

Californians' Use of English and Other Languages:  
Census 2000 Summary

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The *CCSRE Race and Ethnicity in California: Demographics Report Series* documents the current socioeconomic, educational, and demographic status of ethnic and racial minority populations in California. Census 2000 data are being used as they become available to examine racial/ethnic diversity, residential segregation, household and family composition, language use, educational attainment, occupation and work status, income, and poverty. The series is made possible by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, and is accessible on-line at the CCSRE website: [www.stanford.edu/dept/csre](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/csre).

Since 1890, the United States decennial census has surveyed the population on language use. On the past three censuses (2000, 1990, and 1980), respondents to the long-form questionnaire were asked whether they (and other members of their households) speak a language other than English at home<sup>1</sup>. On prior censuses, people were asked to identify their “mother tongue,” defined as, “the language other than English spoken in the person’s home when he or she was a child; one’s first language; or, the language spoken before immigrating to the U.S.” (U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder definition).

In 2000, 40 percent of people in California reported that they speak languages other than English at home, Spanish being the most common, followed distantly by Chinese. Census 2000 data presented in this report consider non-English language use, household rates of linguistic isolation, and English ability among people who use other languages at home. Differences by nativity, age, and race are examined as well.

## Languages Spoken at Home

Table 1 summarizes languages spoken at home<sup>2</sup> for children ages 5 to 17 and adults ages 18 and older in California and the U.S.. In California, 61 percent of adults and 57 percent of children speak English at home, compared to 82 percent of adults and children in the overall U.S.. The second most common language spoken at home is Spanish, used by 24 percent of adults and 32 percent of children in California, and 10 percent of adults and 13 percent of children in the overall U.S..

## Non-English Language Usage and Linguistic Isolation

Since two out of five people in California speak languages other than English at home, the data presented in this section consider the extent to which households in the state are linguistically isolated. Households are considered *linguistically isolated* by the Census Bureau if “no member fourteen years old and over 1) speaks only English or 2) speaks a non-English language and speaks English ‘very well.’ In other words all members fourteen years old and over have at least some difficulty with English.”

The main language categories used by the Census Bureau to summarize data are as follows, along with selected examples from their definition (U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder definition):

**English only**

**Spanish**

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<sup>1</sup> Problematic with this method of asking about language use is that, in households in which more than one language is spoken, we cannot determine whether one is the dominant or primary one used.

<sup>2</sup> The Census Bureau assigns the same “household language” to everyone living in the same household. In cases in which more than one non-English language are used in the home, the Census Bureau assigns the *household language* as the non-English language used by (in the following order) “the householder, spouse, parent, sibling, child, grandchild, in-laws, other relatives, stepchild, unmarried partner, housemate or roommate, [or] other nonrelatives.” Using this method of assignment, it is possible for an individual who speaks only English to have a non-English language assigned as their home language (U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder definition).

