this person speak a language other than English at home?

Yes

No → Skip to 12

b. What is this language?

(For example: Korean, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese)

c. How well does this person speak English?

Very well

Well

Not well

Not at all

Figure 1. Source: Shin and Bruno (2003).

1850 to 2000 (with the exception of the 1890 census, which was destroyed in a fire) and from the American Community Survey of 2000-2008. The IPUMS provides consistent variable names, coding schemes, and documentation across all the samples, facilitating the analysis of long-term change (Ruggles 2010).

The current research focuses on the level of multilingualism among the Nordic populations found in the United States. For the first time, it is possible to obtain data on the numerous languages that are spoken by members of these groups within the United States from 1910 to 2000. Unfortunately, the census did not ask about mother tongue or language in the 1950 and 1970 census years. While variables differ for the years since 1910, the present study looks at the changing language associations based on the 1980-2000 Census data in which 1st and 2nd ancestry is claimed by respondents. Calculated by using the available online analysis functions, cross tabulations provide detailed information on number of speakers at the national and state levels. While the IPUMS data provides valuable information, it must be noted that IPUMS used a 5% sample through a 1-in-20 national random sample of the population for the 1980-2000 Census periods. Notwithstanding such sampling restrictions, the longitudinal trend apparent in my findings is of immense value. I will provide brief summaries of these data in the following pages, and will consider each of the Nordic groups separately, making comparisons of the major languages spoken.

Table 1. Languages Spoken at Home in the United States, 1980-2007

	1980	1990	2000	2007	Change 1980-2007, %
English	187,187,415	198,600,798	215,423,557	225,505,953	20.5
Spanish	11,116,194	17,345,064	28,101,052	34,547,077	210.8
Chinese	630,806	1,319,462	2,022,143	2,464,572	290.7
French	1,550,751	1,930,404	2,097,206	1,984,824	28.0
German	1,586,593	1,547,987	1,383,442	1,104,354	-30.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010): <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/language/acs/Table2.xls>.

Icelanders

The first Icelandic settlers in North America arrived in Utah in 1855 seeking religious freedom to follow Mormonism. Since this beginning, the number of Icelanders has grown slowly and steadily. The largest wave of Icelandic immigration occurred between 1870 and 1900, as some 15,000 of Iceland's population of 75,000 resettled in North America. While the majority of these emigrants settled in a colony called New Iceland north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, those coming to the United States settled primarily in the upper Midwest, especially Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakota Territories.

The 1980 Census revealed a total of nearly 34,000 Icelandic-Americans in the country. This number climbed to almost 40,000 in 1990 and nearly 42,000 in 2000. California, Washington, and Minnesota were the most heavily populated with Icelanders and Icelandic-Americans. North Dakota was home to the fourth-largest number of persons with Icelandic backgrounds.

In analyzing the results of Icelanders and their language use, it is clearly shown through the IPUMS Census data that the use of English language dominates within this ethnic community. As of 2000, some 80% or 34,000 individuals spoke English at home. Icelandic language use, while dropping from 1980 to 1990, increased to nearly 10% or some 4,000 of the Icelandic American population in 2000. This may mean that bilingualism is exhibited in homes where both English and Icelandic are spoken. As to the other languages spoken by Icelanders, Spanish ranks in third place with a 1% share of the ethnic population, with nearly 450 individuals. Given the bilingual nature of the Census question, which allows for only one additional language aside from English, the data

thus indicates that Spanish is spoken along with English. German, French, and other languages followed (Table 2). The highest percentage of Spanish speakers among Icelandic Americans was found in Washington DC where 15.7% of the Icelandic community spoke Spanish. The highest concentrations of Spanish speaking Icelandic Americans were followed by Indiana (10.1%), and Arizona (3.8%).

Danes

The second group of Northern Europeans involves Danes. The Danes share a similar history of early immigration to the United States, in that some of the earliest arrivals were Danes who had been converted to the Mormonism as a result of early missionary work in Denmark starting in 1850. In fact, the Mormons brought to Utah "more Danes than any other immigrant group except the British" (Allen & Turner 1988). By 1920, the largest Danish born populations were found in California, followed by Iowa, Illinois, and Minnesota (US Census 1920).

According to the 2000 Census, a total of 1.4 million Danish Americans were concentrated in California, Utah, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Washington. The strongest percentage of the total population was found in several counties in Utah, where up to 33% of the county population had Danish ancestry. When analyzing the language use of the Danish Americans, it is noted that there has been a steady decline in absolute numbers for English speakers at home (Table 3).

