

Language maintenance and acculturation in the Hungarian diaspora of Queensland: A microcosm from which to learn

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Multicultural policies and subsequent language policies claim to provide a favourable environment for the maintenance of immigrant languages. However, the relationship between multiculturalism and multilingualism is complex and contested. Rates of language loss and shift in Australia also show that the multilingual heritage is very vulnerable even within the context of a highly multicultural society. This paper examines the possible effect of multicultural policies on the Hungarian diaspora of Queensland, Australia.

The research contrasts two vintages of Hungarian migrants in terms of their acculturation strategies, attitudes to the host and source cultures ethnic-identity and language maintenance and shift patterns. The conclusions drawn have implications for the theoretical framework of language maintenance and shift as well as additive versus subtractive bilingualism. Period of arrival is singled out a main factor in influencing patterns of social adjustment as well as language maintenance and shift patterns. The paper argues that the wider social and policy context plays a significant role in the language development of small communities.

One of the most significant findings of the research is that today there is a growing tendency to use the Hungarian language at home. The older generation of Hungarians who migrated to Australia in the 1940s and 1950s did not transmit their language to the next generation for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the lack of intergenerational language transmission reflected the assimilationist policies and practices of the Australian society at the time. It seems that the new vintage of Hungarian migrants are more positive about maintaining their language and transmitting it to their children. Multicultural policies seem to have created a more beneficial environment for minority language maintenance.

The positive developments within the Hungarian diaspora provide insights that could be used to redress language shift in other areas of the globe.

Biodata

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