

## Understanding Media Opinion on Bilingual Education in the United States.

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- Forty-five percent of media writers argued in favor of bilingual education. Thirty-nine percent were opposed, and the remaining 16% reached mixed conclusions.
- Among media authors, the use of anecdotal evidence increased, and the use of academic evidence decreased since McQuillan and Tse's (1996) study.
- Ninety-six percent of media authors opposed to bilingual education only discussed programs for language-minority students.
- Language-as-right arguments in public debate have increased since McQuillan & Tse's (1996) study.
- Language-as-resource remains the most prevalent argument for pro-bilingual education authors.

**Purpose:** This study evaluates stances toward and characterizations of bilingual education by US editorial and letter-to-the-editor writers from 2006-2016 with references to perspectives offered in academic outputs. We are principally interested in bilingual education that supports English language proficiency (rather than heritage language proficiency).

**Methodology:** A documentary analysis was conducted on a sample of articles collected from six major US news outlets, and compared to academic articles from the ERIC database. These results were compared with those of McQuillan and Tse (1996) who examined a similar set of articles published from 1984-1994. We classified articles according to the author's position on bilingual education, and collected data on the program type and target language(s) being discussed. Ruíz' (1984) orientations in language planning were used to analyze characterizations of bilingualism and bilingual education.

**Findings:** It was found that 45% of media articles, compared to 95% of research articles were in favor of bilingual education. The rate of pro-bilingual education academic articles increased in 2006-2016. Fewer media authors overall cited academic studies to support their position. Proponents of language-as-right were found to have increased, though language-as-resource arguments remained the most prevalent.

**Keywords:**

Media, academic, opinion, bilingual education, United States.

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## 1 Introduction

In this article we explore attitudes towards bilingual education on the basis of an analysis of material published in media outlets. Our work is a near-replication of McQuillan and Tse (1996). There are several reasons for our interest in this field. Since the publication of McQuillan and Tse's 1996 study, major pieces of anti-bilingual education legislation have been passed: *English for the Children* in California and Arizona, and Ballot Question 2 in Massachusetts (Rubinstein-Ávila, Sox, Kaplan, & McGraw, 2015). More recently, measures such as California's Proposition 58 have sought to reverse anti-bilingual legislation (The Times Editorial Board, 2016). In this study, we focus on the US but we do this work in the context of bilingual education being on the rise in many parts of the world.

There is a significant and increasing population of children in the United States who enter schools in need of English language support for academic success, and stand to benefit from native language support. McQuillan and Tse (1996) noted that nearly 10% of American children spoke a non-English language at home. More recent figures indicate that roughly 21% of Americans over the age of 5 use a language other than English at home (US Census Bureau, 2015).

Research in this field is necessary as there are significant debates about whether bilingual education is for minority language speakers (Garcia 1982), a form of education conducted in more than one language (Baker 2001) or a means by which a form of social and economic capital may be acquired to achieve global competence (Fortune & Jorstad, 1996). Some US states may be dismantling bilingual education, but some schools have begun to implement their own testing to collect data on children's progress toward bilingual fluency and literacy (Burkhauser et al., 2016). In this rather volatile and varied context, we wished to explore the ways in which bilingual education was being presented. We asked:

How do the proportions of articles in opinion pieces in the media during the period 2006-2016 that are pro- or anti- bilingual education compare with findings reported by McQuillan and Tse (1996) who analyzed the same type of pieces published from 1984-1994?

What themes emerge during 1984-1994 and 2006-2016 when examining the construction of arguments for and against bilingual education, and how is bilingualism being characterized?

We analyzed these media pieces in the context of literature and in particular against a sample of publications in academic journals.

## 2 Bilingual Education

In this study we have an inclusive approach to bilingual education recognizing that different types of students with different purposes who are taught and learn in different ways will be involved.

The three main types of bilingual education are transitional, late-exit, and dual-language immersion (Baker, 1993). In transitional or "early exit" (Lindholm-Leary, 2001) bilingual education, native language education is only provided in order to accelerate the student's L2 (second language) fluency and literacy (Cummins, 1979). However, the goal of transitional bilingual education is not academic proficiency in both languages; transitional bilingual education is considered a form of "subtractive" bilingual education because it focuses on ultimately transitioning the student into mainstream monolingual education (García, 2009, p. 55).

Late-exit (sometimes called "maintenance") programs give greater attention to developing academic proficiency in the L1 (first language), with the intent that "bilingual education" refers not only to the means of instruction, but to the academic outcome of developing bilingualism and biliteracy. Thus, late-exit programs are considered to be "additive", though they also move students into mainstream classes at a later age. García (2009) suggests that maintenance of the child's bicultural identity is also a significant ideology of this program type. Critics of late-exit programs warn that the classes keep minority students segregated through their later school years, which limits their interactions with native English-speaking children.

Finally, dual-language immersion is a program which involves using more than one language for instruction across all subject areas, for all students. In this model, instruction is conducted in a fixed percentage of each language (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Dual-language immersion programs may have



classrooms (García, 2009) or content areas (Lindholm-Leary, 2001) which are dedicated to a certain language, to encourage code-switching and full immersion in one language at a time. In *one-way* dual language immersion, the students are only native speakers of one of the languages of instruction. In *two-way* dual-language immersion, language majority and language minority students are taught together, giving all students exposure to target-language input from their native-speaking peers (García, 2009).

English immersion (“sink-or-swim” English education) is the alternative to bilingual education and ESL support. As the name suggests, English immersion involves placing students who are not proficient in English into mainstream English-only classrooms with limited (as in Structured English Immersion [Gort, de Jong, & Cobb, 2008]) or no language support. Some studies have pointed to rapid short-term gains for students in these programs (Rossell, 2002), while others have argued that greater long-term success is demonstrated in bilingual programs (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Cummins, 2000). Recent critiques concerned with student dignity have noted that placing non-English-speaking students into English classrooms – especially those who transfer in at older ages – can be damaging to self-esteem (Love, 1978, p. 17) and devalue native language skills (Pavlenko, 2002). However, in school districts with limited funding or no certified ESL or bilingual instructors, this is often the only option available. Again, we emphasize that our focus is on the US but feel that our work may have wider resonance as, for example, “sink or swim” is adopted in many post-colonial states, and in international schools around the world where countries / some parents want their children to become ‘global citizens’, with all the likely educational difficulties that we refer to above.

