

# **Language Maintenance Revisited: An Australian Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Language maintenance has been an issue debated whenever languages come into contact. This paper presents a detailed discussion of the reasons most often cited as to why languages should be maintained, with a specific focus on Australia because of the country's multilingual makeup. Australia currently has about 150 aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages still in use, and more than 100 languages other than English are spoken by its immigrant population. However, these diverse language resources have been allowed to steadily decline. The arguments for the maintenance of Australia's languages are categorized loosely based on Thieberger's (1990) work and each of the arguments is discussed: (a) group integrity and group membership, (b) identity, (c) cultural heritage, (d) social-humanitarian and economic implication, (e) assimilation, and (f) cognitive development and academic achievement. This paper argues that there are many apparent advantages to maintaining languages.

## **Linguistic Diversity in Australia**

Multilingual societies, such as Australia, offer great opportunities for in-depth sociolinguistic studies, including those focusing on the idea of language maintenance (LM) and shift. Language shift and its ramifications are among the most important aspects of situations where different languages come into contact because most often through social or political processes one or more language(s) become dominant at the expense of the others. This is certainly the case in Australia. The languages spoken by the original inhabitants of this country and those spoken by its immigrants have all lost out to English, and most of these languages are close to becoming extinct (in the case of aboriginal languages) or relegated to the status of foreign languages with no native speakers living in Australia.

Because of its history as a destination for a variety of immigrant groups, in addition to hosting its multifaceted aboriginal population, Australia is linguistically quite diverse. Apart from the 150 aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages still in use, more than 100 languages other than English are spoken in Australia. According to the 1996 census, 14.6% of the Australian population speaks a language other than English at home. However, because of the specific wording of the census question, which only asked for the *home* language, it is likely that for the more established immigrant communities (for example, Italian, Greek, or German) the actual use of languages other than English out of the home domain could be underestimated. This is because members of the second or third generation might, as they reported in the census, only use English at home with their immediate or nuclear family, but use their community language when visiting or communicating with their older relatives and friends (Cavallaro 1997; Clyne & Kipp, 1997). Australia's aboriginal heritage is linguistically very rich (albeit in diminishing degrees), and its immigrant population, mainly from Europe and Asia, has added to Australia's linguistic diversity. However, in a worldwide context, Australia has not taken advantage of its existing language resources. Australia's large number of native speakers of languages other than English has dwindled in recent times. The census data shows an increase in the size of the immigrant communities thanks to the expansion of the second, third, and subsequent generations. However, these increases in the communities have not been matched by an increase in the number of proficient speakers of the languages of those communities. Why is Australia with its apparent linguistic diversity heading toward monolingualism? One answer and by no means the only one, is that the primary-language (L1) skills of the non-English-speaking immigrants and their descendants are being neglected by the government and the state education systems (Gatt-Rutter & Cavallaro, 1991). Multilingualism is not actively or effectively being promoted in Australia. At the same time the L1 skills of non-English speakers in Australia are allowed to disappear with little thought to their maintenance.

All languages spoken in Australia, except for the aboriginal languages, were brought to the continent by immigrants. English was originally brought to Australia as the language of the colonizing power (Great Britain) that used Australia as a penal colony during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then Australia has been an English-speaking country and English has always been the dominant language in this society. This has meant that all other languages of native Australians and immigrants have been relegated to minority status. The terms *foreign* and *migrant* languages have been widely used in the past by English-speaking Australians and by researchers as well to refer to all languages other than English and aboriginal languages. The term "foreign", however, did not take into account languages spoken by large groups of immigrants, such as Greeks and Italians. Researchers (see Clyne, 1982) argued that if a language is spoken within a country and the group that speaks it has in essence become

part of the Australian life, this language cannot possibly be classified as foreign, and the term “migrant” does not seem applicable to the use of non-English languages by Australian-born persons (Clyne, 1991). In the 1970s and 1980s, the term *ethnic language* began to be widely used as an alternative to foreign and migrant language by people looking for a more politically correct term. Clyne (1991) points out, however, that this usage ignores the fact that some languages are spoken by more than one ethnic group. Other terms such as *Australian language*, *community language*, and *Australian language other than English* were used in the 1970s to refer to the non-English languages spoken in Australia. Since the early 1980s, community language has been used to refer to a subgroup of languages other than English, while Clyne (1982) used community languages other than English as a way of stressing that English is a community language as well.