A similar decline has happened for the use of Danish language. However, most important appears the steady growth of the Spanish language among Danish Americans. In 1980, nearly 11,000 (0.7%) Danish Americans spoke Spanish at home, but in 2000,

Table 2. Languages spoken at home by Icelanders in the United States, 1980-2000.

Icelander							
	1980		1990		2000		
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	plus/minus
English	27,720	82.3	31,004	79.3	33,889	80.3	6,169
Icelandic	3,880	11.5	3,561	9.1	4,149	9.9	269
Spanish	140	0.4	501	1.3	443	1.1	303
German	80	0.2	377	1.0	247	0.6	167
French	40	0.1	74	0.2	147	0.4	107
Danish	20	0.1	55	0.1	66	0.2	46
Norwegian	0	0.0	9	0.0	58	0.1	58
Italian	20	0.1	18	0.0	53	0.1	33
Swedish	0	0.0	19	0.0	33	0.1	33
Finnish	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
TOTAL POP.	33,680	100.0	39,073	100.0	41,928	100.0	8,248

Source: Author tabulations from <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

Table 3. Languages spoken at home by Danes in the United States, 1980-2000.

Danish							
	1980		1990		2000		
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	plus/minus
English	1,384,700	91.3	1,460,844	89.6	1,298,436	90.3	-86,264
Danish	33,140	2.2	30,909	1.9	24,383	1.7	-8,757
Spanish	10,940	0.7	15,596	1.0	21,903	1.5	10,963
German	6,140	0.4	6,918	0.4	5,869	0.4	-271
French	4,240	0.3	5,211	0.3	5,641	0.4	1,401
Italian	880	0.1	637	0.0	1,103	0.1	223
Norwegian	920	0.1	683	0.0	582	0.0	-338
Swedish	820	0.1	676	0.0	548	0.0	-272
Finnish	80	0.0	28	0.0	121	0.0	41
Icelandic	20	0.0	24	0.0	53	0.0	33
TOTAL POP.	1,516,280	100.0	1,630,571	100.0	1,438,223	100.0	-78,057

Source: Author tabulations from <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

the number had increased to nearly 22,000 (1.5%). The top three concentrations of Spanish speakers relative to the Danish American population in individual states were encountered in Washington DC (5.6%), New Mexico (4.7%), and Alabama (3.6%).

Norwegians

The third Nordic group involves the Norwegians. Arriving in America as early as the 1820s, many of these

early immigrants were farm families who tried to establish a colony that eventually failed. Some of these early immigrants started new lives in Illinois, namely the Chicago area and the newly opened and available lands of southwestern Wisconsin. Other early arrivals settled in Iowa, southeastern Minnesota as well as North Dakota (Allen & Turner 1988). By 1920, the highest numbers of Norwegian born immigrants were found in Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota (US Census 1920). In 1980, over 20% of all Norwegians lived in Minnesota. Of the nearly 4.5 million Norwe-

Table 4. Languages spoken at home by Norwegians in the United States, 1980-2000.

	Norwegian						
	1980		1990		2000		plus/minus
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	
English	3,136,860	90.9	3,455,430	89.3	4,054,393	90.4	917,533
Spanish	19,100	0.6	28,075	0.7	65,047	1.5	45,947
Norwegian	104,160	3.0	68,241	1.8	47,345	1.1	-56,815
German	10,500	0.3	13,062	0.3	15,043	0.3	4,543
French	7,620	0.2	10,416	0.3	14,265	0.3	6,645
Italian	900	0.0	770	0.0	1,940	0.0	1,040
Swedish	2,820	0.1	1,855	0.0	1,682	0.0	-1,138
Danish	700	0.0	554	0.0	625	0.0	-75
Finnish	620	0.0	424	0.0	338	0.0	-282
Icelandic	80	0.0	90	0.0	155	0.0	75
TOTAL POP.	3,452,680	100.0	3,867,414	100.0	4,484,655	100.0	1,031,975

Source: Author tabulations from <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

gian Americans in 2000, the leading states for Norwegians included Minnesota, Wisconsin, California, Washington, and North Dakota. The significance of Norwegians in the United States is realized only when the numbers are compared in relative terms. By per capita ratio, Norway ranks second only to Ireland as being a land of emigrants to the United States. Perhaps due to this volume, it may not be surprising that the Norwegians are the largest Nordic group in the country (Hanks 2006).