### 3 Social and political context

To write about language in the US is to write about culture, identity, dynamics of power, allegiance, social class, and politics. Blackledge (2005) writes that “language ideologies are positioned in, and subject to, their social, political and historical contexts” (p. 32). Leibowitz (1974) asserts that from 1880 to WWII, English-language requirements in the US were used “to exclude and discriminate against various minorities and immigrant groups” (p. 7). Despite the multitude of languages spoken by indigenous peoples and large immigrant populations in the US, President Theodore Roosevelt famously asserted in 1919 that “we have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boardinghouse” (quoted in Pavlenko, 2002, p. 183). Politically, language has at times been treated as an important vehicle for national collective identity, and as a symbol of allegiance to country. The suppression and outlawing of bilingual education in many states preceding WWI contributed to a prolonged period of monolingual English education in US schools (Pavlenko, 2002), and symbolically made clear to immigrants that English was the language which signified one’s allegiance to the US.

During the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the *Meyer v. Nebraska* decision allowed German language instruction to resume in the state (Pavlenko, 2002), and UNESCO (1953) endorsed mother tongue education for all children. Though such documents from global governing bodies or international agreements (e.g. the Helsinki Final Act) promoted new global norms, they did not establish concrete language *rights* in the United States.

The most seminal legal ruling on language rights in the US was that of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), which determined that the San Francisco Unified School district’s sink-or-swim English curriculum deprived Chinese-speaking children of “a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program, and thus violate[d] § 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964”. *Lau v. Nichols* ruled that English-only education violated the students’ civil rights, however – perhaps anticipating the difficulties in providing L1 support for all languages spoken in the US – the ruling did not lay out a specific plan for how schools would be required to support English language learners.

Even where it was favorable toward bilingual education, legislation often reinforced ethnic and linguistic stigmas. For example, Ruiz (1984) notes that in its original text, the 1968 Bilingual Education Act “made poverty a requirement for eligibility in bilingual programs” (p. 20), and observed that Wisconsin’s Statute



on bilingual education of the time was to be found “in the state code on the chapter on ‘handicapped children,’ and [the statute] proceed[ed] to define the target population on that basis” (p. 20).

Beginning in the 1980s, organizations such as *US English* and *Official English* were formed, with the aim of declaring English the official language of the United States (Crawford, 2000). These groups have been accused of nativism (Crawford, 2000) and Hispanophobia (Zentella, 1997), and their rhetoric (see Chavez, 2009) may have contributed to public support of sink-or-swim English education. There is a complex context for debates about bilingual education.

#### 4 Debating bilingual education in academic research

The complex social and political context referred to above is mirrored by academic debates, and academic findings have not always supported “additive” bilingual education. Baker writes that “well-meaning teachers, doctors, speech therapists, school psychologists and other professionals” once warned that bilingualism would result in “a burden on the brain, mental confusion, inhibition of the acquisition of the majority language, even split personality” (1993, p. 107).

Until two-way dual-language immersion programs began to emerge across the US, bilingual education was only considered to be a form of supplementary education, or welfare for recently-arrived immigrants. In the 1970s Cummins found “considerable discrimination against bilingual children” in psychological assessments archived at the Alberta Centre for the Study of Mental Retardation (Baker & Hornberger, 2001, p. 8). In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a brief period where scholars reported neutral effects of bilingualism on cognition was soon replaced by scholarship which declared positive effects (Baker, 1993). In 1962, for example, Peal and Lambert found that bilingual schoolchildren in Quebec “performed significantly higher on 15 out of 18 variables measuring IQ” (Baker, 1993, p. 112).

Researchers in the 1980s and 1990s began to re-evaluate the evidence against bilingualism in meta-analyses of past data. Upon re-analyzing the data of Baker and de Kanter (1981)’s study, Willig (1985) found that the data actually supported bilingual programs. When Rossell and Baker (1996) reviewed the results of bilingual programs with structured English immersion, they concluded that Structured English Immersion (SEI) was superior. However, these results were again reassessed, this time by Greene (1998) who removed duplicate studies of the same program, studies which lasted only 10 weeks, and studies which had misclassified bilingual programs, among other issues, and found “moderate benefits” for English learners in bilingual programs, compared to those in SEI (Lopez, 2010, p. 7).

#### 5 Public opinion on bilingual education

Despite findings that 82% of academics from their data argued in favor of bilingual education, public opinion – at 45% approval – remained more evenly divided from 1984-1994 (McQuillan & Tse, 1996). Discussing media opinion and social issues in the US, Egan (2011) writes that, “On many of the most salient social issues ... [such as] abortion, gay rights, school prayer, [and] interracial marriage ... the [Supreme] court changed policy in an unmistakably liberal direction. Public opinion on these issues has not necessarily followed suit” (p. 3). Similarly, despite the academic trend toward a positive consensus, public opinion on bilingual education may not mirror this trend.

Several authors who traced the attitudes reflected in US language policy report that in many cases, public opinion and educational legislation were based on biases regarding the ethnicity or language of the affected foreigners, rather than on scientific findings (Hernández-Chávez, 1988; Crawford, 2000; Pavlenko, 2002). Valdes (1997) notes that in literature as recent as the 1980s, trends of success or failure amongst different immigrant groups in the US have been attributed to genetic differences, cultural differences, and class differences. She notes that these studies tended not to assess whether extreme poverty might have had a role in student outcomes, or whether the education students received was responsive to their needs. Dicker (1996) also cites “the belief amongst mainstream Americans that [minority] groups resist the learning of English” as a rationalization of poor academic achievement or limited English abilities, and a reason not to provide bilingual education. Perhaps controversially, Dicker asserts that “[b]ecause



Americans rarely need to acquire proficiency in a second language, they find it difficult to understand why recent immigrants struggle so much with learning English” (1996, p. 73). Thus, in spite of academic findings, many cultural assumptions about minority groups and about language-learning have had an effect on public opinion in the past.

