

Prospectus for an anthology

*Tongue-Tied:
The lives of multilingual children in public education*

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Who is tongue-tied?

This anthology is designed to give voice to millions of people in the US who, on a daily basis, are denied the opportunity to speak in their own words. It may be surprising in this day and age that the American public continues to believe that certain kinds of people should be silenced—for their own good. Muteness, it seems, will make them better citizens. Their lives, it is believed, will be better for the experience.

Millions of American school children who do not speak standard English are the tongue-tied. Language minority students now make up the majority of students in our urban public schools. The current hegemony of English monolingualism (based on 19th century educational theories and 20th century assimilationist ideologies) insists that they give up their home language in order to learn English quicker. In utter contrast, contemporary linguists respond with near unanimity by saying that monolingualism is neither natural, necessary or beneficial, and that the personal and social costs of stripping away home languages from these children are enormous. But the antiquated views of the past century have produced a public opinion that unthinkingly maintains the linguistic hegemony.

Modern theories of learning held by most educational researchers maintain that to silence students is to deny them an equal opportunity to learn. Yet, it is commonplace to insist that non-English speaking students, as well as non-standard English speaking children, shut up and listen, rather than to speak with their own voices. As children, their anguish at the daily repudiation of their home languages for educational purposes is customarily disregarded, if it is heard at all. These students' tongues are tied. Still, they are not the only ones who are silenced.

Another tongue-tied segment of the US population is the parents of these children. The anti-democratic linguistic hegemony discredits their home language or home dialect, as it exalts standard English. Again, their warranted outrage is often dismissed as so much garbled ingratitude.

School teachers are a very important third group who are also constrained by the prevailing hegemony of monolingualism. They speak English, of course. But the linguistic

hegemony undercuts their best intentions. Political insistence on English-only instruction restricts the methods available to the educators. Moreover, structural inequities in public education (based on class and race) far too often relegate the most inexperienced and inadequately trained teachers to classrooms filled with language minority students. Unfamiliar with the language or culture of their students, these teachers often succumb to popular prejudices and misconceptions that devalue these children's language and speech.

Tongue-Tied is designed to address each of these abusive silences, by creating a forum for language minority children to speak up in their own defense.

What is *Tongue-Tied*?

Tongue-Tied is an anthology that brings together two kinds of writing. First, it includes select literary works by American authors of color writing about their own experiences as language minority students. Second, it adds careful abridgments or synopses of key critical commentaries and social science essays about such students. By interweaving beautiful compositions about the lives of language minority students with scientific and critical essays on their education, *Tongue-Tied* can sensitize readers (teachers, students and the general public) who may have lived their own lives speaking only standard English. Such readers are frequently unaware of the hegemony that arbitrarily imposes English-only and standard English values on other Americans.

Tongue-Tied is designed to raise the awareness of its readers. First, by way of the literature, their hearts may be opened up to these children. Then, accessible non-literary essays can inform them about the actual educational and linguistic capacities of these linguistic minority students, and the colonizing power inherent in the current linguistic hegemony. By making readers self-aware about the chauvinism of monolingualism, it will become much less acceptable to silence these children.

Literary selections form the heart of *Tongue-Tied*. First-person accounts of Latino, Asian American, African American, and working-class White authors comprise its core. This literary collection is contextualized with essays contributing scientific or pedagogic perspectives. The six sections of the anthology correspond to often-stated concerns of American multilingual communities and most educational researchers.

The child is at the center of *Tongue-tied*. In Section 1, THE ANGUISH OF SILENCE, first-person literary accounts of language minority children's shock at being exposed to chauvinistically monolingual U.S. public schools. This section is rounded out by Section 2, HISTORIES THAT STIFLE, which consists of quick overviews of the public education of American language minority students. Often Americans do not know the basic history of U.S. public education and its often adverse impact on language minority students. In Section 3,

POTENTIAL AND VULNERABILITY, somber scientific descriptions of the vulnerability of these children, as well as hopeful expositions on their special capabilities are offered.

The next sections deal with the adults in the world of the young child. Section 4, MOTHER TONGUE, is a set of third-person recollections of the child's home language, the true medium of emotional and cultural sustenance of (language minority) children. Most of these poignant contemplations gently underline the tremendous costs involved for the child and family when this spiritual link is unnecessarily severed by a school system based on linguistic exclusion. Section 5, EXCELLENCE AND NEGLECT, brings together a number of wise commentaries about the skills and arts that teachers should or should not practice when interacting with these children. Here also are included a set of significant descriptions of highly successful schooling for language minority children.

The last set of literary pieces and social commentaries, in Section 6, REGRET AND RESISTANCE, are writers' critical reflections on their own experiences as language minority children who were subjected to the English-only and standard English hegemony of U.S. public schooling. They all come to the same conclusion, at times stated subtly, at other times more forcefully. At their most subdued, they counsel for greater recognition of the child's vulnerability and plead for more humane treatment. At their most strident, they demand these children's linguistic rights to ensure their equal treatment in school and in society at large.

