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HEADLINE: Diversity Spoken in 39 Languages;
New maps show a part of Bellflower is one of the nation's most linguistically varied.

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BODY:

On a given day at Pho Pioneer restaurant in Artesia, Linda Tran manages Korean-speaking workers who serve the cuisine of her native Vietnam to clients speaking Gujarati, Tagalog or Spanish.

Those are just the languages Tran, manager of the eatery, can count.

"It's so diverse here, in such a small clump," said Tran, the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants. "I don't think you would be able to find this anywhere else in the country."

A newly released graphic depiction of the nation's vast linguistic complexity shows Tran is close to correct. A set of interactive maps, the combined product of census data and academic curiosity, shows that a roughly 13-square-mile area of southern Los Angeles County from North Long Beach to Bellflower to Artesia is among the most linguistically varied swaths of territory in the nation.

The Census Bureau tracks the 40 most commonly spoken languages in the United States. Thirty-nine are in this swath of land defined by the 605 and 710 freeways -- English and Spanish, of course, but also a polyglot that includes Portuguese and Dutch, Navajo and Khmer. A few other spots in Los Angeles County, including some around major universities and medical centers, rival the linguistic density of this triangle; nowhere else in the nation quite compares.

The maps and tables were the product of a year's work sparked by a question, said Rosemary Feal, executive director of the Modern Language Assn., the professional group for language and literature professors and graduate students that conducted the work.

"We really just asked a simple question we didn't have an answer to -- who speaks what language where in the U.S.," Feal said. "We had the data, but we didn't know what it looked like."

The result is a pixilated view, down to individual ZIP Codes, of 30 of the 40 languages that the census tracks. The language association hopes its website, www.mla.org, will spark interest from marketers, politicians, schoolchildren,

librarians, and anyone with a computer, curiosity and time.

Those who look will see in the maps a testament to the forces of immigration and migration. The scramble of squares and rectangles reveals that only America's remotest mountains, deserts, swamps and lightly populated rural areas are bereft of any foreign tongue.

California claims the lowest percentage of people who say they speak English at home -- 60.52%, compared with about 82% nationwide. Appalachia, deep Dixie and parts of the Midwest fall at the other end of the scale. English is spoken exclusively at home by 96.38% of Mississippians -- although not everyone in the country professes to understand it. Neighboring Alabama is close behind.

In all but a handful of states, Spanish is the predominant second language. But four states have French or Creole as the next most prevalent language behind English (Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Louisiana). German is the prevailing foreign language in the Dakotas and much of Montana, a remnant of 19th century settlers. Native American languages top the list in Alaska.

Yiddish is concentrated in New York's Brooklyn and the Borscht Belt of the Catskills, as well as Los Angeles and the retirement communities around Miami. But although the language may be dying, at least one person in every state except Wyoming and Alaska reported to the census that it was his or her home language.

There are limits to what the data say about language in the U.S. The association's maps are based on the census' long form, which was filled out by one in six households in 2000. Residents were asked to report the language those in the household more than 5 years old spoke at home, Feal said. The maps do not show who speaks multiple languages or indicate the degree of command of English.

Of the 47 million respondents to the long form who reported speaking a language other than English, 55% said they also spoke English "very well," according to census figures. Only 7% said they didn't speak it at all.

In Los Angeles County, 83% of the ZIP Codes contain 20 or more languages, and nearly half have 30 or more, according to a Times analysis. Only one remote ZIP Code in the Angeles National Forest, with a population of 36, is English-only.

That much does not surprise Dowell Myers, professor of urban planning and demography at USC. "I find that L.A. County is just as diverse outside the city as inside the city," Myers said.

"There are two competing stories about L.A.," Myers said. "One is that it's very segregated and there is a lot of hostility between groups. That's very wrong, but people want to hold onto it. The other story is that L.A. is diverse, and people live close together with very little friction."

The data are likely to fuel the perennial contest between New York City and Los Angeles for most diverse -- ZIP Codes now can be compared side-by-side.

A first look at the maps shows the Big Apple, which lacks substantial numbers of Native American and Southeast Asian language speakers, loses on languages per square mile.

Indeed, those who yearn to study multiple languages in the smallest geographic area need only take the San Gabriel River Freeway or Long Beach Freeway south of Los Angeles, exit at the Artesia Freeway and travel along Lakewood Boulevard. From that crossroads to the northeast lies Bellflower's 90706 ZIP Code area, where 38 languages are spoken. To the southwest, a scattering of Hmong speakers in the adjacent 90805 ZIP Code brings the language total to 39. The only census category missing is the catchall "other and unspecified."

U.S. Rep. Linda Sanchez, a Democrat, represents all of these language speakers and more. "The greatest asset is the diversity of the people," she says.

Pioneer Boulevard presents a facade typical of Sanchez's district, where Indian grocers, restaurant staff, jewelers and clothiers conduct business with customers who speak Gujarati, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil and Urdu.

Crowding in near the South Asian outlets are businesses owned by immigrants from Vietnam, China, South Korea, Japan and the Philippines -- Chinese dumpling houses and Japanese tofu cafes, Vietnamese nail salons and Korean church supplies. Virtually everywhere, Spanish is spoken.

Descendants of Portuguese and Dutch immigrants, among the earliest settlers in Artesia, still define their presence with a few small bakeries and cafes.

At least 53 languages are spoken in the 30 schools of the ABC Unified School District, which covers Artesia, Cerritos, Hawaiian Gardens and parts of Lakewood and Norwalk, according to school board member Mark Pulido. Minority ethnic groups make up 88% of the district population, according to board figures.

"Artesia was always a multicultural community, although we didn't call it such, and I don't know if the community recognized it as such," said Veronica Bloomfield, president of the Artesia Historical Society, who has spent all of her 65 years in the city. "It's a microcosm of the United States, where there has been just waves of immigrants coming into communities."

*

Spoken here

In Los Angeles County, a language other than English is spoken in most homes. Here are the top languages spoken in Southland area households:

	Number of speakers
Los Angeles County	
Total	8,791,096
English	4,032,614
Spanish/Span. Creole	3,330,935
Chinese	287,724
Tagalog	195,671
Korean	165,158
Orange County	

Total	2,632,408
English	1,542,698
Spanish/Span. Creole	665,069
Vietnamese	124,539
Korean	50,366
Chinese	49,123
Riverside County	
Total	1,425,927
English	957,094
Spanish/Span. Creole	394,322
Tagalog	11,927
German	5,700
Vietnamese	5,623
San Bernardino County	
Total	1,568,725
English	1,035,292
Spanish/Span. Creole	434,445
Tagalog	17,139
Chinese	10,047
Vietnamese	9,501
Ventura County	
Total	697,367
English	467,351
Spanish/Span. Creole	182,412
Tagalog	10,563
Chinese	4,535
German	3,449

Sources: Modern Language Assn., U.S. Census 2000

Times Director of Computer Analysis Richard O'Reilly, data analyst Sandra Poindexter and researcher Maloy Moore contributed to this report.

GRAPHIC: GRAPHIC: Map: Bellflower, CA CREDIT: Los Angeles Times PHOTO: A MELTING POT: At a mini-mall in Artesia, a Vietnamese restaurant shares space with an acupuncture center, an Indian clothing shop and a Farmers Insurance office. PHOTOGRAPHER: Ricardo DeAratanha Los Angeles Times