

# **Do Multicultural Policies Work? Language Maintenance and Acculturation in Two Vintages of the Hungarian Diaspora in Queensland, Australia**

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## **Introduction**

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 (Clyne, 1991; Clyne, 1997; Smolicz, 1980, 1981, 1999). Rates of language loss and shift in Australia show that the multilingual heritage is very vulnerable even within the context of a highly multicultural society (Clyne & Kipp, 1997, 2000). This paper examines the effect of multicultural policies on the linguistic and cultural adjustment of 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 as a main factor in influencing patterns of social adjustment as well as language maintenance and shift. The paper argues that the wider social and policy context plays a significant role in the language development of ethnolinguistic minority communities. It provides some evidence that the Anglo-Saxon host society in Australia is seen as favourable for minority language maintenance and this potentially leads to increased societal bilingualism.

One of the most significant findings of the research is that the more recently arrived migrants tend to use Hungarian language at home with their children, significantly more than the older generation of Hungarian migrants. 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. The new vintage of Hungarian migrants were 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.

## **1. From assimilation to multiculturalism**

Sociohistorical factors, such as the political climate in the host country, have been widely described in language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) as crucial to understanding the LMLS patterns of a given speech community (Clyne, 1991; Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Conklin & Lourie, 1983; Fishman, 1989; Fishman, 1991; Gal, 1979; Kloss, 1966; Smolicz, 1999). Linguistic and social adjustment do not happen in a vacuum; relations between ethnolinguistic groups are influenced by a range of sociostructural and situational factors (Harwood, Howard, & Bourhis, 1994; Tajfel, 1974). Therefore, linguistic adjustment in language contact situations needs to be investigated and interpreted in its socio-structural context. This paper discusses the possible effect of the shift from assimilation to multiculturalism on the linguistic and social adjustment patterns of the Hungarian diaspora in Queensland, Australia.

Contemporary multicultural policies regard languages as of great value (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1989; National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1999). This official support, and the corresponding positive and tolerant wider social environment should provide an ideal social context for the maintenance of community languages. The shift from assimilation to multiculturalism in official policies should result in a shift from assimilationist acculturation strategies to strategies of integration, where migrants strive to keep their original culture and values while becoming fully participating members of the host society. As Smolicz (1999) emphasised, multiculturalism and multicultural education are vehicles for preserving ethnic groups' cultural core values and community literary languages.

Hungarians in Australia are among those ethnic groups, which appear to be language-centred, considering their ethnic languages to be among their core values (Smolicz, 1999). For such group members the value of their first language 'transcends any instrumental consideration, and represents a striving for self-fulfilment that makes the language a symbol of survival, and hence of autotelic significance' (Smolicz, 1999 p.29). This paper investigates how these political changes in the in the host country can affect the patterns of acculturation and language maintenance in an essentially language conscious community.

## **2. The Hungarian diaspora of Australia**

Hungarians represent a small community in Australia, especially in Queensland. According to the national census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001) 3,064 persons used Hungarian at home in Queensland, while this number was 24,485 in total in Australia. Hungarian language does not offer an economic benefit to the Australian society; therefore the language maintenance efforts of this community are largely dependent on what the community does for itself to keep its culture and language alive. In this context socio-cultural factors, including attitudes and acculturation strategies play an important role in shaping the linguistic repertoire of this community.

According to macro-sociolinguistic research based on census results the Hungarian community in Australia shows a trend towards shifting to English rather than maintaining its first language (Clyne & Kipp, 1997). The rate of shift in the first generation is reported by Clyne and Kipp as 24.4% in 1986, 26.7% in 1991 and 31.8% in 1996. These percentages represent the percentages of persons who were born in Hungary and who now speak only English at home. Considering that the range of shifts across countries varies from 3% for those born in the Former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, to 61.9% for those born in the Netherlands, Hungarian language shift rates occupy a middle ground, but seem to be increasing. This tendency is largely attributable to some demographic factors, such as the rapidly aging and declining population. Also, this decline is not compensated by significant numbers of newly migrating Hungarians.