### **Maintenance of Minority Languages**

Arguments for the maintenance of minority languages have been made by many linguists around the world (Clyne, 1982, 1991; Fishman, 1977, 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). In Australia by far the most compelling and vocal supporters of maintenance of all languages other than English have been people involved in or working with aboriginal communities. Although an explanation of the differences and similarities between the aboriginal and immigrant language situations is beyond the scope of this article, I believe that the arguments for the maintenance of Australian aboriginal languages are relevant to all minority languages in Australia.

In his classic discussion, Thieberger (1990) brought together the many reasons why aboriginal languages should be maintained. However, he posited the following as the strongest argument in support of LM for the Australian aboriginal communities: “It is ultimately by appeal to morality and social justice that we find justification for Aboriginal language maintenance” (p. 333). While I do not disagree with his sentiments, I cannot agree that minority groups must still rely on the majority group’s sense of justice and morality to ensure the survival of their own languages. There are compelling reasons, other than appealing to justice and morality, why languages need to be maintained. These arguments will be discussed in the following sections.

The aim of this discussion is to outline the arguments for LM and for bilingualism and multilingualism by taking Australia as a case study. In Australia, these arguments must take into account the issues involved in the maintenance of the languages of origin not merely of present-day Australians (regardless of their origins), but of future generations of Australians as well. I will do this by proposing a categorization loosely based on Thieberger’s (1990) work. Like Thieberger, I have tried to bring together all possible reasons why languages should be maintained. I will discuss the categories in no

particular order. The proposed categories are (a) group integrity and group membership, (b) identity, (c) cultural heritage, (d) social-humanitarian and economic implications, (e) assimilation, and (f) cognitive development and academic achievement.

### Group Integrity and Group Membership

Integrity refers to the factors that keep the group together; membership denotes the factors that identify someone as being part of a particular group. Criteria for membership in an ethnic group may include ancestry, religion, physiognomy, and many aspects of social culture and behavior (Fishman, 1977). Since most ethnic groups have a distinct language or dialect and these linguistic characteristics can be necessary attributes for membership in the group, we can surmise that the mother tongue is a key criterion for ethnic-group membership. This is supported by some researchers (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977), who have proposed that ethnic-group members can identify more closely with those who share their language than with those who share other major aspects of their cultural background, such as religion. Other researchers (Giles & Johnson, 1981, 1987) have extended this observation to also include situations when criteria for ethnic-group membership are obvious and unquestionable. For example, even in cases where skin color is one of the criteria for ethnic-group membership, an ethnic language variety has been reported to remain a key criterion. In the Australian context, Smolicz (1979) has argued that all ethnic groups regard language as an important aspect of their ethnicity. For example, the Greeks in Australia consider language as a core element that keeps the ethnic group together.

Novak (1971) defined an ethnic group as a group with historical memory, real or imaginary. He also proposed that one belongs to such a group either by choice or involuntarily. Novak explained that in a situation, for example, when the ethnicities of the grandparents were different, one could choose how to define one's own ethnicity and therefore ignore the "other" portion of their heritage. Novak posited that this is because:

[Ethnic memory] is not a set of events remembered, but rather a set of instincts, feelings, intimacies, expectations, patterns of emotion and behavior; a sense of reality; a set of stories for individuals—and for the peoples as a whole—to live out. (p. 56)

Francis (1947) stated that "every ethnic group has a distinctive culture, but a common culture pattern does not necessarily constitute an ethnic group" (p. 397). He cited as an example the case of peasants who, no matter where or when they lived, all show similar or identical culture traits. However, they cannot be said to belong to the same social or ethnic group. On the other hand, Barth (1969) argued that the boundaries of an ethnic group were defined by its membership, which was characterized by distinctive and relevant factors

(such as race, religion, cultural traits, and language). He added that the elements of culture that set a group apart from other ethnic groups may change, and factors that defined the boundaries of an ethnic group can also change. Barth's concepts are applicable to the ethnic groups in Australia whose boundaries become quite fluid through exposure to the more dominant English-speaking group.

