

Breaking Barriers for Non-English/Non-Spanish Language Speakers in Survey Research

May 14, 2011

Presentation to the AAPOR Conference

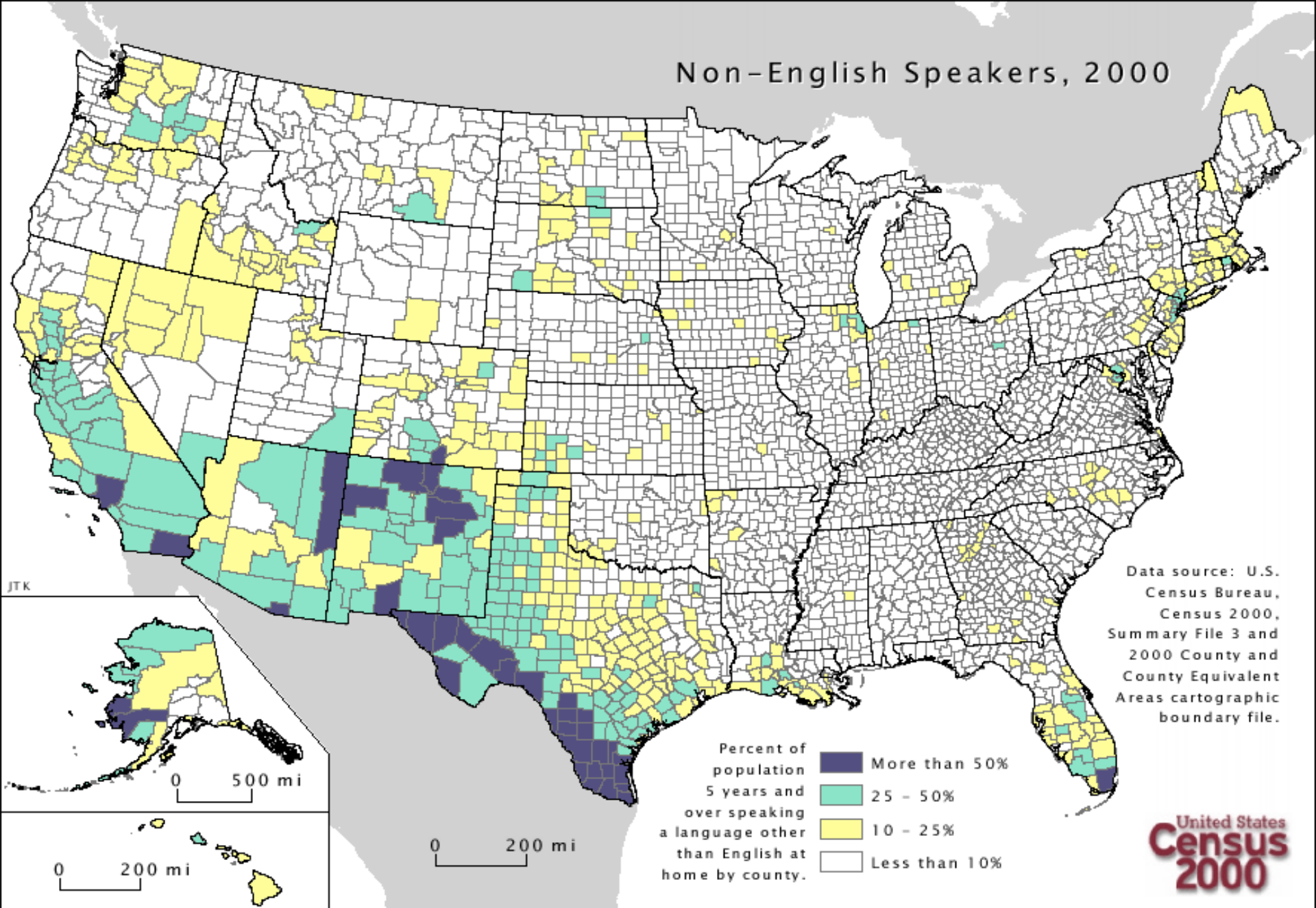
Erin Panzarella • Julie Ingels

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

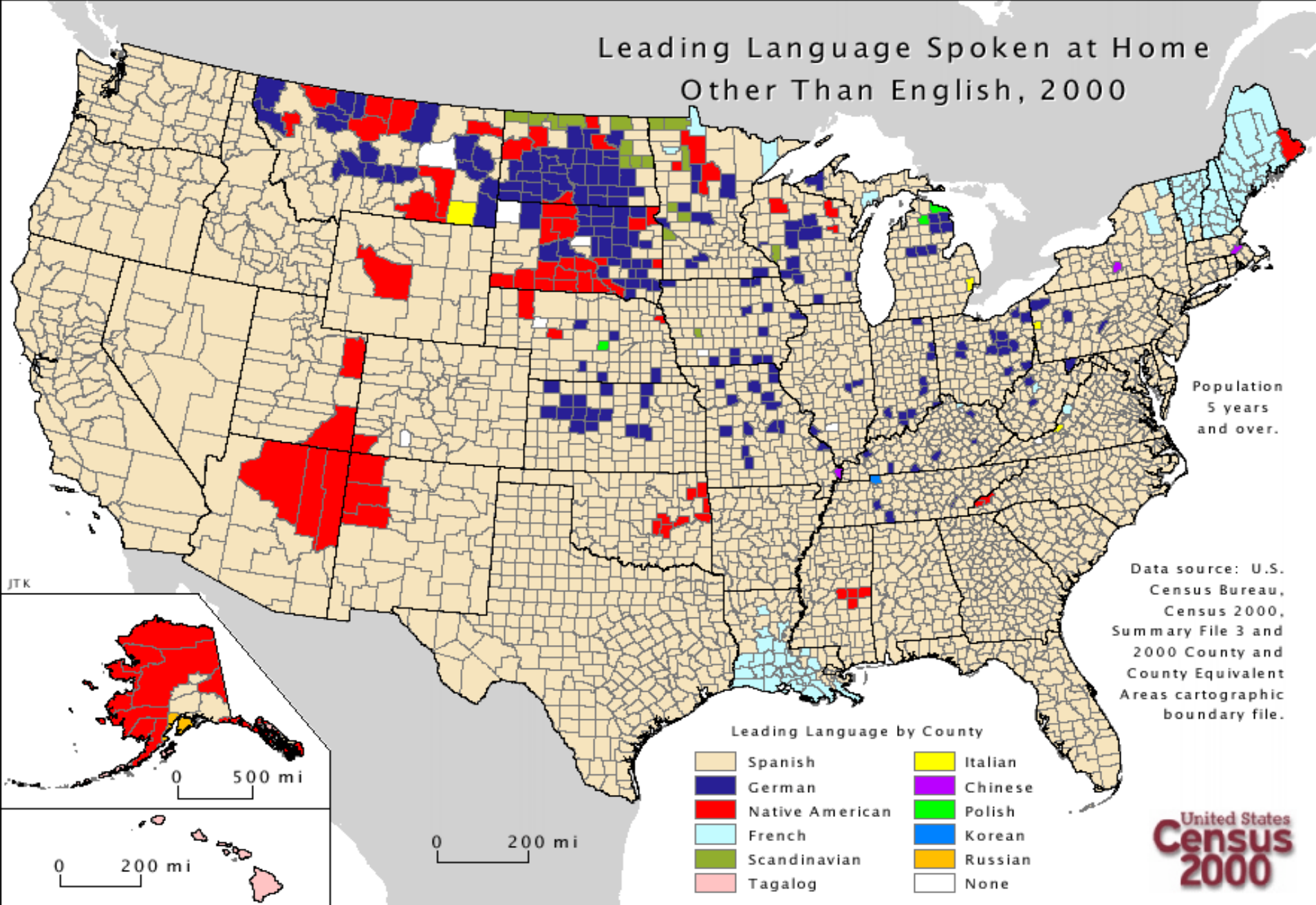
Language Use in the United States

- **19.7% of the United States population age 5 years and older speak a language other than English at home**
- **8.1% of the population speak English less than “very well”**
- **4.7% of the population age 5 years and older live in linguistically isolated households**

Non-English Speakers, 2000



Leading Language Spoken at Home Other Than English, 2000



Reaching Non-English/Non-Spanish Speakers

- Hire a translating service to translate questionnaire and study materials into multiple languages
- Hire an interpreting service to facilitate interviews in other languages
- Interpretation vs. translation

Examples from Surveys Conducted by Mathematica

- **Evaluation of the Healthy Start Program**
 - Funded by Health Resources and Services Administration
 - Site-based study
 - Used a combination of translation and interpreter facilitation
- **Evaluation of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program (TAA)**
 - Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
 - List-frame survey of more than 13,000 individuals in 26 states
 - Used interpreters to facilitate interviews

Process to Reach Non-English/Non-Spanish Speakers

- **Step 1: Identifying languages**
- **Step 2: Selecting an approach**
- **Step 3: Training interpreters**
- **Step 4: Training interviewers**
- **Step 5: Ensuring quality**