In analyzing the available census data on language use, it is noted that the use of English at home among the Norwegian Americans is very high, with over 4 million or some 90% speaking English (Table 4). This high percentage also corresponds to a steady increase in the absolute number of speakers. However, most interesting is the fact that while Norwegian was spoken by some 104,000 (3%) people in 1980, this number and percentage share has dramatically declined. In 2000, Norwegian was spoken by some 47,000 (1.1%) of all Norwegian Americans. As the Norwegian language has declined, a dramatic increase in the use of Spanish has taken place. The use of Spanish ranked third in the 1980 Census with less than one percent of the Norwegian American population, but by 2000, an increase of almost 46,000 people led to a total of 65,000 (1.5%) Spanish speakers. Thus, Spanish was spoken by more Norwegian Americans than the Norwegian language! The relative use of other languages

has remained virtually unchanged over the same time period. In terms of where the Spanish language appeared most evident, the highest Spanish language percentages were encountered in Washington DC (4.2%), Louisiana (3.5%), and New Mexico (3.0%).

Swedes

The history of the Swedes is also associated to the early history of Finns who arrived in North America in 1638 at the founding of New Sweden on the Delaware River. Aside from this earliest arrival, Swedes did not enter the United States in large numbers until the 1840s, when landowners and craftsmen by the thousands began to immigrate with their families (Beijbom 1980).

As with other immigrants, most of the Swedes arriving before the 1880s came primarily to find cheap land, and their destinations were typically in the nearest regions with good land available for settlement. This included the Midwest, specifically Illinois and Minnesota. Other destinations included Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas (Allen & Turner 1988). By 1920, the states with the highest Swedish born populations were found in Minnesota, Illinois and New York (US Census 1920). In 1990, it was estimated that two out of every five Swedish Americans was found in the Midwest. According to the 2000 Census, some 4.3 million Swedish Americans lived in the United States, with

Table 5. Languages spoken at home by Swedes in the United States, 1980-2000.

	Swedish						plus/minus
	1980		1990		2000		
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	
English	3,809,080	91.6	4,191,365	89.7	3,647,970	91.0	-161,110
Spanish	26,000	0.6	38,495	0.8	55,292	1.4	29,292
Swedish	88,160	2.1	61,925	1.3	52,381	1.3	-35,779
French	11,920	0.3	14,223	0.3	14,704	0.4	2,784
German	14,360	0.3	16,120	0.3	14,553	0.4	193
Italian	2,420	0.1	1,707	0.0	2,625	0.1	205
Norwegian	4,580	0.1	2,528	0.1	1,917	0.1	-2,663
Finnish	2,140	0.1	1,709	0.0	884	0.0	-1,256
Danish	740	0.0	640	0.0	508	0.0	-232
Icelandic	60	0.0	27	0.0	14	0.0	-46
TOTAL POP.	4,157,740	100.0	4,672,153	100.0	4,008,237	100.0	-149,503

Source: Author tabulations from <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

the leading states in absolute terms being Minnesota, California, Illinois, Washington, and Michigan (Swedenroots.com).

Similar to the Norwegians, Spanish was also spoken by more Swedish Americans than Swedish was (Table 5). Data indicates that English was spoken at home by some 3.6 million (91%) of all Swedish Americans in 2000, and this represented the highest percentage of English use among all Nordic groups. The use of Swedish declined from a 2.1% share in 1980 to a 1.3% share in 2000. Spanish increased from a 0.6% in 1980 share to 1.4% in 2000, and represented some 55,000 people. Similar to other Nordic groups, other language uses have remained virtually unchanged. Among Swedish Americans who spoke Spanish, the highest concentrations were found in New Mexico (3.7%), Washington DC (3.4%), and Oklahoma (2.7%).

Finns

It is interesting that research into the use of languages within the Finnish American community does not seem to be a topic that has received much attention. Indeed, at the outset of my current work into discovering previous literature into the use of languages in Finnish immigrant homes, colleagues were quick to note that they were not aware of such work (Kivisto 2010, Kostianen 2010, Halmari 2010).

An examination through the collection of 56 articles published in the 1988, 1991, 1998, and 2002 Conference Proceedings of the Finno-Ugric Studies Association reveals nothing that deals specifically with multilingualism among the various Finno-Ugric peoples (FUSAC 2009). Only one attempt is made by Sintonen (1992), to examine social interaction and language retention among Finnish Canadians, and the only languages mentioned in this article deal with Finnish and English.