The definitions of ethnic group outlined above focus on the psychological identity of the group. That is, they have concentrated on the process by which individuals identify themselves as being different from others or see themselves as members of a different group. At the same time, ethnicity can be seen as a process by which others can categorize people as belonging to a particular ethnic group (Isajiw, 1980). This process led Weber (1968) to define an ethnic groups as:

. . . human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief of common ethnicity. This belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community, unless drastic differences in the custom, physical type, or, *above all, language* [italics added] exist among its members. (p. 389)

Isajiw (1980) did warn that any definition of ethnicity may be either too narrow or too general. An analysis of definitions of the term has led Isajiw to propose that any definition is arbitrary to an extent and that "variations among the definitions depend on the level of generalization, the methodological approach used, and the types of variables included" (p. 15). The generalization can be abstract, as in defining ethnicity in general, or specific, as in defining it for particular places: that is, when asking what ethnicity means in North America or in Australia.

Isajiw (1980) rightly pointed out that for Weber, ethnicity was a matter of belief. Isajiw went on to argue that other definitions did not assume that the political community alone inspired the belief in common ethnicity. Ethnicity could also be identified on the basis of other attributes, such as cultural differences, race, language, religion, and so on. Ethnic groups, therefore, can form on the basis of any such attributes or a combination of them.

From his analysis of the different definitions of ethnicity, Isajiw (1980) outlined the most important and common attributes of membership for an ethnic group. In order of importance, these are:

1. Common national or geographic origin or common ancestors.
2. Same culture or customs.
3. Religion.
4. Race or physical characteristics.
5. Language.
6. Consciousness of kind: "We feeling," sense of peoplehood, loyalty.
7. *Gemeinschaft* relations.
8. Common values or ethos.
9. Separate institutions.
10. Minority or subordinate status, or majority or dominant status.
11. Immigrant group.

Isajiw then collapsed Attributes 3, 5, 8, and 9 (religion, language, common values, and separate institutions) into the category of *culture* or *cultural traits*. From this he went on to propose the following definition of ethnicity:

A group or category of persons who have common ancestral origin and the same cultural traits, who have sense of peoplehood and *Gemeinschaft* type of relations, who are of immigrant background and have either minority or majority status within a larger society. (p. 20)

Isajiw (1980) also pointed out that common ancestral origin implied that it was the ancestors or their descendants who could be said to have possessed the same cultural traits. However, this indicates that a person is born into a group that shares cultural traits and, therefore, is socialized into them. The person does not have a choice as to which group he or she is born into. There is, therefore, an involuntary aspect of belonging to a particular group (see Novak's definition, presented earlier in this article). This involuntary nature of an ethnic group is tied in with the *Gemeinschaft* type of relations among the members of the group. This refinement allowed Isajiw to come up with a more concise definition of ethnicity. He concluded that ethnicity referred to "an involuntary group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who identify themselves and/or are identified by others as belonging to the same involuntary group." (p. 24)

Ethnicity is not determined solely by the group(s) involved. Attitudes of outgroup members, that is, of people who do not belong to the group in question, are of paramount importance. As Isajiw (1980) pointed out, so were perceptions by others (both outgroup and ingroup members) of how "ethnic" an individual is. Ross (1979) said that "language can differentiate a collective 'we' from an external 'they'" (p. 5). Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) referred to large experimental evidence indicating that language was an important

marker (perhaps the most important maker) of ethnicity. They proposed that we should view many language varieties as acquired characteristics rather than inherited or ascriptive (i.e., determined by birth). They argued that language can be a stronger cue to an individual's own sense of ethnic belonging than inherited characteristics (such as skin color), since acquired characteristics may be attributed internally rather than externally. In other words, while paternity (inherited characteristics) may be the key to ethnicity as far as how the individuals are perceived by others, patrimony (acquired characteristics) may be the guide as to how ethnic individuals perceive themselves to be.

The definition of ethnic group is tied to those things that act as unifying elements of an ethnic group of people. That is, the factors that serve to unite the group's members, such as a common language, a system of shared beliefs, and other common traditions (food, clothing, residential preferences, etc.). Language plays an important role. It is a powerful uniting factor and a strong indication of group integrity.