Newman, Hartman, and Taber (2012) write that for monolingual English-speaking citizens, another issue is that “the presence of non-English speakers creates barriers to interpersonal communication and challenges what is perceived to be a core aspect of American identity” (p. 636), which leads to culture shock and “emotional disturbance” (p. 636). This argument situates bilingualism in a community-level context, where the impact on all citizens is an important consideration in deciding whether to bilingually educate a student. The authors position monolingual speakers specifically as a population which is more likely to oppose multilingual settings and feel discomfort around “culturally unfamiliar stimuli” (Newman, Hartman, & Taber, 2012, p. 636), even though there are many distinct ethnic groups which may feel discomfort around each other’s languages.

These are some of the factors which may explain McQuillan and Tse’s (1996) findings, and which may predict a similar result in the present study. It is assumed, to a certain extent, that those in *favor* of bilingual education have come to this conclusion from consuming academic literature or from the general dissemination over time of research findings. The four main arguments of pro-bilingual education opinion pieces found by McQuillan and Tse (1996) are, 1) “Students learn English faster”, 2) “Helps academic achievement”, 3) “Bilingualism as national asset”, and 4) “Helps cognitive development” (p. 17). Points 1, 2, and 4 are all outcomes which roughly correspond to the findings of educational research of the past few decades. The third point, which is less easily measured, indicates the consideration of issues such as national security, a globalized economy, and services for linguistic minorities. Still, some of these arguments – indicated by the specification of “English” as the language to be acquired faster in point 1 – contain an assumption that bilingual education programs are only for language minority students. Though little research focused on the reasons that Americans might support bilingual education, their relative alignment with recent educational research may indicate the successful dissemination of academic work.

## 6 Educational research reporting and representation in popular media

Oreskes and Conway (2012) describe how major corporations in the United States funded think-tanks and research institutes to denounce findings which were unfavorable to their businesses and values. Recent discussion of fake news (Rosen 2017) may be related to longer trends of increasingly simply worded encouragement of doubt about research and expert opinion from government (Liam 2008). Barthel, Mitchell, & Holcomb (2016) have found that 64% of US adults say fabricated news stories have caused “a great deal of confusion” about “the basic facts of current events”, with only 39% reporting feeling “very confident” that they could identify fake news. As the number and political range of media outlets continues to increase, Tewksbury and Rittenberg (2012) have noted a decrease in the length and depth of news articles published today. Citizens may be confused and skeptical about academic work.

## 7 Methodology

McQuillan and Tse’s 1996 study sought to measure the extent to which academic findings influence public opinion in the United States. Looking specifically at debate surrounding bilingual education, their study found that in contrast to 82% of academic publications, just 45% of newspaper and magazine articles argued in favor of bilingual education programs. Of the newspaper and magazine articles, it was found that the majority of authors did not cite academic evidence to support their argument. It was also found that the use of academic sources had no correlation with a certain point of view; authors both for and against bilingual education were able to find academic studies in support of their position.

The present study is a near-replication of McQuillan and Tse. Similar to the 1996 study, we evaluated academic and media articles published over a 10-year period (2006-2016) for their stance on bilingual education. We also determined the types of evidence media authors used in their pieces, whether it be academic research, anecdotal evidence, both, or neither.



This study also collected information which was not analyzed by McQuillan and Tse (1996). Because different models of bilingual education have been found to have varying levels of success, qualitative information concerning language of the bilingual program, and program type (transitional, late-exit, dual-language, or English immersion) was collected. In this study, we also sought to understand the what each author saw as the purpose of bilingual education, and the framework of Ruíz' (1984) language planning orientations were found to be helpful in understanding this aspect of the data. Themes in argumentation were coded and compared with results from the McQuillan and Tse (1996) study.

In discussing the two main datasets used in this study, "research articles" is used to refer to articles which have been peer-reviewed and are published in an academic journal. These are either studies which include original research, or are meta-analyses of previously published work. The phrases "media articles", "opinion articles", and "persuasive media articles", are used to refer to the second body of data, consisting of published editorials and letters to the editor collected from newspapers and magazines.

### **8 Data collection: Academic articles**

The ERIC database was used in McQuillan and Tse's (1996) study, and we followed their lead. The search term "bilingual education" was used, and results were restricted to full-text available, peer-reviewed articles from academic journals in the timeframe of 2006-2016, producing 120 results. Those which focused on contexts outside of the United States were discarded, as well as those which discussed bilingual education without contributing to the discussion about its merits or demerits (e.g., articles on multicultural teacher recruitment or the appropriate use of dictionaries in bilingual classrooms). Others were discarded for erroneously labeling second language education as bilingual education, leaving a total of 40 research articles used in this study.

Articles were coded as either 'for', 'against', or 'mixed' regarding bilingual education. Articles which critiqued bilingual education implementation in the interest of *improving* the quality of current programs were coded as being 'for' bilingual education. Articles which criticized implementation in the interest of *dismantling* bilingual education programs and/or switching to English immersion programs were coded as 'against'.

### **9 Data collection: Editorials and Letters-to-the-Editor**

Readership of print newspapers has declined markedly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Edmonds, Guskin, Mitchell, & Jurkowitz, 2013) and 28% of US adults now regularly access digital news outlets (Lu & Holcomb, 2016). Nevertheless, although it would be interesting to look at a wide range of digital platforms, newspapers and their digital counterparts continue to be a regular source of news for 48% of Americans (Lu & Holcomb, 2016) and so we felt they were a suitable base on which to develop our study.

McQuillan and Tse (1996) collected editorials and letters to the editor from a selection of eight "major national newspapers and magazines" (p. 8) which they felt were nationally representative of US public opinion. Though all eight of the original newspapers and magazines were considered for inclusion in the present study, only five out of eight had published articles on bilingual education during the period of 2006-2016. These five newspapers and magazines used by McQuillan and Tse (1996) were included: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, *Time*, *U.S. News*. *Dallas News* was added to enhance geographical inclusivity which also assisted in the recognition of state administration of education and cultural diversity. Each individual letter is treated as one 'article'.

### **10 Document analysis and Ruíz' (1984) Three Orientations in Language Planning**

Ruíz' (1984) three orientations in language planning for multilingual societies were used to identify trends in how minority languages are contextualized and characterized. (As explained above, McQuillan and Tse did not use this framework-- their study looked at the extent of the influence of research on general public opinion, and did not delve very deeply into the context of each author's arguments). Ruíz' (1984) three orientations are as follows: language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource. Ruíz defines an "orientation" as "a complex of dispositions toward language and its role, and toward languages



and their role in society" (1984, p. 16), and explains that orientations in language planning "delimit the ways we talk about language and language issues, they determine the basic questions we ask, the conclusions we draw from the data, and even the data themselves" (1984, p. 16).