The history of Finns in North America dates to 1638 and the arrival of Swedes on the Delaware River. A small settlement grew but eventually disappeared as additional settlers did not arrive after the Dutch takeover of the region in 1655 and the eventual English rule beginning in 1664 (Koivukangas 1988). Finns began to arrive once again in the late 1800s, and most settled in areas in the Upper Midwest, New England states, as well as the Pacific Northwest. By 1920, the highest concentrations were found in Michigan, Minnesota and Massachusetts (US Census 1920). This concentration has remained fairly intact, although a growing retired population is also found in Florida. In 2000, Finnish Americans totaled some 600,000 individuals, and were concentrated in the states of Michigan, Minnesota, California, and Washington.

As noted in Table 6, some 540,000 (86.4%) spoke English as their main language at home. This concentration had steadily increased since 1980, while

Table 6. Languages spoken at home by Finns in the United States, 1980-2000.

	Finnish						
	1980		1990		2000		plus/minus
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	
English	488,440	82.6	559,862	83.9	541,652	86.4	53,212
Finnish	62,580	10.6	48,120	7.2	33,685	5.4	-28,895
Spanish	1,940	0.3	3,997	0.6	6,112	1.0	4,172
German	1,320	0.2	1,468	0.2	1,880	0.3	560
French	1,400	0.2	1,796	0.3	1,808	0.3	408
Swedish	2,820	0.5	2,110	0.3	1,766	0.3	-1,054
Italian	380	0.1	264	0.0	284	0.1	-96
Norwegian	120	0.0	271	0.0	125	0.0	5
Danish	140	0.0	61	0.0	80	0.0	-60
Icelandic	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
TOTAL POP.	591,060	100.0	667,063	100.0	626,592	100.0	35,532

Source: Author tabulations from <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

the Finnish language declined. In 2000, some 34,000 (5.4%) Finnish Americans spoke Finnish at home. To their credit, this proportion of language maintenance is the highest among all Nordic groups. The third most common language spoken by Finnish Americans was Spanish, as over 6,000 (1.0%) of the ethnic population spoke this language. A dramatic increase in Spanish language took place between 1980 and 2000, as the number of speakers increased from nearly 2,000 individuals to just over 6,000.

The one language that many Finns clearly associate with Finland is Swedish. The dialect of Finland-Swedish is somewhat different from *Riksvenska* or the Sweden Swedish, and while much has been written about this ethnolinguistic minority, and the founding of the Swedish-Finn

Historical Society in Seattle attempts to maintain a definite presence of this distinct cultural minority in America, it may be disheartening to learn that the Finland-Swedes have steadily lost Swedish speakers in the United States. While in 1980 there were nearly 3,000 people who spoke Swedish and may have identified themselves as Finland-Swedes (Finnish ancestry and Swedish speaking respondents), the Swedish speakers ranked third among the languages spoken among Finnish Americans. In 2000, there were some 1,800 Swedish speakers, and the language had dropped to 6th place, behind English, Finnish, Spanish, German, and French speaking Finnish Americans. Based on the

census calculations, it is highly likely that the Finnish language will decline even more, while Spanish will increase. It is estimated that by 2010, the Finnish language will be spoken by less than 4% of the Finnish Americans, while Spanish will increase to nearly 2% of the population. Swedish will also continue to decline (Figure 2).

As the Spanish speaking Finnish Americans have continued to grow, it may not be very surprising to find the highest concentrations of Spanish speaking Finnish Americans in the South. The highest concentrations were led by Mississippi (7.0%), Louisiana (5.0%), and New Mexico (4.0%). Contrary to other Nordic Spanish speakers, no Spanish speaking Finnish Americans were found in the nation's capital.

Discussion

What will happen to the languages spoken by immigrant ethnics and their descendents in the future? As the Spanish language continues to expand its influence, it is inevitable that more and more Nordics will speak Spanish as well. The mother tongue of all Nordic immigrants has made way for English and will also make way for the Spanish language. For some, Spanish is already more commonly spoken compared to the original language brought from Northern Europe. While this is clearly evident in this study, what can be