In Queensland the situation is even less favourable for Hungarian, as in this state Hungarian represents a relatively small percentage of the non-English speaking population (0.1% in Queensland, as compared to 0.2% in New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. Clyne & Kipp also report a high ratio of intergenerational shift; that is a large proportion of Hungarians do not transmit their language to the next generation. In endogamous relations the rate of intergenerational shift is 64.2%, while in exogamous relations this figure is significantly higher, representing 89.4%. Similar differences are attributable to gender as well as age factors.

While these macro-level studies indicate important trends, it is necessary to carry out micro-level in-depth investigations, which contribute to a better understanding of the social and socio-cultural factors that promote or hinder first language maintenance or shift. These studies are crucial in the case of the Hungarian community, as census statistics; at least prior to the 2001 census did not provide sufficient information for calculating a valid percentage of language shift. This was mainly due to the fact that language shift statistics were mainly based on the 'country of birth' data. Country of birth, in case of Hungarians, however, did not represent a valid starting point for LMLS analysis, as a large number of Hungarians were born outside the current political borders of Hungary. A large percentage of ethnic Hungarians live in minority status in the Carpathian basin in the territory of Hungary's neighbouring countries. This was the result of border

realignments following World War I. Due to the large discrepancy between Hungary's political and ethnic borders, a large proportion of ethnic Hungarians migrated to Australia from Hungary's neighbouring countries and were mistakenly classified as Slovaks if they were born in Slovakia, Romanians, if they were born in Romania. This bias was pointed out by Clyne (1991) as well as Ambrosy (1984, 1990) who surveyed the Hungarian community in Melbourne. The 2001 census rectified this problem by including a question about ancestry; this allowed a better starting point for calculating LMLS trends for many communities where the country of birth did not coincide with the ethnic origin.

### 3. The research

The aim of the study was to provide insights into the linguistic ecology of the Hungarian diaspora in Queensland. It sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the acculturation process in the community? Do Hungarians tend to assimilate or integrate into the mainstream Australian society?
2. What are the characteristics of first generation language maintenance? Do Hungarians activate their language in various domains?
3. What are the trends of intergenerational language maintenance and shift? Do Hungarians transmit their language to their children?

The main aim of this paper is to contrast two vintages of Hungarian immigrants, and establish whether there are significant differences in terms of acculturation and language maintenance patterns between the early migration group who settled in Australia during the assimilationist times, and those who migrated after multicultural policies had been introduced.

#### 3.1 Methodology

For the purpose of the current research 50 Hungarian families were randomly selected from a database kept by the Hungarian Associations in Queensland, but for the purpose of this paper only those respondents who satisfied certain criteria were included in the analysis: (1) respondents had to be born in Hungary; (2) be married to a Hungarian (exogamous marriages were excluded to avoid bias due to exogamy versus endogamy); (3) respondents had to have children living in Australia; (4) had to have at least Level 3 proficiency in English according to the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (Ingram & Wylie, 1993). After this careful selection process, 54 respondents were kept for the purpose of the analysis. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire, which included 148 items and was designed to collect both quantitative as well as qualitative data. The survey was also followed up with a telephone interview, which allowed for clarification of missing or incomplete data and provided an opportunity to collect further qualitative data. The sample was split into two sub-groups according to the period of migration. The Early Migration Period (EMP) Group included those who migrated to Australia before 1972, while those who migrated after 1972 were included in the Late Migration Period (LMP) Group.

Respondents' attitude towards the host culture and people as well as their home culture and people were measured by using several items including perception of mentality, family life, child rearing, values in general, education, and people. A modified Likert scale was designed with 3 levels of positive and 3 levels of negative views (1-6 scale, 1 being least positive, 6 being most positive). The same questions were used in relation to Australian culture, which allowed statistical comparisons.

