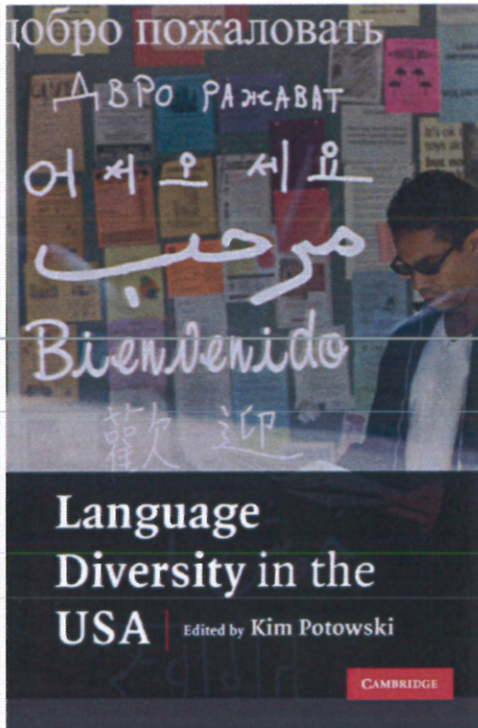


When “foreign” languages aren’t foreign: Heritage speakers in the United States



Presented by: **Kim Potowski**
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“Today’s immigrants are not
learning English as quickly as
those of the past.”

“Multilingualism
threatens
our national unity.”

“You’re in America,
speak English.”

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These **myths** regarding language are fairly prevalent in the U.S. at the beginning of the 21st century. Approximately 20% of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English at home, yet several mainstream currents portray this linguistic diversity as a problem – with repressive and sometimes illegal results. But there have been growing countercurrents of awareness that heritage languages are in fact both a **right** for the communities that speak them and a **resource** for the nation generally, along with the understanding that there are good ways (and not so good ways) of promoting English language learning. Several cities have enacted initiatives to protect people’s right to maintain their heritage language without being accused of rejecting mainstream U.S. society, and several K-8 educational models teach other languages to our nation’s English monolingual children. This talk explores these issues making frequent reference to Spanish in the U.S. and to Chicago more specifically.



Kim Potowski is Associate Professor of Hispanic linguistics at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she directs the Spanish for heritage speakers program. Her research focuses on Spanish in the United States, and her book *Language Diversity in the U.S.* (Cambridge University Press 2010) profiles the 12 most commonly spoken heritage languages in the nation. She is currently completing a book about “MexiRicans” in Chicago.