In Ruíz' first orientation, language-as-problem, non-English speakers are viewed as having a disadvantage which must be overcome, ideally through the rapid acquisition of the majority language. This is often the orientation apparent amongst those who argue that homogeneity and monolingualism lead to greater community cohesion and national unity.

In the language-as-right orientation, heritage rights and civil rights are at the heart of language planning for society. Zachariev (1978) is a strong proponent of this orientation, arguing that mother-tongue instruction is an inalienable right. He writes that one has the right to protect one's heritage language, to speak in a language which allows the greatest feelings of freedom and security, to protect the cultural identity belonging to a language group, and to achieve this with the aid of community schools. This orientation was also strongly advocated by UNESCO, which asserted the right of a child to mother tongue instruction (1953).

The third orientation, language-as-resource, values language knowledge and communication skills as a resource, tool, or instrument (Ricento, 2005). Bourdieu's (1991) writings on linguistic cultural capital are indicative of this orientation, wherein proficiency in language – including knowledge of the mainstream dialect, awareness of linguistic appropriateness, and the capacity for communication – are intangible forms of capital in a society. Authors who display this orientation often argue that bilingualism provides economic and political advantages to both the individual and the state.

Language-as-resource has been notably criticized by Ricento (2005), who argues that the language-as-resource orientation does not contribute to improving the status of minority languages. For language-as-resource justifications to be appropriate, Ricento asserts that "hegemonic ideologies associated with the roles of non-English languages in national life would need to be unpacked and alternative interpretations of American identity would need to be legitimized" (2005, p. 349).

In the table below, examples extracted from the data indicate how various arguments made by media authors were identified and sorted by orientation:

Table 1: Example arguments sorted according to language orientation

"Language-as-Problem"	"Language-as-Right"	"Language-as-Resource"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "bilingual education ... sparked a culture war in many school districts" (Chavez, 2009)</li> <li>• "Why would anyone teach a 5-year-old [in the US] the alphabet in Spanish?" (Teri, 2009)</li> <li>• "the problem is culture in regard to Mexicans" (Adrian, 2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The goal of not casting off a family's cultural heritage ... is one [benefit]." (Hacker, 2011)</li> <li>• "being literate in the language of your ancestors makes you wiser and more powerful" (Tobar, 2016)</li> <li>• "No Child Left Behind now humiliates Limited English Proficiency [LEP] students by setting on their desk a standardized exam that can't be deciphered." (Fuller, 2008)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "these native-speaking youngsters have an enormously valuable asset the rest of us can directly and effectively benefit from" (Gordon, 2016)</li> <li>• In the "global economy ... Chinese, Spanish and Arabic are going to be the E-ZPass to success" (Levine, 2009)</li> <li>• "children who are exposed to multiple languages at an early age are able to activate certain networks within the brain that enhance cognitive function" (Chau, 2014)</li> </ul>

Of course, these excerpts by themselves do not dictate the author's language planning orientation: the nature of their overall argument is a more important. Fuller's (2008) argument concerning the struggles of language minority students taking standardized tests in English is ostensibly a point for language-as-problem. However, contextually, it is clear that Fuller's intent is to argue for language minority students' rights to dignity through equitable educational practices.



In addition to each article's stance on bilingual education, qualitative data on language of bilingual instruction discussed (where specified) and program type (e.g., transitional bilingual education, English immersion, dual-language immersion, etc.) were recorded from each article. It was expected that this data would help determine whether attitudes surrounding bilingual education were dependent upon the language being discussed, or whether programs were more likely to be deemed beneficial if they were perceived as benefitting the majority of society.

NVivo qualitative data software was utilized to organize data collection and analysis. Documents were uploaded into the software and coded according to source (e.g. New York Times, U.S. News), type (letter to the editor or editorial), and stance on bilingual education (for, against, or mixed). Arguments reported in McQuillan and Tse's (1996) study were coded for purposes of comparison, and an additional seven "new" arguments were also identified and coded for analysis through the strategy of open coding (Cohen et al., 2007).

### **11 Word counts**

McQuillan and Tse's (1996) data collection included the measurement of physical space given to each perspective (either for or against bilingual education) in print media, measured in column inches. In this study, because all persuasive media articles were retrieved from digital databases, a word count was considered to collect and report findings regarding the average length of articles. However, due to word count limitations for letters to the editor and suggested word counts for submitted editorial pieces on news websites, such a test was not expected to find statistically significant differences in article length based on stance toward bilingual education. The proportion of editorial pieces to letters to the editor would have also affected the overall average length of each piece. Therefore, a modern equivalent of measuring column inches was not conducted.

### **12 Research vs. anecdotal evidence**

There is a value judgement being made when an author compares articles based on whether their arguments are based in research or based in personal or anecdotal experience. However, this is based on newspaper guidelines which encourage writers to research their position before submitting an editorial or letter for publication. McQuillan and Tse cite Stonecipher (1979)'s assertion that editorials should be grounded in "reliable research" (1996, p. 2). In a 2014 video by the New York Times, Andrew Rosenthal instructs would-be editorialists that,

A good editorial consists of a clear position that's strongly and persuasively argued. It's based on principle, but it's also based in fact. ... Everyone's entitled to their own opinion; you're not entitled to your own facts. Go online, make calls if you can, check your information, double-check it. There's nothing that's gonna undermine your editorial faster than a fact you got wrong, that you did not have to get wrong.

(Spingarn-Koff, 2014)

Thus, though experiential evidence is still valid and significant, it can be argued that the use of research is more highly valued by magazine and newspaper editors, as failure to report well-researched information reflects poorly on both the writer and the publisher.

However, experiential data is often used in research, and those with firsthand experiences in bilingual education should not be dismissed. It should not be ignored that though academics were overwhelmingly pro-bilingual education, numerous public and private school educators and administrators declared their opposition to bilingual programs. Furthermore, those who expressed positions against bilingual education from a social/community perspective should not be counted out, as language planning in society certainly affects all of its members.