Another aspect of the definition of ethnic group is the need to maintain some kind of boundary between the group being studied (the ingroup) and all other groups (the outgroup). A weak boundary will weaken the group by allowing movement in and out, and, as Barth (1969) said, can lead to change. A strong boundary, on the other hand, is characterized by a high rate of endogamy. Strong boundaries will also protect groups that have strong internal conflicts. The French in Canada offer an example of how a group has survived by establishing a strong "French" boundary around Quebec; meanwhile, the Hutterites on the Canadian prairies and even the urban Jews have also survived through rigid endogamy and a strong sense of collective responsibility. All these groups have also been able to maintain their languages (see Fasold, 1984; Wardhaugh, 1985, 1986).

## Identity

As pointed out in the previous section, language is seen as one of the most important keys to ethnic or group identification. In multilingual situations, such as the one in Australia, there has been considerable pressure on ethnic or minority groups to assimilate into the majority group, and this pressure has been centered on forcing these groups to give up their languages and adopt English. The adoption of English has been seen as a sign of becoming a "real Australian." While the loss of their L1 has not been viewed by everyone as a necessary step toward becoming an integral part of Australian society, unfortunately, for many groups and individuals, their adoption of English has been at the expense of their L1.

Language is generally regarded as a salient dimension of ethnicity, and as such is one of the most important articulations of ethnic identity both at an individual and at a group level (Giles et al. 1977). This belief has led Lambert

(1980) to posit that communicating in a language other than that of one's own group can lead to a sense of not belonging to the same culture as one's own ethnic-heritage group. One's sense of ethnic identity may therefore be threatened or lessened in some way; this is reflected in particular among groups that occupy low-power positions in terms of socioeconomic status when their members use the dominant group's language (Lambert, 1979, 1980; Giles & Johnson, 1981). This is one of the many reasons why many ethnic groups consider the loss of their language as symbolizing the loss of their identity as a group. Wardhaugh (1983) warns that this aspect can have an extreme result. For groups whose language has a profound value as a symbol of their ethnicity or as a clear mark of ethnic identity, its loss is regarded as the loss of their most precious asset and may be followed by complete (not just linguistic) assimilation (see section on Assimilation).

In Australia, the notion of an Australian identity is linked with the English language, in particular, with a specific Australian inflection or pronunciation of the English language, and this inflection is mandatory if one wants to be accepted as fully "ethnic" Australian. This is a serious problem for many members of immigrant communities now living in Australia because participating in a speech community is not the same as belonging to or being a member of such a community (Hymes, 1977). In Australia, many English speakers are considered foreigners because they lack the correct inflection or pronunciation of English. Williams (1992) proposed that membership in a community involved shared knowledge of the rules for the interpretation and production of speech, and this was tied in very closely with the concept of competence in the community's language. The interaction within a community was dependent on "the speech networks that link community members through a shared knowledge of forms of speech and ways of speaking" (p. 181). In Australia, many immigrants do not share this knowledge with English speakers, so immigrants cannot have the identity of fully ethnic Australian.

## Cultural Heritage

Maintaining the individual's sense of cultural heritage is a strong argument for LM. This argument follows directly from the previous sections, where it was discussed that language is an important factor in the preservation of group integrity, and a clear marker of ethnicity and group identity. It has also been argued that language is a strong carrier of a group's cultural heritage. The importance of language in communicating and preserving culture will be discussed in detail in this section.

Gunew (1994) presented two definitions of the term *culture*. One is the sociological or anthropological definition, which defines culture as "every aspect of life" (p. 2). It is an inclusive notion of the various elements of everyday life, for example, food, religion, and sport. As discussed in the section on Group Integrity, Isajiw's (1980) definition of ethnicity includes references



to a group's cultural traits, one of these traits being language. Williams (1981) also includes language as a specific cultural activity. He proposes that one definition of culture is "the informing spirit of a whole way of life, which is manifest over the whole range of social activities but is most evident in 'specifically cultural activities'—a language, styles of art, kinds of intellectual work" (p. 11). The other meaning of culture put forward by Gunew is the notion of culture as involving the arts. This notion includes heritage and tradition "or what a culture wishes to preserve as manifestations of its imaginative and intellectual life" (p. 2). The idea of preserving some cultural traits is also found in Williams's preferred definition, which sees culture as the "signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (p. 13). The reference to "communication" in Williams's definition clearly highlights the importance of language as a medium for culture.

