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Portion of story should have been written in Spanish. Bilingualism make America stronger  
[City Edition]

Boston Globe - Boston, Mass.

Date: Dec 29, 1997

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Section: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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##### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I was interested in the Dec. 22 "Foreign Journal" by Steve Fainaru, "In Mexico, machismo is a tie that binds." It was compelling to read how cultural distinctiveness can be recognized and dealt with in a reasonable fashion. On that level, the article was refreshing and informative.

However, I cannot understand why, in a city where Spanish maintains a stable and lively presence, this article could not contain the Mexican vows of marriage in Spanish accompanied by a translation.

This would have been effective for two reasons. First, on a practical level, the fact that the vows were presented in English only confused the intent of the article. It was unclear to me until a second reading that those English words were in fact being spoken in Spanish. Had they been written in Spanish with a parenthetic translation, not only would the article have been clearer, but also the mental picture the author was attempting to paint (i.e., on top of a cliff, a sailboat passing by) would have been much clearer.

Second, and more important, America must come to terms with the fact that this nation is multilingual. We live in a world where many people are at least bilingual, if not trilingual. Languages other than English must be introduced into the country's linguistic mainstream if we are to achieve current goals of equity across the country.

Further, bringing languages other than English into the fold of American language would allow us to achieve greater success in the education of our English-language learners. While perhaps it should be renamed, bilingual education and its methodologies need to become a greater part of the educational norm so that our children can learn that the languages they speak at home are vital components to a healthy America.

Of course we all need to speak English to be successful, but to embrace bilingualism, to build it and to praise it will only make the country stronger. PATRICK PROCTOR Jamaica Plain

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A lesson about the oppressed and the oppressors  
[City Edition]

Boston Globe - Boston, Mass.

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WED

A big thanks to Ellen Frank for her June 30 letter "The fault may not be in teachers, but in the test." It is so frustrating to watch state government mandate top-down requirements of teachers, and then brand them as idiots or failures when they do not perform on a substandard test.

In reality, it is quite normal for there to be a dip effect when these types of standards are newly implemented. These prospective teachers did not know what to study for, and the state did not know how to guide them. The same goes for the students who took the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) earlier this year. The low scores will go up only if the state Board of Education and politicians are capable of showing a modicum of patience and a nurturing attitude instead of scorning the examinees and scrapping these tests in a few years for yet another quick fix.

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, wrote about this exact dynamic. Top-down, systemwide changes like the MCAS, teacher tests, and curriculum frameworks put enormous burdens on those who must take or implement the mandates -- that is, the students and the teachers. Actually taking the tests is hard enough, but when those who require them denounce the test-takers as idiots, morale plummets and revolution is fomented. The state becomes the oppressor, and the teachers and students the oppressed. This is an unacceptable climate in which to educate our children.

House Speaker Thomas Finneran, chairman John Silber of the Board of Education, and the rest of the "oppressors" would do well to put themselves in the position of those who must deal with the effects of their policies and their words. PATRICK PROCTOR Jamaica Plain