## 12 Results

### 12.1 Stance on bilingual education, media vs. research articles

Amongst persuasive media pieces, the percentage of articles in favour of bilingual education was 45% (n=28). Thirty-nine percent of articles (n=24) were found which opposed bilingual education, and the remaining ten (16%) were found to have mixed conclusions (See Table 2).

In contrast, 38 out of 40 research articles (95%) on bilingual education from academic journals were in favor of bilingual education, with only two (5%) displaying mixed conclusions. Out of the 40 academic articles, zero articles from this sample argued against bilingualism or bilingual education.

Table 2: Rate of consensus by news source

Publication	# For	# Against	# Mixed	# From publication
<i>New York Times</i>	13	10	3	26
<i>Dallas News</i>	4	11	5	20
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	5	3	1	9
<i>Washington Post</i>	4	0	0	4
<i>U.S. News</i>	2	0	0	2
<i>Time</i>	0	0	1	1
Total	28 (45%)	24 (39%)	10 (16%)	62

### 12.2 Use of research in media articles

McQuillian and Tse (1996) found that 45% of persuasive print media articles cited research to support their argument. Of the 62 news media authors included in our study, it was found that 20 (32%) cited published research (see Table 3). Of those 20, half cited a specific researcher or study; the other half found it sufficient to use nonspecific claims such as, “science shows” or, “researchers have found”, which may make it controversial to include them in this category.

Fifty-two percent of media authors (n=62) used anecdotal evidence to support their position, in comparison to McQuillian and Tse’s figure of 31% (1996, p. 16). These figures suggest that since McQuillian and Tse’s study, anecdotal evidence has become more frequent than research-based evidence in persuasive media writing. However, this may also be attributed to word limits for letters to the editor.

Table 3: Type of evidence used by position on bilingual education (BE)

Use of research as evidence, by position on bilingual education (BE)				
Type	For BE (n=28)	Against BE (n=24)	Mixed (n=10)	All (n=62)
# Cited research (source specified)	7	2	1	10
# Cited research (source not specified)	7	3	2	12
Total which cited research	14	5	3	22
Total which did not cite research	14	21	7	42
Use of personal experience or anecdotal evidence, by position on bilingual education				
# Used personal or anecdotal evidence	10	14	8	32
# Did not use personal or anecdotal evidence	18	10	2	30



### 12.3 Stance on bilingual education, population served, and linguistic diversity

Ninety-six percent (n=24) of authors opposed to bilingual education exclusively discussed programs which were intended for non-native or limited proficient speakers of English. One author asserted the existence of effective dual-language immersion programs for “Anglos” (Fraleley, 2013), but criticized the “‘multiculturalism’ and Hispanic political activism which keep[s] Hispanic children in largely ineffective bilingual education”. This may be related to Lindholm-Leary’s (2001) assertion that the term “immersion” is affiliated with elite programs, whereas “bilingual” programs have the “political connotations ... [of being] compensatory or lower quality education” (p. 30).

Pieces which supported bilingual education more frequently mentioned dual language immersion programs. This result was hypothesized due to the growth of dual-language programs in the US, which directly benefits both language minority and language majority students. Dicker (1996) observes that, “Spanish is not just the native language of half the students but also a ‘foreign language,’ a desired object of study for the other half of the students” (p. 132). Thus, she argues that the desirability of Spanish skills has given the language a higher status, leading to its increased popularity and approval.

Writers in favour of bilingual education also discussed a wider variety of languages used in the US, while writers against bilingual education tended to only discuss Spanish. The “for” group collectively discussed the possibility of bilingual education in 21 different languages, from Persian to Cantonese. The “against” group collectively mentioned only five languages, with most (n=18) making their argument in relation to Spanish and English programs. In both groups, Spanish was the most frequently discussed non-English language for a bilingual program.

Notably absent from all media articles were indigenous American languages. Languages such as Navajo, Cherokee, and Hawaiian were not analyzed, nor was it brought up anecdotally or as evidence for or against bilingual education. Though the Center for Applied Linguistics database of immersion programs lists bilingual programs for the Ojibwe language in Minnesota and Iñupiaq in northern Alaska, (CAL, 2016) none of the media authors brought up the US’ many indigenous languages, even when discussing heritage language rights.

Though it is a U.S. territory rather than a state, Puerto Rico—a majority Spanish-speaking US territory with Spanish-language mainstream education—was not mentioned in any articles, though it would have served as a counterpoint to the assertions that “American culture” means being a monolingual English speaker.

Finally, though there have been debates about American Sign Language (ASL) (see Pavlenko, 2002), there was no relevant evidence in this study.

### 12.4 Changes in argumentation & language planning orientation since 1984

In 1984, Ruíz observed that the language-as-problem and language-as-right orientations were “[competing] for predominance in the international literature” (p. 15). However, a meta-analysis of McQuillan & Tse’s (1996) study indicates that the language-as-right orientation was entirely absent from popular media writing from 1984-1994, and authors instead focused on language-as-problem and language-as-resource as competing ideologies. Because McQuillan and Tse did not collect similar data for research articles, it is unclear whether the language-as-right orientation was also absent from academic work of the period. The following is a comparison of arguments for and against bilingual education in the 1984-1994 period, to arguments found in the 2006-2016 period.



Table 4: Frequency of arguments in media articles

Stance	Issue	Opinion pieces mentioning issue, 1984-1984 (n=87)	Opinion pieces mentioning issue, 2006-2016 (n=62)	Percent Change
In favor of bilingual education	Students learn English faster	38% (33)	9% (6)	-29
	Helps academic achievement	24% (21)	24% (15)	0
	Bilingualism as national asset	13% (11)	9% (6)	-4
	Helps cognitive development	8% (7)	9% (6)	1
	*Heritage language rights	-	11% (7)	-
	*Aids educational equity and social justice	-	19% (12)	-
	*Provides students with economic advantages	-	19% (12)	-
	*Students develop global competence, cultural sophistication	-	13% (8)	-
Against bilingual education	Not effective in helping student learn English/overall academic achievement	51% (44)	27% (17)	-24
	Leads to segregation of students	20% (17)	8% (5)	-12
	Is un-American and unpatriotic	19% (16)	10% (6)	-9
	Is too expensive	13% (11)	6% (4)	-7
	Goes against public opinion	10% (9)	2% (1)	-8
	Allows for no parental choice in child's education	10% (9)	2% (1)	-8
	*Bilingualism is unnecessary because English is the national/global language	-	21% (13)	-
	*English immersion is superior to BE	-	5% (3)	-
	*Bilingual education allows immigrant to resist cultural assimilation, not learn English	-	9% (6)	-

\*Issue did not appear in McQuillan & Tse's (1996) data.