Step 1: Identifying Languages

- **The ease of identifying languages depends on sample frame**
 - **Site-based** : more efficient because languages can be identified from the start
 - **List-frame** : less efficient because languages can only be identified as cases are worked

Step 2: Selecting an Approach

- **Target languages with the highest prevalence of speakers**
- **Ensure the firm hired has interpreters available in the necessary languages**
- **Ask the firm to translate (and closely review) the advance letters, consent forms, and frequently asked questions, if possible**

Step 3: Training Interpreters

- **Interpreters must be trained to:**
 - Ask question exactly as read by the interviewer
 - Probe only when the interviewer indicates
 - Understand interviewing conventions

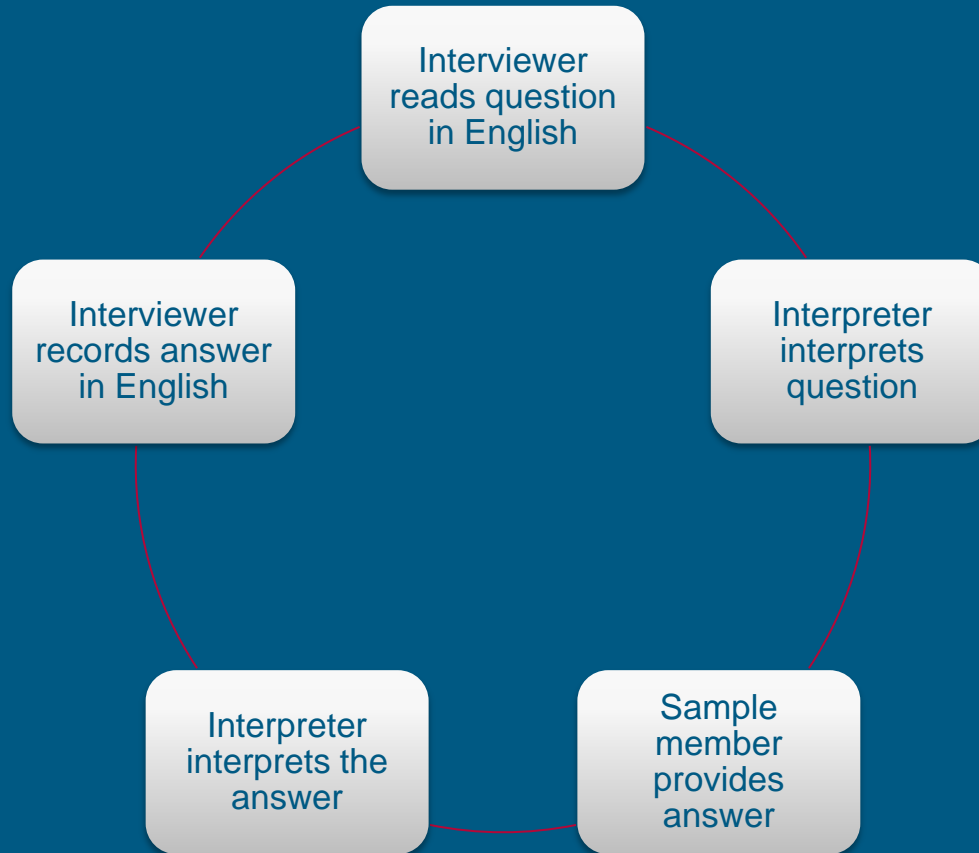
Step 3: Training Interpreters (continued)

- **Content of Training:**
 - Overview of study
 - Topics covered in survey
 - Interviewing conventions
 - Detailed discussion of materials : English language instrument; any translated critical, sensitive, or complex questions

Step 4: Training Interviewers

- **Interviewers must be trained to:**
 - Understand they are in charge of the interview
 - Make sure the instructions to the interpreter are clear and unambiguous
 - Recognize that a sentence of 10 words in English may be 20 words in an Asian language
 - Intervene if there is extra discussion between the interpreter and the respondent

Flow of Interpreted Interview



Step 5: Ensuring Quality

- **Pre-translate:**
 - **Critical questions and terms**
 - **Sensitive questions**
 - **Complex questions**

Important Considerations: Risks

- Interviews will be longer and more costly (especially with Asian languages)
- Cannot be 100% certain whether the question has same meaning in other language as in English, even after translation
- Difficult to be certain of verbatim interpreting of questions

Important Considerations: Benefits

- Higher response rate from minority respondents
- Some amount of control over critical, sensitive, and complex questions
- Less costly than full-scale translation

For More Information

- **Please contact:**
 - **Erin Panzarella**
 - epanzarella@mathematica-mpr.com
 - **Julie Ingels**
 - jingels@mathematica-mpr.com