From a sociolinguistic point of view on LM, therefore, cultural heritage can be analyzed in terms of what it means for speakers of a language to lose it in the space of a few generations. For these speakers the loss of their language can mean losing touch with their cultural heritage. For most people, language is the carrier of culture. Therefore, people who do not have contact with their heritage language are outside their culture. Just as an Italian (in Italy) requires contact with Italian culture in order to be accepted as "Italian," an Irish-Australian requires contact with both Irish and Australian cultures, and an Italo Australian with Italian as well as Australian culture. Following Fishman's (1996) thought below, these people cannot keep their cultural heritage solely through the medium of English. Fishman stated that:

The most important relationship between language and culture that gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Take it away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. The culture could not be expressed and handed on in any other way. What would be left? When you are talking about the language, most of what you are talking about is the culture. That is, you are losing all those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality that you are talking about. (para. 6)

He also posited the view that there was a symbolic relationship between language and culture:

That is, the language stands for that whole culture. It represents it in the minds of the speakers and the minds of outsiders. It just stands for it and sums it up for them—the whole economy, religion, health care system, philosophy, all of that together is represented by the language. (para. 7)

In Australia, there is considerable support and encouragement for cultural maintenance. There is considerable funding available at state level for multicultural activities and community programs. The National Policy on Languages (NPL) (Lo Bianco, 1987) does make provisions for the possibility of cultural maintenance through the L1 at all educational levels. That is, the policy makes particular reference to the teaching of community languages as part of L1 maintenance, and a second language (L2) (English) for intercultural reasons and academic development. At the same time it supports aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages through the provisions for bilingual and bicultural education. These provisions, though, have not had a chance to filter through to the communities and schools in any considerable amount or with any measurable degree of success, and seem almost impossible, in any single school, to deliver in languages as diverse as, say, Urdu and Cambodian. Indeed, the pluralist and multicultural ideals promoted by Lo Bianco have been somewhat dampened by Dawkins's (1991) Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP). As May (1997) pointed out: "The NPL's broad concern with ethnic identity, language rights, and language diversity as a social, cultural and economic resource has been *eclipsed* by the far narrower economic-rationalist tenets reflected in the ALLP document" (p. 144).

### Social-Humanitarian and Economic Implications

There are further implications in the argument about the maintenance of minority languages and cultures. For the aged, LM means the availability of L1 speakers to provide care and companionship to those who cannot communicate in English. Recent changes in the patterns of immigration to Australia, especially the slowing down of immigration from Europe, are leading to an ever-increasing shortage of L1 speakers of community languages. This problem could only be overcome if sufficient Australian-born people were trained to a high enough competence to break Australia's dependence on immigration for fluent speakers of non-Indigenous languages other than English. The efforts and costs involved in training absolute beginners in a language are obviously higher than those needed to train people who already have varying degrees of competence in their L1. These social-humanitarian and economic arguments are strong reasons for encouraging the maintenance of community languages.

In economic terms, the situation in regard to the immigrant minorities can also be analyzed in other ways. Gatt-Rutter (1992) proposed that there were two important economic factors to be considered when discussing the plight of immigrant communities. The first factor involves a mixture of what he calls language and acculturation economics. This takes into account the fact that language and social culture are the biggest single investments that anyone ever makes in life. The second and more obvious factor is made up of the relationship between migration and labor economics. This accounts for the

situation where immigrants belonging to linguistic minorities bear the main cost of immigration. Most people in Australia see the costs of immigration solely from the host culture's point of view, that is, in terms of what it costs to provide services such as English education and the aid provided to those with refugee status. What many people do not take into account is the price paid by the people who migrate to another country and the fact that the price is higher when the dominant language in the host country is a different one than their own. The price paid occurs in terms of the language disabilities suffered by the first generation; the language stripping that the group suffers; the de-culturing or loss of their culture experience; and the inevitable discrimination, prejudice, and educational, social, and economic disadvantages that the group (especially the first generation) has to suffer (Dorian, 1981). Workers in the host country also bear some of the cost in terms of restraint on wage rates and bargaining power, because immigrants usually work longer hours for less and do not join unions. However, in no way can they be said to suffer the same social and cultural problems as immigrants.