**Table 1: Language Spoken at Home**

	CALIFORNIA				UNITED STATES			
	Age 5-17		Age 18+		Age 5-17		Age 18+	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Speak only English	3,886,749	57.4	15,128,124	61.4	43,316,237	81.6	172,107,320	82.2
Spanish or Spanish Creole	2,188,434	32.3	5,917,071	24.0	6,830,100	12.9	21,270,952	10.2
Chinese	128,999	1.9	686,387	2.8	317,106	0.6	1,705,037	0.8
Vietnamese	83,250	1.2	323,869	1.3	205,064	0.4	804,563	0.4
Tagalog	67,760	1.0	558,639	2.3	127,790	0.2	1,096,451	0.5
Korean	54,244	0.8	243,832	1.0	156,080	0.3	737,983	0.4
Miao, Hmong	33,256	0.5	32,273	0.1	82,653	0.2	85,410	0.04
Armenian	30,762	0.5	124,475	0.5	36,487	0.1	166,221	0.1
Persian	25,484	0.4	128,837	0.5	54,076	0.1	258,009	0.1
Mon-Khmer, Cambodian	24,654	0.4	46,651	0.2	57,939	0.1	123,950	0.1
Other Indic languages	21,686	0.3	90,433	0.4	79,495	0.1	359,794	0.2
Arabic	20,732	0.3	87,608	0.4	124,220	0.2	490,362	0.2
Russian	19,324	0.3	99,058	0.4	117,518	0.2	588,724	0.3
Other Pacific Island languages	18,512	0.3	94,920	0.4	51,251	0.1	262,590	0.1
French (incl. Patois, Cajun)	16,509	0.2	118,558	0.5	232,696	0.4	1,411,142	0.7
Japanese	15,872	0.2	138,761	0.6	55,555	0.1	422,442	0.2
Other Asian languages	12,479	0.2	63,534	0.3	52,732	0.1	345,702	0.2
Laotian	12,426	0.2	28,891	0.1	38,302	0.1	111,001	0.1
Hindi	11,982	0.2	64,152	0.3	41,076	0.1	275,981	0.1
German	11,661	0.2	130,010	0.5	164,961	0.3	1,218,481	0.6
Portuguese or Portuguese Creole	9,932	0.1	68,471	0.3	85,235	0.2	479,395	0.2
African languages	8,461	0.1	37,010	0.2	68,273	0.1	350,232	0.2
Urdu	7,031	0.1	24,557	0.1	61,658	0.1	201,242	0.1
Other Indo-European languages	6,636	0.1	31,114	0.1	55,132	0.1	272,814	0.1
Hebrew	6,385	0.1	28,262	0.1	39,980	0.1	155,394	0.1
Thai	5,797	0.1	34,173	0.1	14,464	0.03	106,000	0.1
Other and unspecified languages	5,765	0.1	29,783	0.1	23,007	0.04	121,568	0.1
Gujarathi	5,637	0.1	27,475	0.1	41,940	0.1	194,048	0.1
Italian	5,431	0.1	78,759	0.3	68,029	0.1	940,341	0.4
Other Slavic languages	5,294	0.1	23,402	0.1	37,409	0.1	263,670	0.1
Polish	2,811	0.04	20,624	0.1	75,678	0.1	591,736	0.3
Serbo-Croatian	2,796	0.04	21,076	0.1	41,370	0.1	192,495	0.1
Scandinavian languages	2,437	0.04	26,216	0.1	15,405	0.03	146,847	0.1
Greek	2,385	0.04	26,462	0.1	38,511	0.1	326,925	0.2
Other West Germanic languages	1,597	0.02	29,199	0.1	46,522	0.1	204,613	0.1
Hungarian	1,328	0.02	17,903	0.1	7,642	0.01	110,331	0.1
Other Native North American languages	865	0.01	5,864	0.02	39,989	0.1	163,477	0.1
French Creole	594	0.01	3,513	0.01	112,621	0.2	340,747	0.2
Yiddish	341	0.01	8,611	0.03	39,244	0.1	139,701	0.1
Navajo	146	0.002	1,628	0.01	42,556	0.1	135,458	0.1
<i>N</i>	<i>6,766,444</i>		<i>24,650,185</i>		<i>53,096,003</i>		<i>209,279,149</i>	

Source: Census 2000 (SF3)

**Other Indo-European languages** (e.g., French, Italian, Portuguese, German, Yiddish, Greek, Russian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Armenian, Persian, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu)

**Asian and Pacific Island languages** (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai, Laotian, Vietnamese, Tagalog)

**Other languages** (e.g., Native North American languages, Hungarian, Arabic, Hebrew, African languages).

As shown in Table 2, 31 percent of households in California that speak Asian/Pacific Island languages at home are linguistically isolated, followed by 26 percent of Spanish-speaking households, 17 percent of “Other Indo-European language” households, and 15 percent of those that use “Other languages.” Rates of linguistic isolation are similar at the national level, though the overall percentages of households using languages other than English at home are smaller.

**Table 2: Linguistic Isolation in Households, by Language Spoken at Home**

	CALIFORNIA	UNITED STATES
<b>English</b>	<b>62.2</b>	<b>81.1</b>
<b>Spanish</b>	<b>22.4</b>	<b>10.2</b>
Linguistically isolated	26.2	23.9
<b>Asian &amp; Pacific Island languages</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>
Linguistically isolated	30.6	29.2
<b>Other Indo-European languages</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>5.2</b>
Linguistically isolated	16.8	15.5
<b>Other languages</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Linguistically isolated	15.2	15.0
<i>Total Number of Households</i>	<i>11,512,020</i>	<i>105,539,122</i>