Respondents' patterns of social contact were examined in order to identify their acculturation strategy. They had to state how many contacts they had with Anglo-Australians and Hungarians and how they perceived their cultural identity. In line with the previously reviewed theories of identity, which recognises the possibility of dual identities, respondents had to choose from three options a, more Hungarian than Australian, b, more Australian than Hungarian and c, equally Australian and Hungarian. Two statements about migrants' role in the host society (Q132: Migrants should try to keep their values and traditions in

Australia; and Q133: Migrants should try to participate completely in Australian life) were adopted from Piontkowski *et al* (2000). In order to measure language activation, respondents were asked to indicate which language they used in different domains. The domains followed Fishman's (1989) categories. The domains incorporated family, public and intimate domains following Doucet's (1991) methodology applied in the study language maintenance in the Serbo-Croatian community of Queensland. Due to the limitation of the questionnaire, however, the study did not allow for a detailed analysis of each domain in terms of intensity or duration. Also, while measuring language use in intimate domains, such as swearing, praying and dreaming offered valuable insight into some psycholinguistic aspects of respondents' bilingualism, these domains were not analysed in detail.

### 3.2 Findings

#### 3.2.1 General description of the sample

The sample included a total of 54 respondents, 24 males and 30 females. In terms of their marital status 47 (87%) were married, 4 were (7.4%) divorced, and 3 (5.6%) were widowers. According to age, 16 respondents were in their 30s and 40s, 23 respondents were in their 50s and 60s, and 15 respondents were over 70. Forty-six respondents (85%) came from Hungary, while 8 (15%) came from minority status in Europe, from Vojvodina and Transylvania. Respondents came to Australia between 1949 and 1994. Twenty-four respondents arrived before 1972 (inclusive 1972), and 30 respondents arrived after 1972. A large proportion of (57%, n=30) respondents came to Australia for political reasons, a further 11% (n=6) migrated because they felt that they were not treated as equal in their country. These respondents represented those who came from minority status in Europe. All respondents represented endogamous relations. The two groups showed similar patterns in terms of their children's language of formal education. There was an approximately equal ratio of children in the two groups, who finished their primary education in Hungarian language. This was an important condition for ensuring the validity of the comparison between the children's Hungarian ability in the two groups.

#### 3.2.2 Attitudes towards multiculturalism

Overall, respondents had a mixed opinion of the Australian host society. Overall 51% agreed that Australians treat ethnic minorities as equals, 65% thought that Australians were open to migrants, 54% thought that Australians showed interest in other cultures, 61% agreed that Australians value the different cultures and languages in Australia. In their views about migrants' roles in the host society, they were more positive: 86.5% agreed that migrants should try to keep their values and traditions in Australia, and 77.4% agreed that migrants should participate completely in Australian life. The t-test did not show significant differences between the two groups, therefore the null hypothesis was kept.

#### 3.2.3 Patterns of social contact

Both sub-groups were characterized by extended social contact in the community. In the EMP Group 71% (n=17) had over 10 Hungarian contacts, 13% (n=3) had 5-10 contacts and 8% (n=2) had 3-5 contacts. In the LMP Group however, social contact with other Hungarians was more intense. Sixty-seven per cent (n=20) had over 10 Hungarian contacts, 13% (n=4) had 5-10 contacts, and 17% (n=5) had 3-5 contacts. It is important that no respondent reported a lack of contacts with Hungarian peers.

In terms of Australian contacts, the following was found: In the EMP Group 33% (n=8) had over 10 Australian contacts, 13% (n=3) had 5-10 Anglo-Australian contacts, and 29% (n=7) had 3-5 contacts. The most important finding here was that 21% (n=5) of the EMP Group reported that they had no contacts with Anglo-Australians at all, while there were no reports of lacking contacts with Anglo-Australians in the LMP Group (Pearson Chi-Square  $p < .05$ ). This finding suggests that the newly arrived Hungarian migrants are

more successful at establishing positive contacts with the mainstream Australian society, while some Hungarians who migrated to Australia during the assimilationist times do not seem to have contacts with Anglo-Australians. As the language barrier in this survey is ruled out as a possible explanation, attitudinal and other socio-cultural factors should be examined to investigate this further.

