

How Do You Say “Hoosier” in Spanish?

Between 1990 and 2000, Indiana’s Hispanic population increased by 117 percent, from 98,788 to 214,536. The infusion of Hispanics into the state raises some issues involving language incompatibilities, such as the need for bilingual K-12 education or government forms in Spanish. Recently released profiles from Census 2000 are a major source of new data for needs assessment in the area of language.

The census long-form questionnaire included questions about language spoken at home and English-speaking ability for all persons who were age five or older. Statewide, 362,082 persons age five and over spoke a language other than English at home. A majority of these people have mastered English, with 60 percent having been judged to speak English “very well.” That still left 143,427 Indiana residents with limited English-speaking ability in 2000.

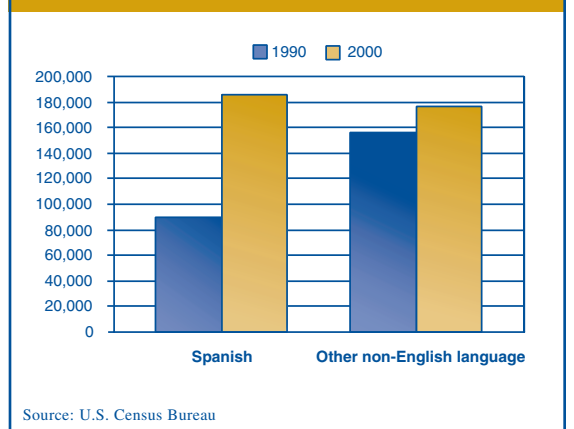
Persons speaking Spanish in their Indiana homes more than doubled

between 1990 and 2000, reaching 185,576. Indiana is also home to a large number of people who speak other non-English languages, but this population segment grew slowly in the 1990s. With the rapid increase in the state’s Hispanic population over the previous decade, Spanish speakers now outnumber all other non-English speakers in Indiana (see Figure 1). Spanish speakers comprised 51 percent of all Indiana residents who spoke a language other than English at home in 2000, compared to 37 percent in 1990.

Two adjacent counties in northern Indiana illustrate very different patterns in language spoken at home. Both Elkhart County and LaGrange County have substantial Amish communities in which Pennsylvania Dutch or some other Germanic language is used. Elkhart County’s population composition changed substantially in

Figure 1: Language Spoken at Home in Indiana

143,427 residents speak limited English



the 1990s, however, as the county experienced a fivefold increase in its Hispanic population and the number of Spanish speakers skyrocketed (see Figure 2). In neighboring LaGrange County, the number of persons speaking Spanish grew by about 650 from 1990 to 2000, a large percentage increase (250%), but only a small fraction of the 11,000-person growth in Spanish speakers in Elkhart County. Both Elkhart and LaGrange showed much more modest increases among people speaking any other non-English language. The phenomenal growth in people speaking Spanish in Elkhart County means that Spanish is now the dominant non-English language being used in that county, accounting for 57 percent of all those who do not use English exclusively. Ten years earlier, the comparable Spanish share was 24 percent. In LaGrange County, where the Amish presence is very strong, Spanish speakers constitute only 9 percent of people using a language other than English at home, up from 3 percent in 1990.

Figure 2: Language Spoken at Home in Elkhart and LaGrange Counties

Spanish is now the dominant non-English language in Elkhart County

