

# Identity Formation, Cross-Cultural Attitudes and Language Maintenance in the Hungarian Diaspora of Queensland

*Anikó Hatoss*

University of Southern Queensland

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some cultural factors influencing the language maintenance and shift patterns of the Hungarian community of Brisbane. This paper examines language shift in the context of language use in the family domain and discusses the connections between the development of cross-cultural attitudes (attitudes to the host society as well as the home culture), identity development and language maintenance and shift. The empirical evidence based on a sociolinguistic survey suggests that Hungarians attach great value to their language. Keeping a strong Hungarian identity is a strong factor in intergenerational language maintenance, and the development of dual-identities does not necessarily lead to language shift. Dual identity can be an additive rather than a subtractive force in the development of Hungarian-English bilinguality.

## Ethnicity, identity and language

As many authors have noted, patterns of language maintenance and shift are driven by both social and cultural factors (Dorian 1989; Gal 1979; Giles et al. 1977). Minority languages do not serve only as a means of communication, they are important tools for expressing cultural heritage and ethnic identity (Auer 1998; Crystal 1997, 2000; Fishman 1989, 1991, 1999; Spolsky 1999; Padilla 1999; Lanca et al. 1994). Various studies examining language alternation patterns have found that language can express group membership (Giles & Johnson 1987) and solidarity (Jorgensen 1998). As Fishman (1989:6) put it 'at every stage, ethnicity is linked to language, whether indexically, implementationally or symbolically.' Language is the primary index or symbol or register of identity (Crystal 2000:39). This symbolic value attached to language is a powerful source of motivation for the retention of minority languages.

A number of authors (Giles 1979; Giles & Johnson 1987; Giles *et al.* 1977; Edwards 1984, 1988; Edwards & Chisholm 1987; Breitborde 1998; Carbaugh 1996) have examined the relationship between identity and minority language maintenance and shift. Giles *et al.*'s concept of ethnolinguistic vitality theorises that the success of language maintenance in minority groups is highly dependent on the perception of the vitality that minority group members attach to their language. Grenoble and Whaley (1998) also argued that an answer to the language loss patterns in minority contexts involves outlining an intricate matrix of variables dealing with the community's self-identity. Smolicz's (1999) theory of core values further supports the idea that those minority groups which attach a stronger value to their language as a core cultural value, are more likely to maintain their language over generations.

The complexity of the exploration of this intricate matrix stems from the very process of identity formation. While identity formation can be seen as a decision made by the individual members of an ethnolinguistic community, this decision does not happen in a vacuum, but is reflective of and influenced by various external factors. Isajiw's framework (cited in Harris 1980) of ethnic identity theorises this by emphasising the important role that the wider social environment plays in shaping the identity of migrants. This framework introduces the concept of two essential boundaries: the 'boundary from within' and the 'boundary from without'. The boundary from within directs attention to the complex interaction between cultural heritage, socialisation and identity, and to the importance of the past in identity formation. The concept of the 'boundary from without' emphasises the necessity to incorporate in the analysis of identity the constraints imposed on the individual by the attitudinal and structural conditions of the wider society. This framework underlines Fishman's (1989, 1991) theories about the importance of the pressure and the expectations that the host society has towards the minority group. The development of positive acculturation strategies, additive construction of identity and additive bilinguality require a supportive social space, where ethnic minorities strive to establish positive contacts with the host society, and at the same time strive to maintain their ethnolinguistic heritage.

Another relevant question is whether adopting a new identity inevitably results in the disposal of the first. A number of studies in the field of social psychology have shown that immigrants can feel emotionally attached to the new country without losing their attachment to their homeland (Harris 1980). According to Taft, 'dual ethnic identities may summate rather than compete, thus constituting a

stable and enriching rather than a deliberating situation' (cited in Harris 1980:12). The dynamic nature of identity is theorised in Collier and Thomas's (1988) identity model, which suggests that a person can have multiple identities, which are changing over time. The development of dual identities in minority groups necessitates a supportive multicultural society, which provides migrants with an opportunity for an enrichment and expansion of outlook through identifying with two cultures and two language groups.

Ethnic identity is a complex phenomenon and can only be understood if it is viewed as a multifaceted, selective process rather than as a 'unidimensional and static characteristic' (Harris 1980:9). The complexity of its analysis is further underlined by research literature, which suggests that the meaning of ethnicity varies, between generations as well as between individuals within the same generation (Smolicz, Hudson & Secombe 1998). The present study is concerned with the investigation of ethnic identity on the level of group membership identification and seeks for insights into the relationships between ethnic identity and first language maintenance in the Hungarian diaspora in Queensland.