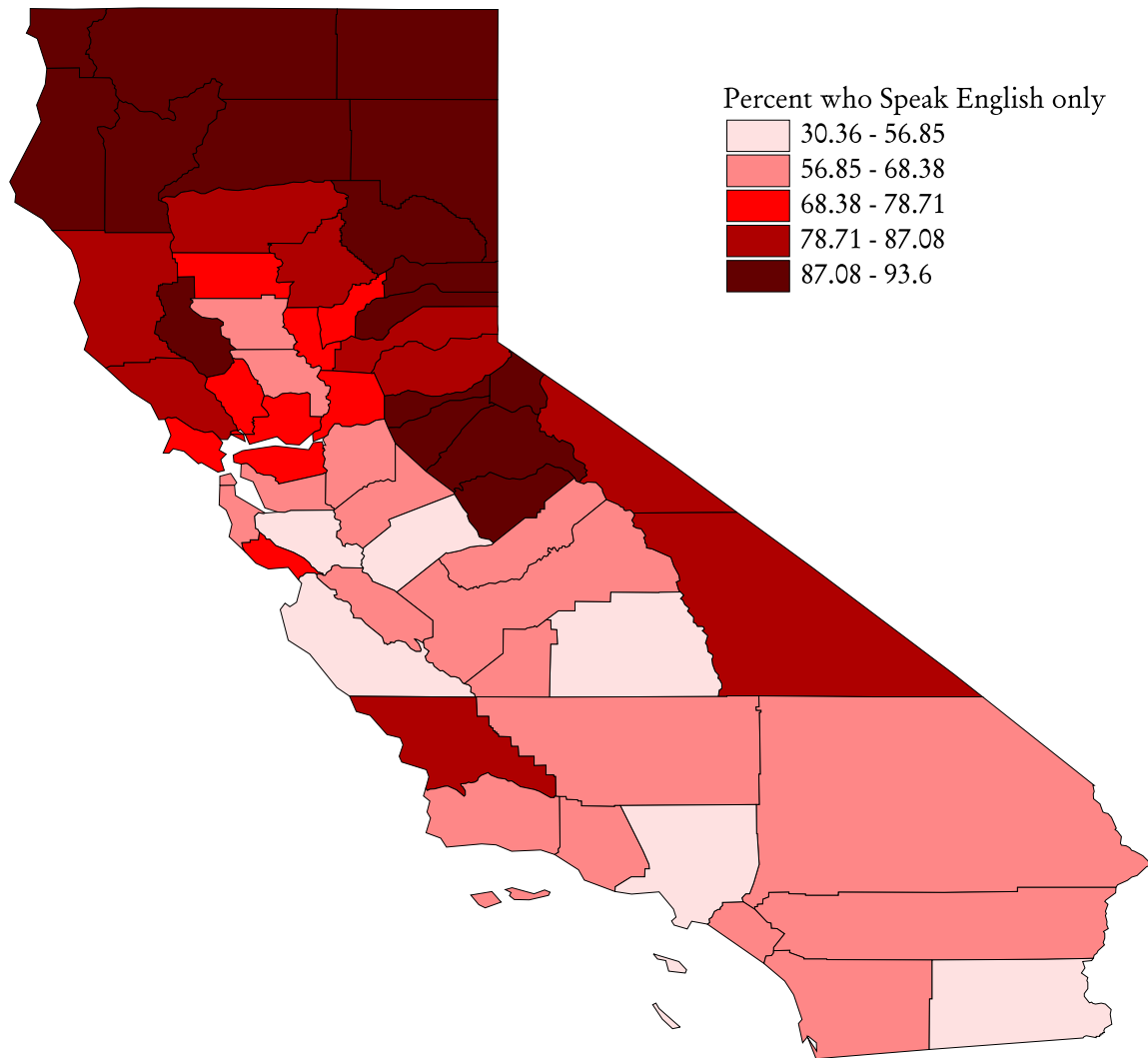
Source: Census 2000 (SF3)

To note regional differences in household language use and linguistic isolation, Table 3 presents data compiled for eight regions of the state<sup>3</sup>. Of all the regions, Eastern Mountain counties have the lowest rates of non-English use, with 90 percent of households in this area using English only. See Map 1 for an illustration of county rates of English use—the darker the shading the larger the percentage of households using English only. [Also, Maps 2 and 3 indicate county percentages of households speaking Spanish and Asian/Pacific Island languages, respectively.] Los Angeles has the highest rates of Spanish (32 percent) and “Other languages” (1.4 percent) usage at home, compared to other regions, as well as the lowest percentage of households using English only (49

<sup>3</sup> The state’s 58 counties were divided into the following eight geographic areas:

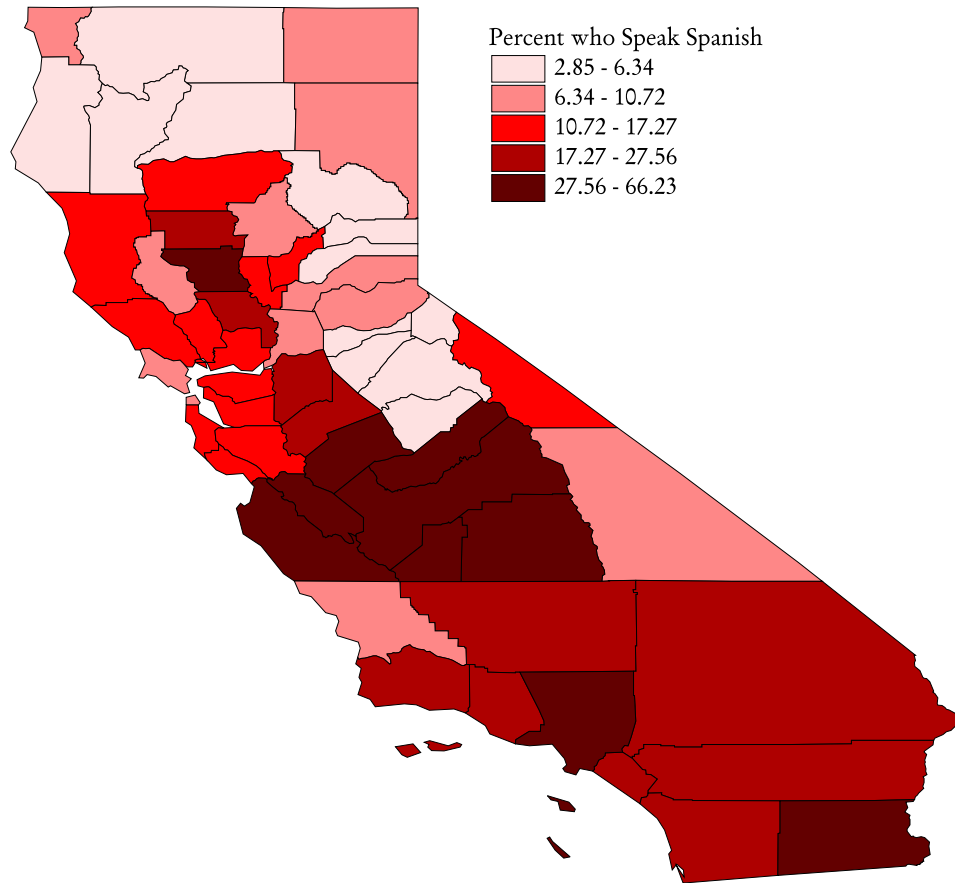
- Northern: Butte, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lassen, Lake, Mendocino, Modoc, Nevada, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Yuba;
- Sacramento Metropolitan: El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, and Yolo;
- San Francisco Bay Area: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma;
- Eastern Mountain: Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, Tuolumne;
- Central Valley: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare;
- Coastal: Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Ventura;
- Los Angeles: Los Angeles;
- Southern: Imperial, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego.