Thus, the types of arguments appear to have diversified and increased in number overall.

### 13 Discussion

#### 13.1 Media authors against bilingual education in the US

##### 13.1.1 Language-As-Problem

Many of the voices in opposition to bilingual education exhibited a fear that non-native English speaking students would not become proficient in English if they received bilingual instruction. Several authors expressed beliefs that children are not capable of becoming fully bilingual and biliterate, or that there are maxims limiting the development of skills in multiple languages. One anti-bilingual education author argued that bilingualism would have “undoubtedly prevented [him] from ... scoring a perfect score on the SAT's, attending an Ivy League university, and starting [his] own business” (Chen, 2009). This assertion portrays bilingualism as a cognitive handicap, elevating monolingualism not only for academic achievement, but for success in other areas such as business. Another author wrote that education in Spanish “actively disadvantages kindergartners by teaching them the wrong language” (Teri, 2009), though conceding that bilingual education might be acceptable from a later age. An editorial from the *LA Times* asserted that prior to the dismantling of bilingual education in 1998, “thousands of students were handed diplomas without ever having mastered English”, though the author(s) do not indicate how they arrived at this conclusion. In a letter to the *New York Times*, Mexican-American writer “Adrian” asserts that bilingual education is ineffective based on this quote from his bilingual Mexican father: “I speak to [Adrian's bilingually-educated cousins] in English and it sounds bad, so I speak to them in Spanish and it's just as bad” (Adrian, 2009). Because the author does not list his cousins' ages, number of years in the U.S.,



or program type, it is difficult to address this critique specifically, beyond mentioning that it has been found to take five to seven years for non-English speaking immigrant students to reach grade-level academic proficiency in English (Thompson & Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981). These arguments speak to the continuing resonance of older research which declared detrimental effects from bilingualism.

### 13.1.2 Cultural fragmentation and resistance to “American culture”

Many anti-BE authors offered varied solutions to what they viewed as the problem of immigrant resistance to assimilation. One writer to the *New York Times* offered seemingly contradictory guidance on this issue:

“many [limited English proficient students] have parents who do not speak English. Thus, the child is expected to learn and speak English during the school day and then goes home and does not practice those skills. Needless to say, not only are the language skills not reinforced, but the child often feels disconnected from both his native culture and the American culture, making assimilation extremely difficult”

(Flippin, 2009).

In this very strong argument largely for language-as-problem, no consideration is given to the benefits of speaking two languages, the need for the L1 in order to communicate with parents and family members, or role of “cultural broker” often taken by the bilingual children of immigrants (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002; Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Letter to the editor contributor Voirin (2013) asserts an idea which has been reflected in interviews elsewhere (see Thicksten, 2000; Bigler, 1996), that immigrants of the past surrendered their native language and culture in order to become American:

“My ancestors came to Dallas in 1855 straight from France. One of the things my great-great grandfather insisted on is that his kids speak English, the language of a fresh start and new opportunity in their new home. Many in the family have regretted not learning French over the years to know something of our ancestry. However, if we had never learned English, we would never have fully assimilated and would have failed and probably returned to France.”

(Voirin, 2013)

The expression of regret at having not learned French nearly amounts to a language-as-right orientation. However, it appears – though it is not explicitly stated – that Voirin values the (presumably economic) success of his family above knowledge of their ancestry and heritage language, and views these two concepts as fundamentally incompatible: either you can have a connection to your heritage, or you can succeed in the US. Though by no means a new type of argument, this opinion shows the depth of belief that foreign cultures and languages will prevent immigrants from succeeding in the US.

The view that early European immigrants to the US willingly abandoned their home languages also supposes that those languages and cultures have, over time, disappeared into the proverbial melting pot. One letter author, who professes profound disagreement with bilingual education and multiculturalism, writes that, “Like the Eastern European Jews in early New York, [LEP] students would do better in English immersion” (Fralely, 2013). However, Fralely might be surprised to learn that there are still cities in New York where Yiddish is spoken as a first language, and that five New York public schools offer transitional bilingual education in Yiddish (Walcott, 2011).

It seemed to emerge as a theme that whether or not bilingual programs were superior at teaching English, bilingual education was an object of suspicion from authors who worried about cultural fragmentation. Many anti-bilingual education authors cited segregation of students, both in and outside of school, which they often attributed to both bilingual programs (particularly transitional and late-exit) and multiculturalism. Linda Chavez, past president of *US English* whose editorial appeared in the *New York*

*Times*, argues that bilingual education “sparked a culture war in many school districts” (Chavez, 2009). She also argues that thanks to a “new emphasis on English – not preserving native language and culture as it had been in the heyday of bilingual education – immigrant children are finally making significant academic strides” (Chavez, 2009). In this view, the problem of multiculturalism is an obstacle to immigrant students, whose native language and culture are seen as a disadvantage in US schools.

It was argued that monolingual English speakers should not be asked or expected to change their behavior as a result of demographic changes around them; those who migrated to the US ought to forfeit their language and culture to assimilate and succeed. Ricento (2005) argues that that in the US, “monolingual English speakers “take as given their ‘right’ to receive communication in English” (p. 356), and notes some US laws protect this privilege. Arguments that teaching non-English languages threatens the rights of monolingual English speakers point to both institutionalized privilege of the majority, and a fear of losing such privilege.