In the LMP Group 70% (21) showed a tendency to integration, 20% (6) separation, 7% (2) assimilation and no respondent showed deculturation. In the EMP Group the corresponding percentages were 58% (14) for integration, 17% (4) for separation, 13% (3) for assimilation and 8% (2) for deculturation. The Chi-square test did not show significant differences in the two groups in terms of their acculturation patterns. Still it is curious that the most negative acculturation strategy, deculturation, where migrants do not wish to establish positive contacts with the host society and they do not wish to keep their traditions was characteristic of the EMP Group only. Certainly, there seems to be a tendency in the LMP Group to adopt a positive acculturation strategy, where migrants keep their values and establish positive contacts with the host society at the same time.

The t-test did not show significant differences between the two groups, either in terms of their number of contacts with Hungarians in Australia or with mainstream Australians. Also, there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of their perception of the importance of contacts with mainstream Australians. However, the LMP Group regarded it as less important to keep in touch with other Hungarians in Australia ( $p < .05$ ) as well as with Hungarians in Hungary ( $p < .05$ ).

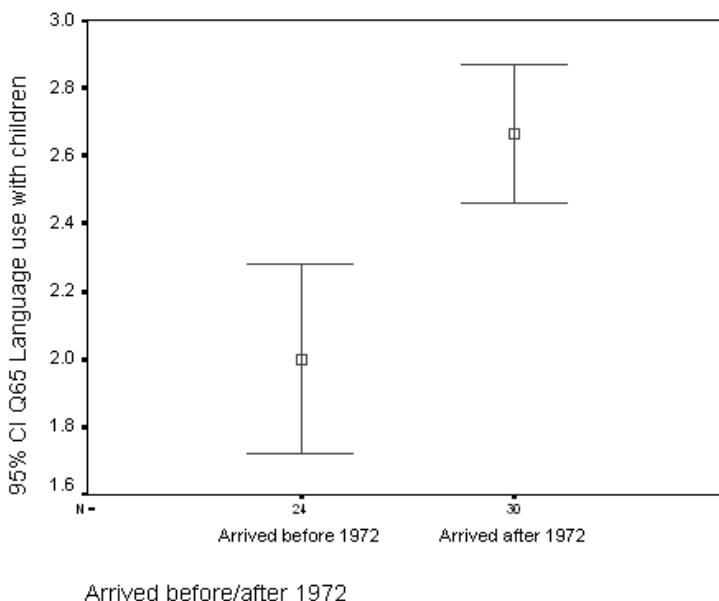
#### *3.2.4 Attitudes to Hungarian and Australian cultures*

The results of the t-test confirmed that there was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in the two groups in terms of their attitude towards Hungarian culture in Australia, the EMP Group being more positive. There was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of their attitudes towards Hungarian culture in general. Also, the two groups showed very similar attitudes towards Australian culture. All in all most respondents were fairly positive about Hungarian culture and Australian culture.

#### *3.2.5 Language use patterns in various domains*

Respondents were asked which language they used in the named domains. They had the choice of English, Hungarian or both English and Hungarian. Since all the respondents were first generation migrants who migrated to Australia at an adult age, questions in the family were limited to language use with spouse and children and did not include language use with parents, grandparents and siblings. A scale for measuring the intensity of the use of Hungarian was calculated. According to the results language use showed some variation across the family, as well as in public and intimate domains. While most respondents used Hungarian with their spouse (76% only Hungarian, 17% Hungarian and English), they did not seem to use Hungarian as much with their children: only 48% reported using solely Hungarian, 41% reported using both English and Hungarian and 11% reported using only English. All in all, it seems that the family domain is the most significant domain for the use of Hungarian. Outside the family domain, the activation of Hungarian language was significant with fellow countrymen in the street (59% used only Hungarian) and at church (39% used only Hungarian at church). In the intimate domains it seems that 61% of Hungarians count only in Hungarian, 56% reported dreaming in Hungarian, while 30% reported swearing only in Hungarian and another 30% reported writing the shopping list in Hungarian. As it was noted above, this information, however, was reflective of some psycholinguistic aspects of respondents' bilingualism and was not analysed further in detail.