# Map 1: English Language Use at Home

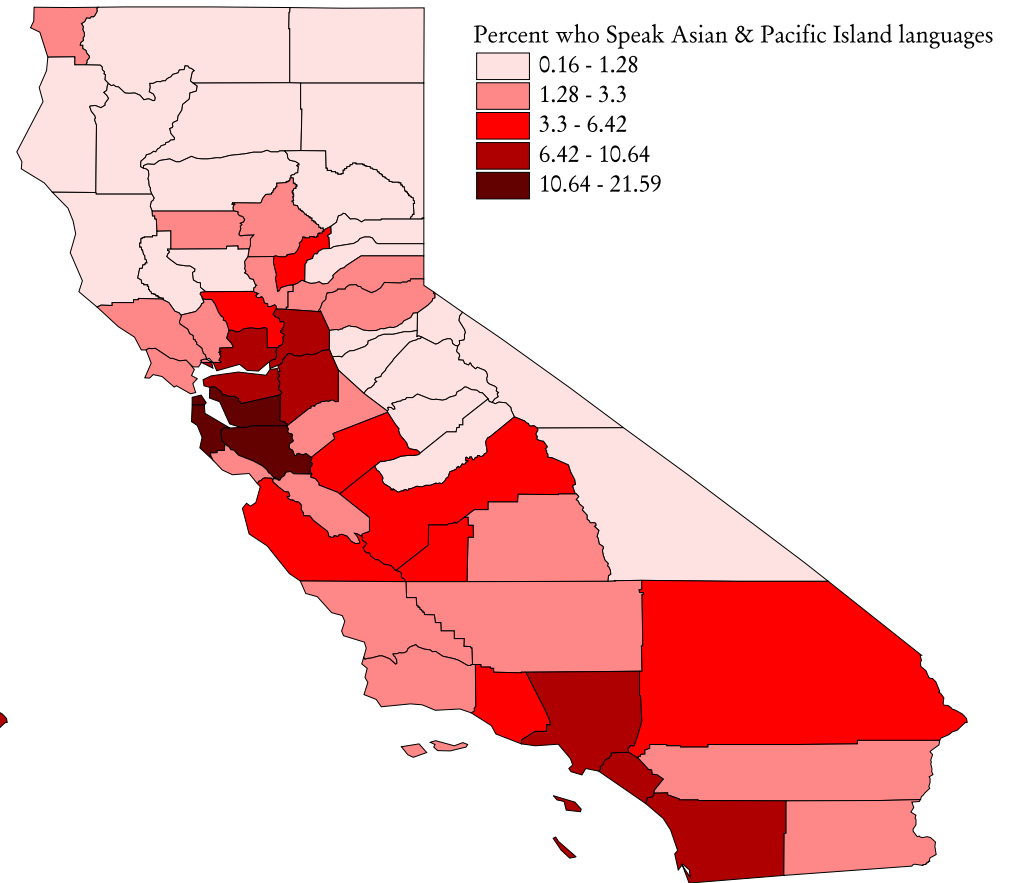


Source: 2000 Census (SF3)

Map 2: Spanish Language Use at Home



Map 3: Asian & Pacific Island Language Use at Home



Source: 2000 Census (SF3)

percent). Other areas of the state have between 63 and 90 percent of their households using English only, with the state average at 62 percent.