### 13.1.3 Denigration of immigrants and culture in media pieces

Though it was not mentioned in McQuillan and Tse’s (1996) study, the present study found four instances where ethnicity or culture was linked to both a lack of academic success and to poverty. “Adrian”, writing to the editor of the *New York Times*, insisted that, “the problem is cultural in regard to Mexicans ... More often than not children aim low, they grow accustomed to just floating by, because they don’t expect more from themselves and neither do their families” (Adrian, 2009). In the same collection of letters, Hansen (2009) writes that in 1990s New York City, “School was not part of [Hispanic students’] family culture. No amount of teacher dedication could possibly overcome the profound lack of sustained commitment to learning that pervaded their extra-school lives”. Editoralist Linda Mikels, president of Sixth Street Prep School, warns against undervaluing minority students’ native language skills, and declares with pride that “our teachers believe that all children can learn and achieve high standards in spite of barriers like poverty, language and ethnicity” (2009). Though she claims to value native language skills, Mikels’ characterization of ethnicity as a barrier for students points to assumptions of ethnic inferiority.

It was unexpected that any author would so blatantly display discrimination against certain cultures or ethnic groups, and indicate, as Valdes (1997) noted, that economic circumstances are not frequently considered a factor in student success.

### 13.1.4 From ineffective programs to unnecessary skills

Material in the media seems to suggest that schools should focus on English competence at any cost. English, having the advantage of being both a national and global language, is advocated as the language of science (Cooley, 2013; Johnson, 2013), business (Ligon, 2012), higher education (The Times Editorial Board, 2016), and upward mobility (Corrigan, 2014; Daly, 2014). This approach means that there is the failure to acknowledge that proficiency in two languages is a superior academic outcome to proficiency in only one. In McQuillan and Tse (1996), those against bilingual education cited the ineffectiveness of programs, or the issue of segregating students from their peers. In the present study, however, 21% of authors against bilingual education argued that English, as a national and global language, is the only language that needs to be taught to children.

Of course, it should be acknowledged that lack of proficiency in the majority language may exclude certain populations from participation in society. It may prevent them from knowing about or receiving welfare services, legal aid, healthcare, job opportunities, and so forth. Without a common language, communication is hindered. However, bilingual education is not a hindrance to English fluency, because one of its outcomes is English fluency. Though in 1984-1994, many writers expressed concern that bilingual programs have not helped students gain English proficiency quickly, empirical studies have found the opposite to be true: that despite the possibility of quicker short-term gains, bilingual programs produce comparable or superior long-term results for English proficiency amongst non-native English speakers. Thus, those arguing language-as-problem orientations are well-intentioned in hoping for quick



English proficiency, but displayed little knowledge of the effectiveness of bilingual programs and tended not to consider the value of speaking a heritage language or a second language.

### 13.2 Media authors for bilingual education in the US

#### 13.2.1 Language-as-right

Ruiz' second language orientation – language-as-right – was not evident in McQuillan and Tse's (1996) findings, and was scarcely mentioned by media articles in this study. There are 381 distinct languages in the US, according to a 2011 survey (Ryan, 2013) – and the logistical impracticality of providing native speaker instructional support for speakers of each of those languages may mean that there are few advocates willing to fully support language-as-right for *all* languages in the US.

It was suggested in several media articles that dual-language immersion programs would have effects beneficial to society, such as reducing educational inequities and helping to balance the dynamics of power between ethnic majority and ethnic minority students. This is an overarching goal of language-as-right advocates, who see problems in the hegemonic dominance of English in the US. Because students in dual-language immersion learn each other's language, they can work together to problem-solve, and recognize the value of each other's native language skills. Furthermore, it was proposed that with bilingualism becoming more desirable to wealthy parents, the schools would become more socioeconomically diverse, and perhaps engender better inter-ethnic relations.

Valdes (1997) is one of few voices critical to dual-language immersion programs, but not because they are ineffective in terms of academic outcomes. Her argument is that the Spanish language, once a "shared treasure, a significant part of a threatened heritage, and ... a secret language [in the US]" (Valdes, 1997, p. 393) for its native speakers, is being given away to further advantage the white majority. Where employers may have once looked to minority groups for bilingual employees, they can now select an applicant from the majority group. Valdes writes that in response to a proposed DLI program for her district, one educator objected, saying, "*Si se aprovechan de nosotros en inglés, van a aprovechar de nosotros también en español.*", or, "If they take advantage of us in English, they will take advantage of us in Spanish as well" (1997, p. 393). There were no media articles – and only one research article – which expressed concerns similar to Valdes'. This may be related to the limitation that none of the articles were written by non-English-speaking parents or immigrants.

Another face of the language-as-right argument was the discussion of student dignity, and equitable treatment of all students. These discussions largely took two forms: first, that already-vulnerable language minority students should not be subjected to sink-or-swim methods, and second – a position which was articulated by authors both for and against bilingual education – that separate classes isolate and segregate some students from their peers. In his editorial, Fuller (2008) writes that the English-language standardized tests mandated by No Child Left Behind "stigmatize what young children know, undercut their confidence in the classroom, and disempower parents." Similarly, editorialist LeBlanc-Esparza (2009) asserts that additive programs are more likely to boost self-esteem, and editorialist Tobar (2016) writes simply that, "A fourth grader from Guadalajara, Mexico, learning English for the first time in a Los Angeles classroom needs to know that what she already possesses is valuable."

However, academic literature indicates that both segregation and integration come with challenges; labeling a child as an "English Learner" or LEP for too long may harm their self-esteem and academic achievement (Umansky, 2016), whereas students may be ignored by peers or spoken to condescendingly when immersed in mainstream classrooms (Cavazos-Rehg & DeLucia-Waack, 2009). Again, the authors tend to rally around dual-language immersion programs as the best solution, for valuing a child's existing linguistic knowledge and avoiding potentially harmful labels.

#### 13.2.2 Language-as-Resource

In 1996 and presently, language-as-resource is almost unchallenged as the most common and influential orientation of language planning. Ricento (2005) has critiqued the commodification of language as an instrument or resource, though few media authors express awareness of his concerns.



Pro-bilingual education media pieces frequently cited the utility of a second language, sometimes for intercultural understanding, but more often for economic or cognitive developmental advantages. Take for example Kristof (2010), who argues for Spanish language bilingual education because in the future, “[m]ore Americans will take vacations in Latin America, do business in Spanish, and eventually move south to retire in countries where the cost of living is far cheaper” (Kristof, 2010). In such a vision, learning a foreign language has no intrinsic value; it is not associated with personal growth, enjoyment of learning, or deeper cultural understanding, but is valued only in terms of return on investment. Kristof discusses languages as though they were commodities, and the presumption of his audiences’ monolingual English-speaking background is made clear in his statement that: “In effect, [learning] Chinese is typically a career. Spanish is a practical add-on to your daily life, meshing with whatever career you choose” (2010).