### **Hungarians in Australia**

Hungarians have migrated to Australia for a variety of reasons, but the most prominent form of migration was the refugee status. The refugee movements were the result of the political situation in Hungary primarily after WWII and after the Hungarian revolution against the Soviet regime in 1956. The 2001 Census recorded 28,000 persons born in Hungary in Australia (ABS 2001). This figure shows that Hungarians represent a small ethnolinguistic community. Another important demographic factor is that the population of Hungarian Australians is aging rapidly. While the national ratio for the population aged 65 and over is 12.4%, the corresponding figure is 40% for those born in Hungary. Inbound migration from the source country is sporadic and rather low, and does not even compensate for the death rate. These demographic factors have serious implications for language maintenance and shift patterns.

Hungarians in Australia are among those ethnic groups which appear to be language-centred, considering their ethnic language to be among their core values (Clyne 1991; 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). Hungarian language has always been a core cultural icon and has been regarded as an important means to express and keep Hungarian identity. Since a large number of Hungarians live in minority situations outside the borders of Hungary in Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria, Ukraine (as a result of the Treaty of Trianon after World War I), mother tongue maintenance has had long traditions in Hungarian culture. The language maintenance efforts of Hungarians in the European context have been discussed by a number of authors (Lanstyák 1991; Szépfalusi 1991; Gal 1991; Kontra 1991; Szépe 1999). Lanstyák is one of the advocates of language rights in the Slovakian context. Gal (1979) described the social factors affecting the code-switching patterns of the Hungarian community in Oberwart (Austria).

Despite their relatively small number, Hungarians have managed to establish and maintain several cultural organisations, which play a significant role in the maintenance of their culture and language. The central organisation of all Hungarians in Australia is called the Hungarian Association of Australia and New Zealand (Ausztráiai és Új-Zélandi Magyar Szövetség, AUZMSZ) which is the main body providing an institutional support for the cultural maintenance needs of the community. It keeps in contact with the World Association of Hungarians (Magyarok Világszövetsége), as well as cultural and educational institutions in Hungary, including the Ministry of Education. Within the AUZMSZ, the Council of Hungarian Associations in Queensland (CHAQ) (A Queenslandi Magyar Szövetség, QMSZ) represents the Hungarians of Queensland. This organisation (CHAQ) grew out of the old Hungarian Club and owns the Hungarian House where several cultural programs are offered to the members of the community on a regular basis. These programs include balls, dance nights, sport events and other cultural events, which correspond with traditional national holidays in the home country. The present number of members is approximately 200. Recently they have established a Hungarian Saturday school with the support of the Hungary-based Apáczai Foundation (Apáczai Közalapítvány).

### **The research**

The present research was part of a wider sociolinguistic study carried out in South-East Queensland. The research aimed to establish connections between acculturation, cross-cultural attitudes, identity and first language maintenance and shift. The study looked for an answer to the following questions:

1. How do Hungarian Australians maintain their identity?

2. Do they see Hungarian language as an important tool for maintaining their identity?
3. Is there a connection between language activation in various domains and perceived self-identity?
4. Is there a connection between self-identity and the perception of the host society?
5. Is a strong Hungarian identity a predictor for successful intergenerational maintenance?

### **The sample**

For the purpose of the research 50 families were randomly selected from a database kept by the Hungarian Associations in Queensland. All members of the selected families were addressed and asked to participate in the research, including parents, grandparents and children. The only criterion for selection was that the respondents had to be of Hungarian ethnic background. In this way the sample was meant to represent a wide range of attitudes, migration stories and family backgrounds. Also, it was hoped that there would be a good representation of different age groups, and at least two generations. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire, which was posted to the families. This questionnaire was later followed up with a telephone interview for the purpose of clarification and collecting more qualitative data.

Respondents were divided into three groups according to their identity. Group A included those who identified themselves as more Hungarian than Australian. Group B comprised of those who identified themselves as more Australian than Hungarian. Those who identified themselves as equally Hungarian and Australian were included in Group C. Statistical tests (T-tests) were used to find significant difference between these sub-groups in their language use patterns, as well as their attitude towards Hungarian and Australian cultures and their attitude to intergenerational language maintenance.