**Table 3: Linguistic Isolation in Households, by Region and Language Spoken at Home**

	Los Angeles	Central Valley	San Francisco Bay Area	Southern	Coastal	Sacramento Metropolitan	Northern	Eastern Mountain
<b>English</b>	49.2	62.9	64.4	64.8	69.0	77.2	86.1	90.0
<b>Spanish</b>	32.3	28.3	12.9	22.9	22.0	10.7	8.8	5.9
Linguistically isolated	30.3	25.2	22.9	23.4	24.5	19.5	22.4	17.3
<b>Asian &amp; Pacific Island languages</b>	10.3	4.1	13.7	6.9	3.7	5.9	1.3	0.6
Linguistically isolated	35.1	28.7	29.6	27.2	20.7	28.9	27.1	10.0
<b>Other Indo-European languages</b>	6.8	4.0	7.9	4.5	4.8	5.7	3.4	3.2
Linguistically isolated	23.0	15.9	14.7	11.9	8.9	21.4	10.3	6.3
<b>Other languages</b>	1.4	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.3
Linguistically isolated	17.1	21.0	12.4	15.5	10.1	10.0	8.0	10.3
<i>Total Number of Households</i>	3,136,279	1,033,880	2,468,024	3,006,699	701,358	665,722	429,959	70,099

Source: Census 2000 (SF3)

The San Francisco Bay Area has the largest percentage of households speaking Asian and Pacific Island languages, 14 percent, followed by Los Angeles with 10 percent, both above the state average (9 percent). The San Francisco Bay Area also has the largest percentage of households using “Other Indo-European languages,” 8 percent, again, followed by Los Angeles with 7 percent, also both above the state average (6 percent).

In terms of linguistic isolation, Los Angeles households are the most linguistically isolated amongst those that use Asian/Pacific Island languages (35 percent), Spanish (30 percent), or “Other Indo-European languages” (23 percent) at home, while the Eastern Mountain counties have the lowest rates of linguistic isolation in these groups. For households that speak “Other languages,” the Central Valley region has the highest rate of household linguistic isolation, 21 percent, and Northern counties have the lowest rate, 8 percent.

### **English Ability Amongst People who Speak Non-English Languages at Home**

To measure the English ability of people who use non-English languages at home, census respondents were asked on the long-form questionnaire whether they speak English “very well,” “well,” “not well at all,” or “not at all.” This set of analyses focuses on the extent to which individuals in non-English using homes consider themselves or those in their households to speak English “well” or “very well,” noting differences by nativity, age, and race.

#### Nativity

Of those who are foreign-born in California, over half (51.7 percent) speak Spanish at home, 24.6 percent speak Asian/Pacific Island languages, 10.9 percent speak only English, 10.7 percent speak “Other Indo-European languages,” and 2.1 percent speak “Other languages” (see Table 4). Of the

native-born population in California, 79.7 percent speak English only, 15.8 percent speak Spanish, 2.4 percent use Asian and Pacific Island languages, and 2.1 percent speak other languages.

**Table 4: English Ability, by Nativity and Language Spoken at Home**

	CALIFORNIA		UNITED STATES	
	Native-born	Foreign-born	Native-born	Foreign-born
<b>Speak only English</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>90.7</b>	<b>17.0</b>
<b>Speak Spanish</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>43.4</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	91.4	51.3	89.6	52.0
<b>Speak Asian &amp; Pacific Island languages</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>17.9</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	91.7	72.6	91.8	73.7
<b>Speak other Indo-European languages</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>18.2</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	94.9	83.0	92.9	82.4
<b>Speak other languages</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	94.7	86.3	93.1	87.4
<i>Total Persons</i>	<i>22,654,569</i>	<i>8,762,060</i>	<i>231,666,088</i>	<i>30,709,064</i>

Source: Census 2000 (SF3)

As one would expect, the vast majority of native-born persons in the state speak English “well” or “very well,” including those who speak languages other than English at home (between 91 and 95 percent). For foreign-born persons, there is more of a range in the percentage of people who speak English “well” or “very well”: 51 percent of those who speak Spanish at home, 73 percent of those who speak Asian/Pacific Island languages, and 83 and 86 percent of those who speak “Other Indo-European” or “Other” languages, respectively. A similar pattern holds at the national level.