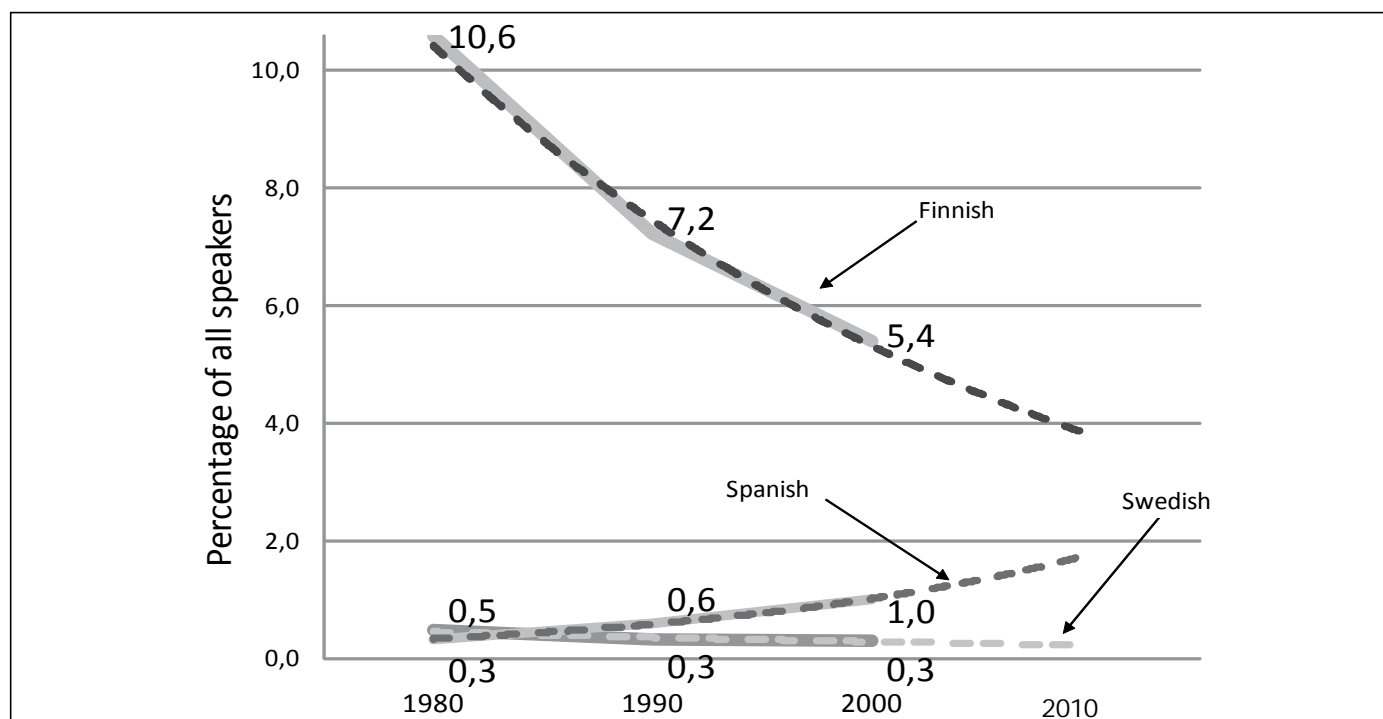


Figure 2. Languages Change Among Finns in the United States, 1980-2000 and Beyond Source: Author tabulations from <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

said about regional differences in this growing Spanish language use? Where does the Spanish language find strongest support? It would seem plausible, that the Hispanic American borderland would exhibit the highest concentrations of Nordics who speak Spanish. Evidence, to some degree, supports this idea.

The leading state amongst most Nordic groups with the highest concentration of Spanish speakers was found in California. In absolute numbers, Spanish speaking Nordics were dominant in the state of California, led by over 9,100 Norwegian Americans; 8,700 Swedish Americans; 4,000 Danish Americans; and 870 Finnish Americans who spoke Spanish at home. In percentage terms, the Spanish speaking Nordics found in California represented between 12% - 18% of all Spanish speakers who identified themselves with a Nordic ancestry. However, as noted earlier, the concentration of Spanish speakers when compared to each state's Nordic population varies greatly, and California failed to show percentages in the top three list for any of the Nordic groups. Overall, the highest Spanish speaking populations were found in the states along the Hispanic American borderland, while several Southern states also ranked high among all ethnic groups. This study has only scratches the

surface of the changing linguistic landscape of Nordic American communities. More detailed study and analysis for possible reasons for Nordic groups and Spanish language preference in these areas needs to be done.

The IPUMS database offers some new and exciting avenues for research. While the results of this study are clear, many of us may be wondering what may happen in the years to come? It is clear that native Nordic languages will continue to decline further, and ethnic communities will have a challenge in increasing the number of Nordic speakers. Bilingualism with English and a Nordic language is wonderful, but is it of practical value in North America? What are the advantages in today's society to learn and maintain a language that was brought here by our forefathers? I'm sure there has been much written on this topic, and parents and families have talked about these matters in their homes at length as well. On the side of the Spanish speaking Nordic Americans, is there an advantage in learning Spanish on this continent? The immigration trends of today may suggest that for anyone to get ahead in the North American milieu, knowledge of English and Spanish are more important than any other language, including the languages of Norden.

These are questions that may be more important now than ever before. I hope we will find some answers to these and other questions in the years ahead.

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