### Assimilation

A distinction has been made between the process of *cultural assimilation* and that of *structural assimilation* (for a more detailed discussion, see Wardhaugh, 1983). In cultural assimilation, a minority group identifies with the dominant culture by giving up some of its special characteristics in favor of adopting those of the dominant culture. At the same time, the minority group may keep many of its traditional structures and institutions, modifying them as little as possible as circumstances dictate. In structural assimilation, the dominant group in no way discriminates against the minority group and allows its members to have complete and equal access to all the opportunities within it. The minority group members in turn do not further develop any of their traditional practices, institutions, and so forth, nor do they totally give any up, leading to a shared set of characteristics for the society as a whole. That is, the minorities influence the majority and other minority groups, creating a blended culture. Structural assimilation can only occur in a truly multicultural society. Day (1985) pointed out that members of the minority groups themselves also participated in the replacing of their L1. He posited that although outsiders did play a major role in the loss of the language, in the example of language loss by Chamorros and Hawaiians, it was only when the speakers themselves saw the benefit (or necessity) of acquiring and using the dominant language (English) that their own languages were allowed to disappear. In Australia the main push for assimilation comes from the little or, in some languages, lack of L1 instruction provided at the primary and secondary school levels. The L1 then is relegated to the home domain and lost in two or three generations (for an in-depth discussion of language shift in Australia, see Clyne, 1988; Clyne & Jaehrling, 1989; regarding the United States, see Fishman, Gertner, Lowy, &

Milan, 1985; Hakuta, 1986; Veltman, 1984; and regarding Canada, see O'Bryan, Reitz, & Kuplowska, 1976). It is more and more a case of second and subsequent generations of immigrant backgrounds who relearn their heritage language as an L2.

However, as Gatt-Rutter and Cavallaro (1991) pointed out, despite the assimilation of minority groups through the process of language shift, (i.e., the group stopped using the L1 and adopted English) and deculturation, a culturally impoverished ethnicity still persisted to a great extent among these minority groups. This is because these groups would still not be regarded as part of the majority or dominant group and at the same time they have lost their L1 and ethnic cultural heritage. This is regarded by both the majority and the other minority groups as a sort of negative ethnicity, especially when it is marked by physical characteristics. This attitude is reflected in the negative self-image and low self-esteem of the minority group who has undergone this process, the sense felt within the group of being discriminated against, and feelings of disaffection and marginalization, along with not belonging to the mainstream culture and not having a culture or language of their own. It comes as no surprise that these features are coupled with relatively high rates of unemployment and delinquency. Evidence from the United States shows a general tendency for social stratification to separate along ethnic and racial lines, most visible in the cases of Blacks and Hispanics (Ayala & Dixon, 1979; Kringas & Lewins, 1981; Martin, 1976; Torres Trueba, 1979). In Australia, this is most visible in the cases of the aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders, and many of the immigrant ethnic groups, especially in the first generation and those from non-British backgrounds (most of all, those from non-English-speaking backgrounds) (Castles, Booth, & Wallace, 1984; Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, & Morrissey, 1988). It is also true that some ethnic groups have done better than their Anglo Australian counterparts in socioeconomic terms. For instance, the more established European communities (such as the Greek, Italian, and German) are well represented in both professional and trade areas. Also, there is a high rate of speakers of languages from India in professional positions (Kipp, Clyne, & Pauwels, 1995).

At the same time, the position of certain ethnic groups within the lower socioeconomic strata of the Australian population contributes to the negative image, by the ingroup and by the outgroup, associated with belonging to such ethnic groups; these minority groups are obviously caught in a vicious circle with no visible means of escape. Tajfel (1978) is one researcher who offers a way out of this vicious circle. He suggested that the governments should grant official recognition to all ethnic minority languages. This act would be one of the most evident and powerful confirmations of identity, enhancing ethnic minority groups' dignity by maintaining their separation from the dominant culture and allowing them to develop positive self-definitions.