### Age

Examining language use across age, a larger percentage of children ages 5 to 17 use Spanish at home, compared to adults; and, a smaller percentage use Asian/Pacific Island or “Other” languages

**Table 5: English Ability, by Age and Language Spoken at Home**

	CALIFORNIA			UNITED STATES		
	Age 5-17	Age 18-64	Age 65+	Age 5-17	Age 18-64	Age 65+
<b>Speak only English</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>72.6</b>	<b>81.6</b>	<b>81.2</b>	<b>87.4</b>
<b>Speak Spanish</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>4.8</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	85.1	63.3	60.3	84.8	68.3	59.6
<b>Speak Asian &amp; Pacific Island languages</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	89.5	77.7	49.0	89.2	78.1	50.8
<b>Speak other Indo-European languages</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>5.5</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	93.6	88.8	71.7	91.0	87.9	81.3
<b>Speak other languages</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.5</b>
Speak English "well" or "very well"	92.4	89.8	72.8	92.0	90.9	78.3
<i>Total Persons</i>	<i>6,766,444</i>	<i>21,063,391</i>	<i>3,586,794</i>	<i>53,096,003</i>	<i>174,300,177</i>	<i>34,978,972</i>

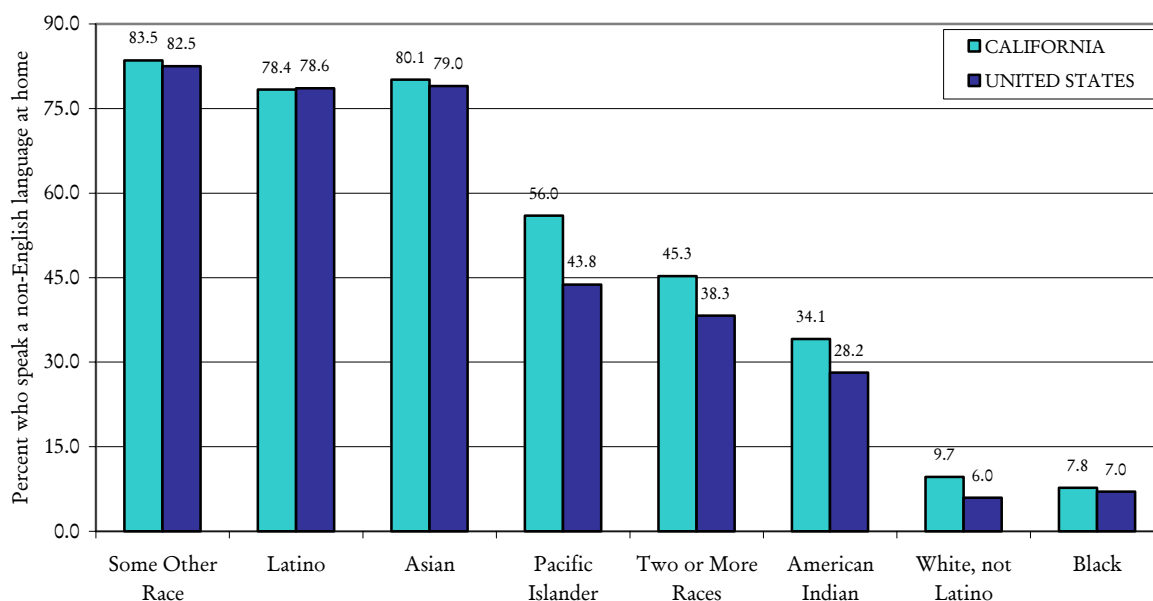
Source: Census 2000 (SF3)

(see Table 5). With regard to English ability, it is clear that larger percentages of children speak English “well” or “very well,” compared to adults, regardless of language spoken at home. These percentages range from 85 to 94 percent of children ages 5 to 17, 63 to 90 percent of adults ages 18 to 64, and 49 to 73 percent of older adults age 65 and older.

### Race

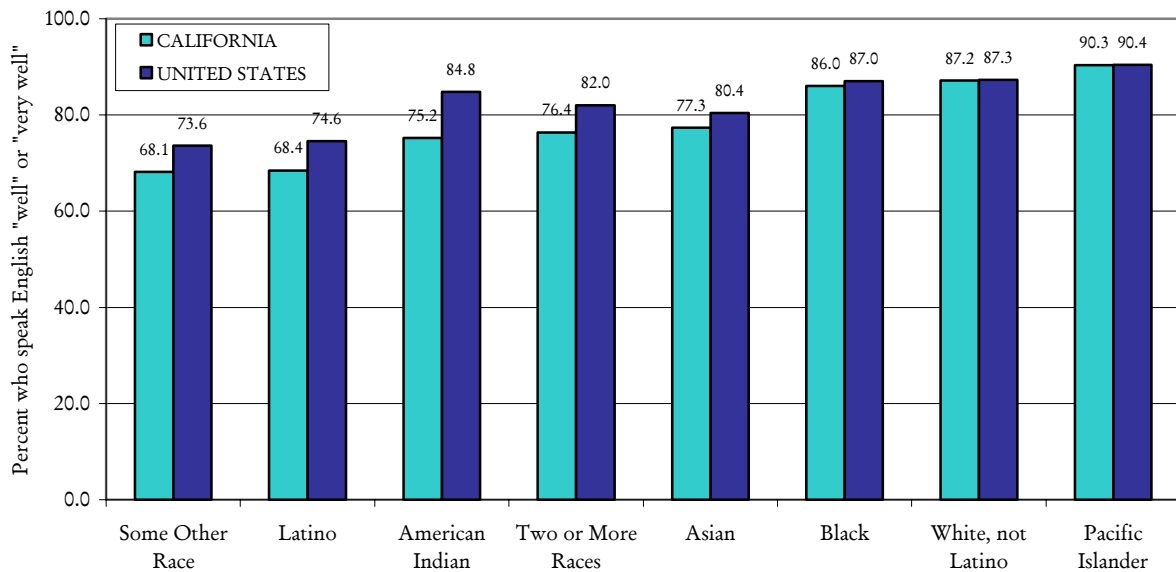
Figure 1 illustrates rates of non-English language usage at home, by race, in California and the United States. About four out of five people who are Asian, Latino, or Some Other Race in California speak non-English languages at home, while small percentages of Blacks (8 percent) and Whites (10 percent) do. Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and people identified with Two or More Races have intermediate rates of non-English usage (ranging between 34 to 56 percent). The U.S. overall has a similar pattern of non-English language across race groups, though the rates are lower for most of the groups, compared to California. For a breakdown of these data by age, see Table 6.