### **Findings**

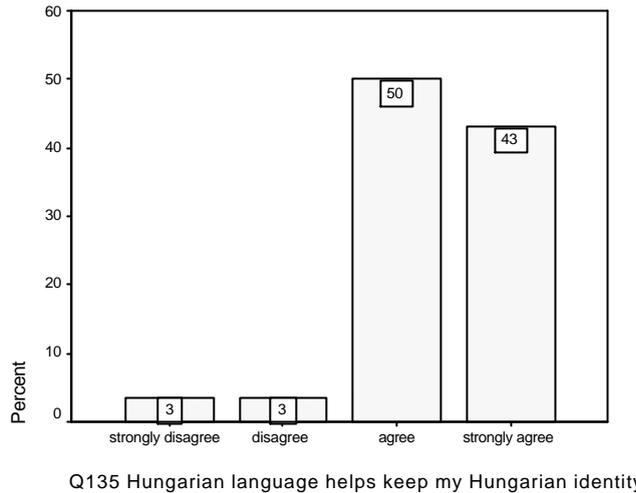
#### **Question 1: How do Hungarian Australians maintain their identity?**

Most Hungarians living in South-east Queensland are proud of their national heritage and ethnic background. Even in the younger generation, more than half of the respondents claimed a stronger Hungarian identity. Among those who migrated as adults (parents) 72.4% identified more with Hungarians than Australians, 3.4% had stronger Australian identity and 24.1% felt equally Hungarian and Australian. Among those who migrated with their parents at a young age (the oldest being 18 at arrival) the majority (65.1%) still identified with Hungarians more, 11.6% had a stronger Australian identity and 23.3% felt equally Hungarian and Australian. Respondents reported an active participation in the Hungarian club activities, among others attending dance nights, soccer matches, concerts and other cultural events. Most of them seem to keep in touch with the community. However, participation is far less frequent in the second generation. Tools for cultural and identity maintenance included attending church services in Hungarian, and reading the *Hungarian Life* newspaper which is the ethnic newspaper published in Australia for Australian Hungarians.

#### **Question 2: Do they see Hungarian language as an important tool for maintaining their identity?**

Both the survey data and the interview data provided evidence that a great majority of respondents attached a strong value to Hungarian language and considered it an important tool for maintaining their identity (see Figure 1 below). This finding underlines that Hungarians belong to those ethnic groups for whom language is a core value (Smolicz 1999). Even those second generation respondents who have lost their language expressed their regret and described their language loss as a contributor to their identity loss. This feeling was best described by one of the participants of the Hungarian school, whose father was Hungarian. She did not learn Hungarian language mainly due to the fact that her mother was Anglo-Australian, therefore the communication in the family was in English when she was growing up. She, however, decided to learn Hungarian language at an adult age, so as to retrieve some of her lost identity:

I joined the course because of my father. My father was Hungarian, and I would like to revive his heritage by learning the language. I feel that I lost this heritage because I didn't learn the language when I was young.



**Figure 1 Perceived role of Hungarian language in maintaining Hungarian identity**

**Question 3: Is there a connection between language activation in various domains and perceived self-identity?**

There was a significant difference in the three groups in their language use with their children. More than half (54.8%) of those who identified more with Hungarians used only Hungarian language with their children, 35.7% used both Hungarian and English and only 9.5 % used only English. Among those who had a stronger Australian identity, no one used exclusively Hungarian with their children, 20% used both English and Hungarian, and 80% used only English. Among those who identified equally with Hungarians and Australians 53.8% used both languages with their children, 23.1% used only Hungarian and only 23.1% used only English (See Table 1 below).

**Q65 Language use with children \* Q127 Identity Crosstabulation**

		Q127 Identity			Total
		More Hungarian than Australian	More Australian than Hungarian	Equally Hungarian and Australian	
Q65 Language use with children	English	9.5%	80.0%	23.1%	18.3%
	Both	35.7%	20.0%	53.8%	38.3%
	Hungarian	54.8%		23.1%	43.3%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 1 Language use with children according to identity**

These findings support the hypothesis that self-identity has a significant influence on the language choice with children and is a factor in determining the intergenerational language maintenance and loss patterns. The results also underline that dual identity does not necessarily lead to language loss, however, the loss of the original identity is likely to lead to the loss of L1 in the next generation.

**Language use in the family**

Language activation with other members of the family also showed significant differences according to self-identification. Those Hungarians who had a stronger identity tended to use Hungarian language more with their spouse, with their parents and their siblings. In their language use with their spouse, 80% of those with a stronger Hungarian identity used only Hungarian, while only 12.5% used both languages, and only 7.5% used English exclusively. Among those with a stronger Australian identity, 66.7% used only English, while 33.3% used only Hungarian. No respondent reported the use of both languages in this group. Among those who felt equally Australian and Hungarian, there was no report of the exclusive use of English, while 35.7% used both languages and 64.3% used only Hungarian.

Language use with parents and siblings showed similar differences according to the sub-groups. Seventy-three (72.7%) % of those with stronger Hungarian identity used exclusively Hungarian with their parents, while only 4.5% used English and 22.7% used both languages. Among those who reported a stronger Australian identity the use of both languages was much higher, representing 75% of the cases. Those with a balanced identity 75% used only Hungarian, 25% used both languages and no respondent reported the exclusive use of English.