In this section on assimilation, two problems involved in language shift have been highlighted. One is a generational problem, that is, that language shift most affects the generation of migrants who left their native country at a young age, the children born in the new country, and the subsequent generations. This is because they are the ones who are exposed to the dominant language from a young age and they are most influenced by the pressures brought on them by the dominant culture. Lieberson (1972, 1980) referred to this phenomenon as *intergenerational switching*. The other problem, as Gatt-Rutter (1992) pointed out, was that there was also the transgenerational problem of impoverished ethnicity and incomplete enculturation into the host society. It is true that these problems improve over time. For example, in the United States, Canada, and Australia, Irish, Italians, and other immigrant groups had severe socioeconomic problems in the past when the initial waves of immigration came. However, these groups have largely advanced economically in subsequent generations and have become more acculturated. This acculturation has come at the expense of these groups' languages and cultural traditions, which have largely been abandoned in favor of English and the host societies' own cultural heritages.

### Cognitive Development and Academic Achievement

One of the major arguments for LM originates from research on the cognitive development of children. It is generally accepted now that speaking more than one language leads to enhanced cognitive abilities.

Studies up to the 1960s led researchers (Darcy, 1953; Jensen, 1962; Saer, 1923; Smith, 1923) to believe that being bilingual or multilingual resulted in various forms of cognitive deficiencies. The common underlying assumption was that the psycholinguistic burden of processing two or more languages exerted a negative effect on cognitive development. Most of these studies have been somewhat discredited on the basis of faulty methodology. More recent studies, however, have indicated that there are advantages accrued from being able to speak more than one language.

Children who speak more than one language have been found to be more flexible and more capable of divergent thinking while also being more sensitive to the metalinguistic aspects of communication than their monolingual counterparts (for a detailed analysis, see, e.g., Ben-Zeev, 1977; Cahill, 1987; Hakuta, 1986; Landry, 1974; Peal & Lambert, 1962; for a review of the area, see Hakuta & Díaz, 1984; Lambert, 1980). More importantly, Hakuta and Díaz investigated the causal relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development and concluded that it was, in fact, bilingualism that led to enhanced cognitive development and not vice versa.

Another side of the cognitive argument for bilingualism, and bilingual education in particular, is summarized by Cummins's (1979) "developmental interdependence" hypothesis, in which he argued that in a situation where

children spoke more than one language and their L1 was a minority language, the competence attained by these children in their L2 was partially dependent on the type and level of competence attained in their L1 at the time when they were immersed in the L2.

Lambert (1975) indicated that an important distinction needed to be made between immersion, leading to additive bilingualism, and submersion, leading to subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism refers to the situation where minority children are schooled in the majority language without any consideration of their social and linguistic situation at home. This leads to these children to be submerged in a language environment where none of their languages flourish. As Lambert pointed out, if children were placed in an environment where they came in contact with a totally new language before they had a chance to develop their language skills in their L1, no positive results were observed, and there might be a negative effect on the children's cognitive growth. This issue has been debated in terms of *semilingualism*. Even before Lambert coined the term subtractive bilingualism to describe this effect, Hansegård (1968, cited in Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981) had proposed the notion of semilingualism to account for the situations where speakers were not proficient in either their L1 or their second (or successive) language. However, the idea of semilingualism has sparked some heated debates (for a critique of semilingualism, see MacSwan, 2000; Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1986; Romaine, 1994). The opposite (additive bilingualism) is true of a properly designed and implemented immersion program. Cummins (1976) hypothesized that a bilingual child must achieve a level of language competence in order to avoid any possible negative effect of speaking more than one language, and another (higher) level in order to gain any benefits from not being monolingual. As mentioned earlier, Cummins went on to argue, through his developmental interdependence hypothesis, that the level of competence in children's L2 depends on the level of competence they reached in their L1.

What the research outlined above has proven without a doubt is that the nature and the quality of language support, through bilingual education, do make a difference in whether children can obtain any benefit from speaking more than one language (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

A number of studies have been carried out to determine how the academic achievement of bilinguals compares with that of monolinguals. The bulk of the research has been centered on the benefits of bilingual education vis-à-vis monolingual education. To prove the benefits conclusively has been quite difficult due to the variation in bilingual programs and in the background of the children in these programs.

This difficulty has sparked some discussion among researchers. The most noticeable is the debate over Rossell and Baker's (1996) findings. Rossell and Baker concluded that there was no difference in the academic achievement of bilingual language-minority students and that of their monolingual peers.