Several other writers indicated that a second language should be selected based on its usefulness and relevance. This linguistic utilitarianism is present in both language-as-resource (e.g. Chau, 2014; Levine, 2009) and language-as-problem (e.g. Corrigan, 2014; Cooley, 2013) media argumentation. Many of the authors who argue for English-only immersion promote the national and international utility of English and its capacity to enable social mobility. Language-as-resource proponents frequently recommend learning a globally useful language. However, selecting languages for bilingual programs based on their relevance to a global economy contributes to a global hierarchy for languages and subjugates languages which are already threatened. Bourdieu (1991) writes that “those who seek to defend a threatened linguistic capital ... are obliged to wage a total struggle. One cannot save the *value* of a competence unless one saves the market” (p. 57).

Allowing the ethnic majority to choose which languages are used in dual-language programs may have already produced observable results. In 2010, the American Community Survey determined that the top five languages spoken at home by people aged 5 or older in the United States were: 1) Spanish, 2) Chinese, 3) French, 4) Tagalog, and 5) Vietnamese, each with over one million speakers (Ryan, 2013, p. 7). However, the Center for Applied Linguistics’ Dual Language Program Directory, the top five languages for DLI programs in the United States are: 1) Spanish, 2) Mandarin, 3) French, 4) Japanese, tied with “other”, and 5) German (CAL, 2016). There were no listings in the directory for dual-language programs with Tagalog (1.5 million speakers) or Vietnamese (1.3 million speakers) (CAL, 2016).

García (2009) writes that the relative power of a language or minority group is the key, writing that, “It is ... instructive to realize that immersion bilingual education is for children whose home language has some degree of power and will be reinforced in society at large” (p. 126). She outlines this point by asserting that *transitional* bilingual education is “For powerless, language-minority children” (García, 2009, p. 132), whereas “*empowered* language-minority children” (p. 132, emphasis added) have access to maintenance, dual-language, or other additive bilingual programs.

Though the examples so far have featured authors with utilitarian outlooks, there were some authors who valued both the process and the results of learning a language. In her letter to the *Washington Post*, Ernst (2006) writes of her daughter’s cultural enrichment through learning Spanish: that she can read Spanish novels and poetry, and perform El Salvadorian dances. Tobar (2016) also wrote of appreciating writers from Cervantes to Neruda once he had reclaimed his native Spanish skills, writing that “to know a language is to enter another way of being”. Though cultural enrichment may not be a selling point that persuades those who see bilingual programs as expensive and unnecessary, it provides a more wholesome and respectful way of viewing language education.

### 13.3 Trends in media coverage of bilingual education

#### 13.3.1 Curating arguments for and against bilingual education in media outlets

McQuillan and Tse (1996) reported that 45% of media articles were in favor of bilingualism and bilingual education, and that ratio was found to be identical (45%) in our study. This contrasts sharply with the ratio of consensus in academic articles (95%), and raises concerns that providing “balanced” coverage – here considered to be the equal or near-equal publication of articles expressing opposing sides to an



argument – of various topics in the media may mislead audiences that there are similar numbers of dissenting voices in scientific research.

However, the near-uniform positivity towards bilingualism amongst researchers may also make louder, by contrast, the few dissenting academic voices against bilingual education in the United States. As in the original study, there was no correlation between a media author's opinion and their likelihood of using research to support an argument. Woolley (2012) and Chavez (2009) both used studies which had been criticized by renowned linguist Stephen Krashen for methodological issues. It appeared, overall, that authors who valued academic evidence were able to find research articles and case studies in support of their views, regardless of their stance on bilingual education.

Finally, anecdotal evidence was found more frequently in the present study than in the findings of McQuillan and Tse (1996). This may indicate a trend towards the usage of emotional arguments rather than clinical ones in persuasive writing. It may also indicate that for many, one's own experiences and intuition about controversial issues are just as valid as academic research and expertise.

### **13.3.2 The transformation of news consumption and quality of reporting**

It is necessary to comment on the transformation of news media when comparing these two time periods. Though this study examines the arguments expressed in established mainstream news sources, it does not assume that the authors are exclusive or even consistent readers of the outlet in which they were published. Even an individual who primarily consumes news through a newspaper will still likely be exposed to television, internet, and social media takes on current issues. Tewksbury and Rittenberg (2012), in their study of digital news in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, report that the internet has diversified and expanded the range of news sources available. Though a diversity of news sources can feasibly mean that citizens on the web may be informing their opinions from a diverse crop of sources, Tewksbury and Rittenberg conjecture that this is more likely leading to users developing less nuanced views and becoming more extreme and insular in their opinions over time.

## **14 Conclusion**

It was found that overall, academic publications are being cited less frequently in a sample of media articles published 2006-2016 than was indicated in McQuillan and Tse's (1996) study of work published 1984-1994. This was not associated with an author's position on bilingual education, but rather seemed to indicate a more general trend toward a lesser need for academic references. The use of anecdotal evidence has grown and may indicate a trend towards argumentation rooted in emotional, rather than empirical, evidence.

Argumentation for bilingualism has become more conscious of language-as-right ideas but is still dominated by arguments concerned with language-as-resource (Ricento, 2005). There were many writers who considered education equity, as well as dignity and social justice for minority students when arguing for bilingual education programs. There was also increased interest in preparing children for a plurilingual, multicultural society and globalized economic competition. However, most pro-bilingual education writers discussed language for cognitive, economic, and developmental benefits.

Those against bilingual education largely followed language-as-problem arguments, arguing that schools should only teach English, and that assimilation into a national "American" culture and English language is the key to success. These programs least frequently discussed dual-language programs and discussed Spanish language programs more than any other language.

Thus, it becomes a project for academics and newspaper editors alike: how can we effectively disseminate educational research which may benefit growing populations of LEP children, and how can we persuade those who value experiential, rather than empirical, evidence? The answer, once again, will likely lie in how we present our arguments.





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\*This source also appears in Appendix A for media articles

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Letters to the Editor and Editorials

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## Appendix B: Academic Articles

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