The results of the t-tests showed a significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) between the two groups in their language use with their children, but no significant difference was found in the other domains.



**Figure 1** Use of Hungarian language with children according to period of arrival

Since parents' choice of a language with their children has direct implications for intergenerational language maintenance and shift, the results suggest tentative predictions about the LMLS patterns in the community. The findings suggest that the LMP Group is more successful at transmitting their language to the next generation. On the other hand the EMP Group reported a significantly less intense use of Hungarian with their children, which is reflective of a higher rate of intergenerational shift. This finding was also confirmed by the qualitative data gathered during the follow-up interviews. Several respondents from this group reported that they were not motivated to speak to their children Hungarian when their children were young, as they felt that the dominant Anglo-Australian society of the time demanded a swift assimilation from them. One of the parents remembered the time with the following words:

*It was a shame at the time to teach a native language to a child, even if the parents had a strong accent, they continued to speak English, because of the stigma attached to speaking another language"*

This comment clearly explains the connection between the assimilationist official policies, and the corresponding negative societal attitudes towards migrants and their languages of the time, and the higher rates of intergenerational language shift in minority communities, such as Hungarian. Some other responses suggested that the parents, may have tried to resist this expectation to assimilate into the mainstream Australian society, but their children did not want to be 'different'. A mother explained the reason behind the shift to English in her family with the following words:

*The children wanted to be Australian and did not associate themselves with Hungarians when they were young. Now the situation is a little different.... Now they are proud of their Hungarian background, but they still do not consider themselves Hungarians. They call themselves Australians with Hungarian parents.*

Another mother reported that she did everything to teach her daughter Hungarian, but the assimilationist attitudes of the time prevented it:

*One day she [my daughter] came home from school and she said: Anya én ausztrál vagyok, és ezentúl csak angolul beszélek'. [Mother, I am Australian, and from now I only speak in English].*

*Mindig bántották az iskolában, egyáltalán, hogy 'etnik' volt. [She was always ridiculed at school for being 'ethnic'].*

Another respondent described the first school experience with these words:

*The first school was not a very good experience for me. We were treated as if we were mentally retarded, just because we did not speak the language. The teachers were most surprised that we were good at arithmetic, e.g. In general the attitude to the "New Australians" at the time was very negative. Children were ashamed of their background and did not want to use their first language. They learnt very quickly what it meant to be a "wog" or a "dego" in Australia.*

### 3.2.6 *Language maintenance activities*

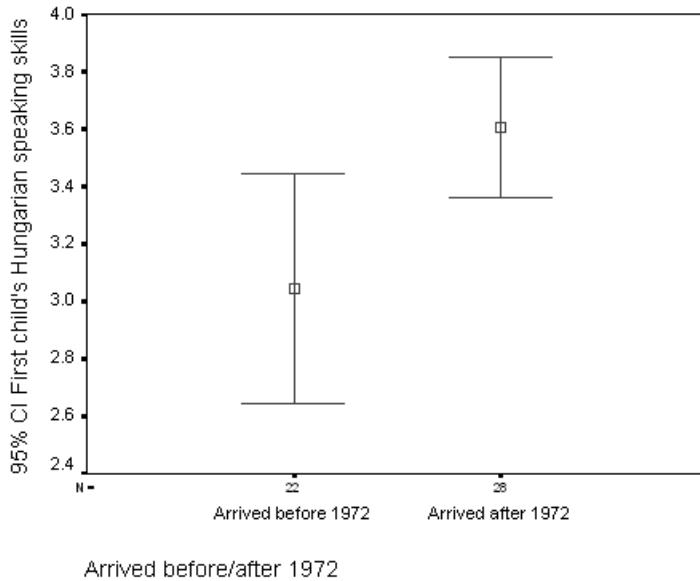
In the whole sample language use with Hungarian peers living in Australia represented the highest percentage, 83.3% used Hungarian with other Hungarians at least monthly or more often; 81.5% watched Hungarian TV at least monthly, including 53.7 percent weekly; 72.2% listened to Hungarian radio at least monthly, including 44.4 per cent weekly; 66.7% read Hungarian books at least monthly. The least intense language activation was diagnosed for letter writing in Hungarian (46.3% at least monthly), watching Hungarian films (40.7% at least monthly); and writing Hungarian emails (31.5% at least monthly).