However, Krashen (1996, 1999) and Cummins (n.d.) drew attention to many inconsistencies in their study. Cummins, in particular, argued that Rossell and Baker's study actually proved the effectiveness of bilingual and trilingual education.

Other researchers (Greene, 1998; Thomas & Collier, 2002) have reached the conclusion that there is a positive effect of bilingual education on the academic achievement of bilinguals. Thomas and Collier conducted an extensive study of the education services provided for language-minority students in U.S. public schools. They also analyzed the long-term academic achievement of these students. They concluded that "bilingually schooled students outperform comparable monolingually schooled students in academic achievement in all subjects, after 4–7 years of dual language schooling" (p. 334). Their results confirm the benefits of bilingual education.

Therefore, since children's cognitive development and academic achievement would seem to benefit from LM and education through their L1, these strategies are quite relevant to the Australian context. This is because most Australian children of non-English-speaking background find themselves in a situation when they reach school age of having no L1 support available to them.

### **Why Language Maintenance?**

I believe that the arguments for LM outlined in this article speak for themselves and there is little need for more research into why languages should be maintained. The research should now concentrate on the mechanisms that best reverse language shift and on ways of promoting the maintenance of all languages spoken within a community.

As discussed earlier, when languages come in contact, as is the case in Australia, speakers of minority languages are perceived and defined by members of the language-majority group as having a disability (Gatt-Rutter & Mercer, 1989; Hurtado & Rodríguez, 1989). This disability has been defined by both the minority and majority groups in terms of need. This has led to a situation where minorities are perceived as having a need for language instruction in English and/or their L1 in order to obtain financial support, and this need has been often regarded as a burden upon the ethnolinguistic majority. Gatt-Rutter and Cavallaro (1991) argued that this was a limited and static sociological perspective, in a number of ways. The most important limitation is that instead of looking at the situation along the sociological continuum of the immigrant communities, the host community, and relations among them, this perspective is fixed only on the first generation of immigrants (i.e., those born overseas) and their children (the generational bridge). It is true that the minority groups have specific language needs in terms of L1 instruction for enhancing the cognitive growth of their children, cultural continuity, positive

identity and self-image, and for the care of their elderly members. They also need instructions in the majority language to enable them to fully function within the society in which they live. What many people do not take into account is that the host community also has specific language needs in terms of translation services related to politics and commerce, cultural expansion, and cognitive growth through the advantages of being bilingual or multilingual. Lo Bianco (1987) made a strong case for a second-language provision for all communities in Australia. By investing time, effort, and money appropriately, all communities can learn to use the language skills and assets of speakers of all community languages that are already present in the society at large to serve all their needs. The effective use of the language skills and assets in the community can only be done through the implementation of effective bilingual education programs. However, as Akkari (1998) warned, "It is futile to expect that bilingual education will ever lead to a multicultural society unless a restructuring of the historical, hegemonic relationship between language and culture takes place" (p. 103).

Thomas and Collier (2002) also strongly advised educators that they must provide a socioculturally supportive school environment for language-minority students that allows natural language, academic, and cognitive development to flourish in both L1 and L2, comparable to the sociocultural support for ongoing language, academic, and cognitive development that native-English speakers are provided in school (p. 324).

Unfortunately, this paper will come too late for many aboriginal and immigrant languages in Australia. Many communities have shifted to using only English. Research (Cavallaro, 1997) shows that some immigrant communities in Australia are almost totally monolingual in English by the time the third generation is born. For those communities that have shifted or are about to shift to a majority language at the expense of their own language, and for researchers who are seeking ways to arrest the slide into monolingualism by minority groups, Fishman's (1996) ending paragraph below points the way ahead. The road is not an easy one, but an essential one to take if we are to maintain our rich language diversity for the benefit of all members of our community:

Reversing language shift is a research field, it is an applied field, it is a cultural values field, it has new horizons, there are new things to do, things that are, if you like, differently focused than the ordinary school has been. And reversing language shift asks, "What happens with the mother tongue **before** school, **in** school, **out** of school, and **after** school?" so that it can be passed on from one generation to another. I started with a good question and I am ending with a good question and that is the question. "What are you going to do with the mother tongue **before** school, **in** school, **out** of school, and **after** school?" Because that determines its fate, whether it is going to become self-renewing. That is my question for you, no joke! (last para.)



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