With well-known authors such as Amy Tan, Sherman Alexie, bell hooks and Richard Rodriguez, the general reading public will be drawn to pick up *Tongue-Tied*. They may well be held in thrall by the strong selections by less familiar authors, which open a window onto the lives of these linguistic minority students. Sympathy for the pain of these children then can be transformed into critical considerations of the current linguistic hegemony, with the commentary of writers such as James Baldwin and Gloria Anzaldúa. Finally, better frameworks to conceptualize the lives and education of these children may be garnered with abridged scientific statements of preminent researchers such as William Labov and Catherine Snow. *Tongue-Tied* provides a full portrait of the sociolinguistic setting of language minority children in the public education system.

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Sources and permissions

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Why now for *Tongue-Tied*?

The numbers of language minority children in American public schools has never been greater. They constitute the largest portion of urban school districts, for example, making up over 70% of Los Angeles Unified School District kindergartners. And just as their numbers soar, national concern for American public education is increasing. [Education may be the most substantial issue in the current presidential campaign!] While the origins of the educational crisis are structural and economic, the perceived foreignness of these children, which resonates with American xenophobia, makes them a scapegoat for the institutional failure of public schools. The direction of the public’s backlash is then quite predictable. One example is the 1998 passage of Proposition 227 in California to eliminate bilingual education for its 1.3 million non-English speaking children. Linguistic chauvinism penalizes these children. Another is the national outrage vented at the 1997 Oakland School Board decision to acknowledge Ebonics in its schools. Commentators in *Tongue-Tied* express the view that the Ebonics controversy is a spectacle of latent racism, in which language plays proxy for race. Thus ample reason and interest for a volume such as *Tongue-Tied* exists in American society today.

The English-only issue will not disappear—it will draw greater attention to itself as multilingualism becomes more apparent throughout the country. To the bilingual American, this future is natural and welcome. However, to many monolingual English speaking citizens, this same future portends the end of a parochial way of life. We have already witnessed the first political volleys to retain and reassert monolingual and standard English superiority. Meanwhile,

these children's multilingual richness is deemed a liability to scorn and eliminate, rather than a resource to nurture and build on. *Tongue-Tied* provides some relief from their plight, by offering a forum where these silenced millions can finally be heard.

Editor's background

Otto Santa Ana has the credentials to bring literary, social commentary and social scientific studies on language minority students together in this anthology. Professor Santa Ana has devoted his academic career to language issues of minority communities, most often the Latino community. His training is in sociolinguistics, the systematic study of the interface of language and social structure. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, working under the pioneer of the study of empirical language phenomena, Professor William Labov.

Santa Ana is a founding member of the César Chávez Center for Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCLA. Previously he was Assistant Professor in Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, and Lecteur in American History and American English at Université de Paris III (La Sorbonne Nouvelle), France.

Professor Santa Ana has also served over the years as a sociolinguistic consultant and teacher trainer to San Francisco Unified School District and Los Angeles Unified School District.

Santa Ana began compiling *Tongue-Tied* to bring the hidden hegemony of English-only monolingualism to conscious awareness for his students, as well as for school teachers. He recognized that traditional lectures often fail to bring the message of linguistic chauvinism home. On the other hand, a well-turned story of a single language minority child could bring tears to the eyes of the most resolute English-only advocate.

The proximate motivation for *Tongue-Tied* was the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998. Santa Ana realized that over one million California children who qualified for bilingual education would now face teachers who need not be trained in pedagogy of language minority education. The teachers would likely be ill-prepared novices. They often bring only an emergency credential, and no experience, to the classroom. Without some kind of effective inoculation against doing what comes naturally, these well-meaning but hapless teachers would be betrayed by their common sense (hegemony) that falsely proclaims the educational superiority of English over other languages. The first full version of *Tongue-Tied* was compiled with the aid of a class of dedicated UCLA students who amplified the selection of readings during a course offered in the Winter of 1999. The current version has been fully rewritten and expanded.

Dr. Santa Ana has published articles on ethnic dialect formation, on the precise character of the speech community concept in sociolinguistics, on the education of language minority children, and on the shared concerns of historians and linguists, among other topics. His writings have appeared in journals such as *Language in Society*, *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, *Discourse & Society*, *Aztlán*, *Language Change & Variation*, *Hispanic Journal of the Behavioral Sciences*, *Frontera Norte*, and others.

Professor Santa Ana has received various honors. Previously he was awarded a University of Pennsylvania Fontaine Fellowship, a National Science Foundation Minority Graduate Fellowship Honorable Mention, and was distinguished as a Linguistic Society of America Fellow. Most recently he was a National Research Council, Ford Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow. His first book will be published in 2001. It is entitled *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse* (University of Texas Press).