While there was no significant difference in the two groups in terms of their overall language maintenance activities, the individual items showed some differences. The t-test showed significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in listening to the radio, watching Hungarian TV and writing Hungarian emails. The EMP Group was more active in listening to the radio and watching TV, while the LMP Group was significantly more active at writing emails in Hungarian.

### 3.2.7 *Intergenerational L1 maintenance*

The t-tests confirmed that there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of the children's Hungarian skills. In the LMP Group the first child's Hungarian skills were significantly better ( $p < .05$ ) than in the EMP Group.

The second and third children's Hungarian skills were not compared, because a high percentage of these children in the LMP Group were often too young. In this group a high proportion of these children have not reached their linguistic maturation, therefore the parents' judgement of their Hungarian skills was not a valid reflection of their success, or motivation to teach these children Hungarian. However, it was found that the LMP Group considered it much more important that their children learned Hungarian ( $p < .01$ ), and they also regarded their children's attitude towards learning Hungarian as more positive ( $p < .01$ ) in comparison to the EMP Group. This finding is promising and shows that the LMP Group was more motivated to transfer their first language to the next generation; also they seemed to be more successful at transmitting their own motivation to their children.



**Figure 2** First child's Hungarian speaking skills

## Conclusion

The findings of this research have shown that those Hungarians who migrated to Australia in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s have different acculturation patterns from those who migrated in the 1980s and 1990s. It seems that the period of arrival and 'vintage' of migration are important factors in shaping the social and linguistic adjustment of minority communities. The fact that members of the LMP Group use more Hungarian with their children, have direct implications for intergenerational language maintenance and shift. Also, Hungarians who arrived in the 1980s and 1990s regarded it more important that their children learned to speak Hungarian, and reported more positive attitudes from their children towards learning this language. This finding suggests that the 'newer' vintage of Hungarians have better chances of intergenerational first language maintenance. A social environment, where migrants are not expected to assimilate and forget about their languages also supports and reinforces this motivation. Respondents' attitudes towards the host as well as the home cultures in general seem to be equally positive, and that in itself is reflective of the success of multicultural policies in terms of generating positive cross-cultural attitudes and interethnic relations. The interviews clearly pointed out the benefits of multicultural policies and the difficulties that Hungarian migrants, along with other ethnic communities, faced during the assimilationist times. It seems that today, Hungarians see multicultural Australian society as an accepting society, which treats migrants as equals.

The present study provided an insight into some aspects of the linguistic ecology of the Hungarian community of Queensland. Still, there is a need for further research in order to establish whether this relative positive picture is sustainable in the long term. Further diachronic research is necessary to compare the present state of the community's linguistic and social practices with future practices.

While the findings of this study are not negligible, there is a need for further investigation into the relationship between acculturation processes and language maintenance processes in minority communities. There is a need to undertake longitudinal investigations to establish the effects of political and socio-

cultural contexts both in the host country as well as in the source country. These studies can contribute significantly to the theoretical model of understanding language shift and maintenance, and provide some further empirical evidence for the effects of multicultural policies on interethnic relations in multicultural societies.

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# **ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism**

edited by James Cohen, Kara T. McAlister,  
Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan

**Cascadilla Press   Somerville, MA   2005**

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ISBN 978-1-57473-210-8 CD-ROM  
ISBN 978-1-57473-107-1 library binding (5-volume set)

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