**Crosstab**

		% within Q127 Identity			Total
		More Hungarian than Australian	More Australian than Hungarian	Equally Hungarian and Australian	
Q64 Language use with siblings	English	4.8%	66.7%	40.0%	17.2%
	Both	19.0%	33.3%		17.2%
	Hungarian	76.2%		60.0%	65.5%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 2 Language use with siblings**

Language use with siblings (see Table 2) showed that 76.2% of those with stronger Hungarian identity used Hungarian only with their siblings, while there was no respondent who reported the exclusive use of Hungarian in the group with stronger Australian identity. Also, the group with a balanced dual identity showed a 40% use of English only and a 60% use of Hungarian only. This finding suggests that balanced dual identity does not necessarily lead to an intergenerational language shift.

**Question 4: Is there a connection between self-identity and the perception of the host society?**

As it has been noted the perception of the host society is an important factor in identity formation. As Kroon (1990:2) argues, there are conflicting interests between full participation of ethnic minority groups in the dominant society, and their maintenance of ethnic identity and ethnic group language. Ethnic groups can participate fully in the dominant society and maintain their heritage and language at the same time, only in a ‘pluralistically organized society’, which offers ethnic minorities ‘a room for social mobility without assimilation’. This research question was meant to investigate whether Hungarians saw the host society as a supportive environment for fulfilling their participation and the maintenance of their cultural and linguistic heritage at the same time.

Perception of the host society was measured on the following items: Q128 Australians treat minorities as equals; Q129 Australians are open to migrants; Q130 Australians show interest in other cultures; Q131 Australians value different cultures and languages. The responses to these questions reflected somewhat mixed perceptions, however, the general perception was fairly positive. The positive percentage ratings to these items ranged from 54 to 65 % (54 % for Q128 Australians treat minorities as equals, 65% for Q129 Australians are open to migrants, 61% for Q130 Australians show interest in other cultures, and 65% for Q131 Australians value different cultures and languages). When compared according to identity, the sub-groups did not show significant differences. However, those who had stronger Hungarian identity were significantly less positive in their perception of the host society in terms of their treatment of migrants. At the same time, those with stronger Australian identity saw Australians as more open to migrants and more fair in their treatment of migrants (p<0.05).

When the sub-groups were compared according to their attitude to Australian culture, it was found that those Hungarians with a dual identity (equally Hungarian and Australian) were more positive about Australian culture than those who had a stronger Hungarian identity (p<0.05). At the same time there was no significant difference in the two groups in their attitudes towards Hungarian culture. They were equally positive about Hungarian culture; therefore, we can establish that the development of a dual-identity is an additive rather than a subtractive phenomenon. Dual identities do not necessarily lead to a reduction in the attachment to the home culture.

**Question 5: Is a strong Hungarian identity a predictor for successful intergenerational maintenance?**

Respondents were asked how important it was for them that their children learnt Hungarian language. The findings suggest a strong connection between the importance attached to intergenerational language maintenance and the perception of self-identity. Among those who identified themselves as “more Hungarian than Australian” (Group A) also regarded it as more important that their children

learnt Hungarian language ( $M=3.51 > 2.75$ ). Also, the children's attitude towards learning Hungarian language was significantly more positive among those with stronger Hungarian identity. Group B and Group C were significantly different in their attitude towards intergenerational language maintenance. Those who identified more with Hungarians regarded it as more important ( $M=3.51$ ) than their children learn Hungarian language in comparison with those who felt equally Hungarian and Australian ( $M=3.00, p<0.05$ ).

### Conclusion

These findings support the theory that the perception of self-identity and attitudes play a crucial role in determining the success of intergenerational language maintenance. The ethnolinguistic vitality theory by Giles et al. (1977) suggests that migrants who see themselves as belonging to numerous different overlapping groups should possess a more diffuse social identity than persons who view themselves as members of only one or two groups (Giles & Johnson 1987:72). This diffuse identity, or dual identity in case of the Hungarians, potentially leads to a weaker ethnolinguistic attachment and a shift in Hungarian language. The research findings, however, seem to challenge this theory. It seems that those Hungarians who developed a dual identity had equally positive attitudes towards their ethnolinguistic heritage, including their language and culture, as those who identified only as Hungarians.

The exact nature of the minority language and identity nexus, however, cannot be established on the basis of the current research. Further research is necessary to investigate the intricate connections between identity and language maintenance and shift. While a number of studies have shown that identity is a strong factor in the maintenance of minority languages in immigrant contexts, the relationship between identity and language maintenance is not unidirectional. As much as identity influences language activation, and ultimately language maintenance and shift, the causal relationship between identity and language maintenance remains problematic. As Edwards argues, a continuity of identity is not necessarily dependent upon communicative language retention. In other words minority groups can continue to attach a symbolic value even though they no longer speak the language themselves (Edwards 1984: 290).

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