



ARTS & CULTURE

1-in-5 in US Homes Speaks a Second Language after English

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The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of people in the United States who speak a language other than English at home increased by three times between 1980 and 2019.

About one in five people in America speak a second language at home. That is 68 million people.

Arabic among top five

Dina Arid of California, who is the mother of three children, is one of them. She grew up speaking Arabic at home. She said it is true that the country is “a melting pot,” a place where many cultures come together.

Arabic is one of the five most-spoken second languages in the U.S. Arid speaks mostly English to her children and is trying to teach them a little Arabic.

She said some of her **cousins** “didn't get to learn Arabic.” They “always wished that their parents spoke to them in Arabic more so that they have that language,” she noted.

Spanish is most common second language

Spanish is the most popular second language in the United States. More than 41 million people — about 12 times more than the other most common second languages — speak Spanish at home. Hispanics are the largest minority group in the United States. Fifty-five percent of Spanish speakers were born in the United States.

The other languages in the top five are Chinese, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

Returning to help in family's homeland

Jenny Nguyen is studying **dentistry** in Virginia. Her parents **emigrated** from Vietnam, so they spoke both English and Vietnamese at home. “I would speak English at school during the day and at night I would only speak Vietnamese just so I could keep the language, Nguyen says. “When I was younger, I didn't understand the importance, but I think now I'm very glad that I'm able to speak and write at such a **proficient** level.”

She was able to put her language skills to use when she traveled to Vietnam to offer free dental care to poor communities. Many of her co-workers there were also Vietnamese Americans.

“They couldn't really communicate with the patients,” Nguyen says. “I was one of the very few young volunteers that were able to speak with the patients and communicate with them what was going on.”

Secret language

Cathy Erway is a food writer based in New York City. Erway is using a language **application** to improve her ability in her mother's native Mandarin Chinese. She said her parents used Chinese between them to talk secretly when their young children were listening

The Census Bureau reports that the number of people who spoke only English at home also increased – by about 25 percent – during the same period.

I'm Jill Robbins.

Dora Mekouar reported on this story for VOA News. Jill Robbins adapted it for Learning English.

Words in This Story

cousin – *n.* a child of your uncle or aunt (your parent's sister or brother's child)

emigrate – *v.* to leave a country or region to live elsewhere

proficient – *adj.* good at doing something; skillful

application –*n.* a computer program that mainly does one task

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