**Figure 1: Non-English Language Usage at Home, by Race**



On the whole in the U.S., people who speak non-English languages at home also speak English “well” or “very well.” In California, for example, these rates range from 68 percent for people identified as Latino or Some Other Race to 90 percent for persons identified as Pacific Islander (see Figure 2). There exist some differences across age group, listed in Table 6 and graphed in Figure 3. The largest differences are between children and older adults, particularly for Asians and people identified as Some Other Race. While 90 percent of Asian children speak English “well” or “very well,” 48 percent of older adults do; and, while 86 percent of Some Other Race children have high English proficiency, 44 percent of older adults in this group do. Latinos and people identified with Two or More Races also have large differences in English ability, especially between children and older adults.

**Figure 2: Ability to Speak English "Well" or "Very well", by Race  
(among persons who speak other languages at home)**

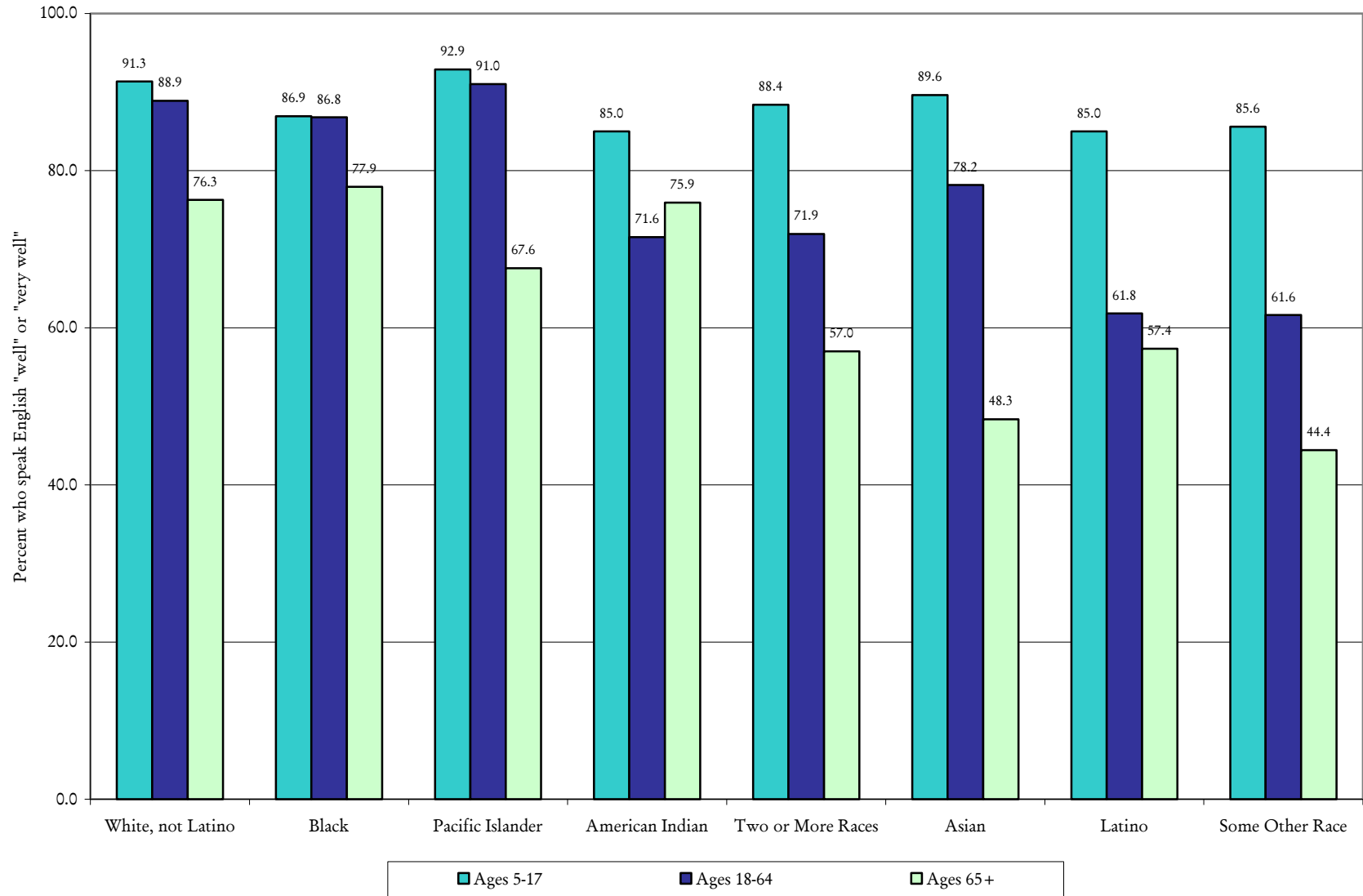


**Table 6: English Ability, by Age and Race**

	CALIFORNIA			UNITED STATES		
	Age 5-17	Age 18-64	Age 65+	Age 5-17	Age 18-64	Age 65+
<b>Some Other Race</b>	1,510,341	3,442,490	165,458	3,885,938	9,466,850	450,095
Speak other languages	80.7	84.6	87.1	76.6	84.7	86.7
Speak English "well" or "very well"	85.6	61.6	44.4	85.5	64.2	46.5
<b>Latino</b>	2,865,260	6,465,048	462,579	8,595,305	21,273,061	1,701,210
Speak other languages	73.4	80.1	84.2	69.9	81.5	85.8
Speak English "well" or "very well"	85.0	61.8	57.4	85.1	65.8	55.2
<b>Asian</b>	656,154	2,462,521	349,617	1,782,276	6,954,935	782,994
Speak other languages	70.5	81.8	86.1	69.4	81.1	81.4
Speak English "well" or "very well"	89.6	78.2	48.3	89.8	79.3	49.7
<b>Pacific Islander</b>	27,755	71,526	5,224	89,160	239,588	18,652
Speak other languages	48.9	58.0	65.8	37.2	46.2	43.4
Speak English "well" or "very well"	92.9	91.0	67.6	91.2	88.5	72.1
<b>Two or More Races</b>	477,023	925,290	83,463	1,985,843	3,947,577	366,845
Speak other languages	34.4	49.9	55.5	28.2	43.1	41.1
Speak English "well" or "very well"	88.4	71.9	57.0	87.8	73.9	59.0
<b>American Indian</b>	72,269	198,469	17,821	609,645	1,496,113	137,586
Speak other languages	32.7	34.6	34.4	23.3	29.5	35.3
Speak English "well" or "very well"	85.0	71.6	75.9	89.4	85.0	70.0
<b>White, not Latino</b>	2,431,273	10,044,898	2,516,462	32,853,901	121,222,516	29,266,566
