

## **Ramifications of monolingualism on identity and institutions**

The interaction of LOTE-speakers with macro-Australian society has been profoundly impacted by the monolingualism inherent in institutional authority, and the cultural values socialised through schools. Through combination of these manifest and latent functions, minorities are excluded from mainstream society, facilitating low socio-economic outcomes, and creating conflict within cultural communities, whereby language loss inhibits construction of positive cultural identity.

The exclusionary nature of education systems has targeted the demographic most crucial to maintaining languages, the 2<sup>nd</sup>-generation, resulting in the greatest language shift occurring between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>-generations, with 53% of 1<sup>st</sup>-generation Australians speaking LOTE, compared to 20% of 2<sup>nd</sup>-generations.<sup>51</sup> This demographic are often heritage language (HL) speakers; those who learned a minority language as children, but never fully developed it, becoming more competent in the dominant language. Considering linguist Monika Schmid's words; '*Children acquire structures of language before school, these structures are not permanent, needing to be consolidated in adolescence*<sup>52</sup>', with analysis of questionnaire responses where '*No opportunities to speak language outside of home*' was selected by multilingual parents as the greatest inhibitory factor in raising bilingual children<sup>53</sup>, it is thereby apparent that institutional monolingualism accelerates HL loss, where parents have difficulty accessing multilingual resources, despite this being a crucial period in linguistic development.

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<sup>51</sup> *Main Features - Cultural Diversity in Australia*. (2011). Abs.gov.au; c=AU; o=Commonwealth of Australia; ou=Australian Bureau of Statistics.  
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>

<sup>52</sup> Marek Kohn. (2020). *Four Words For Friend: why using more than one language matters now more than ever*. Yale University Press. (Original work published 2019)

When people are deprived from resources to maintain their HL, individuals may perceive this as personal failure, evoking shame concerning their cultural identity. Within my questionnaire, although 64% HL respondents indicated speaking their HL was important to them, 86% felt uncomfortable when doing so, compared to 26% of multilinguals, with the greatest reason being '*worry about judgment from native speakers*'<sup>54</sup>. This contradicts secondary research which suggests HL speakers face prejudice from wider-society concerning their language status.

However, as highlighted in the questionnaire response '*I feel distinctly separated from my heritage, especially during family reunions when I cannot understand my relatives*'<sup>55</sup> it is evident greater emotional demands stem from micro-family interactions. Therefore, institutional monolingualism perpetuates a dichotomy between cultural authenticity and assimilation, creating inter-group conflict that results in HL speakers excluded from society, *and* their cultural identity, subsequently accelerating the loss and shame of LOTE.

Australian society further discourages HL speakers by affording English monolinguals who learn LOTE through the perceived legitimacy of schooling a higher-status, conflating bilingualism with intellectual achievement rather than cultural heritage. As linguist Robert Phillipson states; '*English dominance is maintained by continuous reconstitution of structural inequalities between English and other languages*'<sup>56</sup>; therefore, it can be concluded that the dominant culture only favours LOTE when they can be assured of their power over who speaks them, and in what context. This is corroborated in questionnaire results; despite 76% of monolinguals wishing to be bilingual, 27% of this group believed English should be enforced in public spaces, while 32% of all monolinguals felt either '*suspicious, uneasy or intimidated*' upon hearing LOTE in public<sup>57</sup>. These attitudes can be explained through '*Social Identity Theory*'<sup>58</sup>, where LOTE creates a distinctive categorisation of people into 'in' and 'out'-groups, which, when coupled with the conflation of English proficiency with 'Australian-ness', triggers prejudice.

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<sup>53</sup> Primary research. (2020, November 20). *Australia and Multilingualism*. Online Questionnaire; Google Forms. <https://forms.gle/sLRMrtoEx2A81eek6>

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<sup>55</sup> Primary research. (2020, November 20). *Australia and Multilingualism*. Online Questionnaire; Google Forms. <https://forms.gle/sLRMrtoEx2A81eek6>

<sup>56</sup> Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>57</sup> Primary research. (2020, November 20). *Australia and Multilingualism*. Online Questionnaire; Google Forms. <https://forms.gle/sLRMrtoEx2A81eek6>

<sup>58</sup> Augoustinos, M. (2018). *Psychological perspectives on racism* | APS. Psychology.org.au. <https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2013/august/augoustinos>

This results in English-speakers exercising greater power in micro-interactions through the mobilisation of social norms which dictate when, and how LOTE should be spoken.

While deliberate animosity is commonly manifested in micro-interactions, macro modes of oppression are implicit rather than explicit, substantiated by an interviewee's words that; '*accessibility for LOTE-speakers is an afterthought*'<sup>59</sup>. This contradicts with the predicted 'deliberate' exclusion, revealing that the failure of Australia to acknowledge the inherence of multilingualism in society is a continuation of homogenous institutional authority established by, and for, British colonisers.

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<sup>59</sup> Primary research; (2021, March 20). *Interview with Arkady de Jon*