Speak other languages	8.6	9.8	10.2	5.2	5.9	7.2
Speak English "well" or "very well"	91.3	88.9	76.3	87.7	88.3	83.6
<b>Black</b>	506,610	1,369,119	180,973	8,005,348	20,796,550	2,815,059
Speak other languages	6.9	8.5	4.2	6.3	7.7	4.0
Speak English "well" or "very well"	86.9	86.8	77.9	87.2	85.4	70.0

Source: Census 2000 (SF3)

**Figure 3: Ability to Speak English "Well" or "Very well", by Race and Age in California  
(among persons who speak other languages at home)**



## Summary Findings

- In California, 61 percent of adults and 57 percent of children speak English at home. The second most common language spoken at home is Spanish, used by 24 percent of adults and 32 percent of children in the state.
- With regard to linguistic isolation, 31 percent of households in California that speak Asian/Pacific Island languages are linguistically isolated, as are 26 percent of Spanish-speaking households, 17 percent of “Other Indo-European language” households, and 15 percent of those that use “Other languages.”
- Of the native-born population in California, 80 percent speak English only, 16 percent speak Spanish, 2 percent use Asian and Pacific Island languages, and 2 percent speak other languages.
- Of the foreign-born population in California, over half (51.7 percent) speak Spanish at home, 24.6 percent speak Asian/Pacific Island languages, 10.9 percent speak only English, 10.7 percent speak “Other Indo-European languages,” and 2.1 percent speak “Other languages.” In terms of English ability, 51 percent of the Spanish-speaking foreign-born population speaks English “well” or “very well,” as do 73 percent of those who use Asian/Pacific Island languages, and 83 and 86 percent of those who speak “Other Indo-European” or “Other” languages, respectively.
- A larger percentage of children speak English “well” or “very well,” compared to adults, regardless of language spoken at home.
- About four out of five people who are Asian, Latino, or Some Other Race in California speak non-English languages at home, while small percentages of Blacks (8 percent) and Whites (10 percent) do. Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and people identified with Two or More Races have intermediate rates of non-English usage (ranging between 34 to 56 percent).

## Reference

U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder definition, see website: <http://factfinder.census.gov>.