SUSTAINABLE MULTILINGUALISM AS AN ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES – THE CASE OF AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that multicultural societies cannot be sustainable if they do not embrace multilingualism as an essential and embedded element of multiculturalism. Multilingualism is a crucial desideratum for multicultural societies who wish not only to 'manage' diversity, but also use diversity as a resource and a key element of social capital. The discussion in this paper takes place in the context of Australian communities. There are essentially two aspects of sustainability to discuss in this context: (1) the maintenance of the linguistic diversity that is present in a multicultural society: this involves the maintenance of indigenous languages and immigrant languages; and (2) the development of multilingual skills in the wider Australian society. The concept of sustainability provides a theoretical framework and it is presented with the purpose of opening up discussions across various multicultural and multilingual contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability originates in environmental science where it is defined 'as a path of economic and social development whose impacts on the natural environment are constrained within ecological limits' (Jacobs, 1999 p. 78). While the main concern of environmental policy is 'the way states influence market behaviour towards environmental ends in a global capitalist economy' (Jacobs, 1999 p. 78), language ecology is concerned with the study of interactions between any given language and its environment (Haugen, 1972). Several authors have done seminal work in the area of language ecology and ecological language planning (Bastardas-Boada, 2002; Haugen, 1972; Muhlhausler, 1996). This paper does not intend to review these theories; it merely uses the ecological framework for providing an insight into the language situation in Australia. Linguistic sustainability in the Australian context has two major concerns:

(1)   sustainability of minority languages: including Indigenous languages and immigrant languages: maintain/revive the multilingual heritage.
(2)   sustainability of multilingualism in the wider society, irrespective of origin: teaching of LOTE (Languages Other Than English) to all Australians.

Australian public policy since the 1980s has been increasingly shaped by a neo-liberal political rationality (Beeson & Firth, 1998). Neoliberalism reflects 'the approaches to the

conduct of government that are associated with a reliance on market mechanisms to determine economic outcomes' (Beeson & Firth, 1998 p. 216). Material growth, however, is not sufficient for the preservation and development of society in its broadest sense. In the context of multicultural societies, language policies need to encompass the preservation of multicultural values and multilingual skills for broader social benefits which do not necessarily translate into monetary terms. The following underlying principles need consideration:

1   Language policies need to shift the emphasis from economic benefits to intrinsic benefits of multilingualism: all languages should be supported not only the economically beneficial languages.

2   Multiculturalism is superficial if it is not linked to multilingualism: the neo-liberal approach to multilingualism is not sufficient for sustainability.

Because Australia's language ecology has become distorted, language policies are required which are based on an ecological approach rather than an economic approach (Mühlhäusler & Damania, 2004). This means that policies should take into consideration the wider context of sustainability and take a holistic approach to language policy development. Policy makers need to find out 'how the greatest amount of private and public benefits can be achieved by strengthening the linguistic ecology of […] Australia' (Mühlhäusler & Damania, 2004p. 35). Economic linguistics is market driven and based on economic benefits; ecological linguistics is holistic, emphasises the language-culture relationship and the benefits to the environment, including the individuals as well as whole communities (Mühlhäusler & Damania, 2004 p.2). A short review of the language policy development in Australia will demonstrate that the focus in language policies has been largely economic and have not addressed multilingualism in the wider context of social sustainability. Section 2 gives an overview of current multicultural policies, Section 3 discusses societal multilingualism with special focus on immigrant languages, and Section 4 discusses language education, with a specific focus on LOTE (languages other Than English), and finally the paper concludes that an ecological rather than an economic focus is necessary for long-term sustainability of a multicultural society.

2. MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Multiculturalism in contemporary Australia is a fact of life and a result of over 200 years' migration history. According to the latest Census figures, the net permanent migration was over 40,000 per year in the period between 1992 and 2002. In 2001 and 2002 the top three regions as sources of migration included Oceania (21.5%), Europe and the former USSR (19.6%), and Southeast Asia (12.1%). Migration is the major contributor to the development of Australia's multicultural character, and a potential contributor to the development of a multilingual character. However, this paper will argue that multilingualism is not present in the Australian society to the degree which is desirable for a country with highly multilingual historical roots, such as the diversity of Indigenous languages, and a society which claims a multicultural identity. Out of the total population of 18,972,350 recorded in the 2001 Census, 15,013,965 people (79.13%) speak English

only at home. The US shows a similar trend: 82% of the total adult population was monolingual in English in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Contemporary Australian multicultural policies emphasise the benefits of the cultural and linguistic diversity for the whole society. The ideas are fundamentally based on the report called 'National Agenda for Multicultural Australia' (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1989). This was a landmark report in response to issues raised by the rapid increase in cultural diversity resulting from the arrival of large numbers of migrants from all over the world, particularly from Asia. The National Agenda accepted as its underlying principles the eight goals proposed by the Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs in 1988 (Fitzgerald, 1988), among which were important principles which promote the maintenance of community languages as well as development of proficiency in English and other languages. The National Agenda states:

- All Australians should be able to develop and make use of their potential for Australia's economic and social development.
- All Australians should have the opportunity to acquire and develop proficiency in English and languages other than English, and to develop cross-cultural understanding. (National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1999 p. 27)

The report defines three main rights and three main obligations. The rights are:

- Cultural identity: the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion;
- Social justice: the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth;
- Economic efficiency: the need to maintain, develop and utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background. (National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1999 p. 27)

The obligations require all Australians to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society- the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, and English as the national language. The political discourse of the National Agenda, and its revised versions (see (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003b; National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1999) reflects a shift from seeing migrants as 'problems' to be dealt with, towards a realisation that migrants represent assets that can be beneficial for the whole society. Under the banner of *productive diversity*, 'the Government is committed to promoting the economic benefits that can be derived in both the domestic and international markets by capitalising on Australia's wealth of cultural and linguistic skills and on the social and business networks of Australia's migrants'(Commonwealth of Australia, 2003a p. 9). Productive diversity is defined as 'the significant cultural, social and economic dividends, which arise from the diversity of our population…and…should be maximised for the benefit of all Australians' (National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1999, p. 6).

Since 1992, when the term 'productive diversity' was introduced, all state and territory governments have expressed their commitment to policies and programs which recognise 'the advantages in effectively harnessing the linguistic and other resources of the culturally diverse community for the economic benefit of the State or Territory' (NMAC, 1999, p.6). It was not the first time, however, that language was seen as a resource, as this concept was also included in the Senate Standing Committee's recommendation report in 1984 (Senate Standing Committee on Education and Arts, 1984). This report suggested addressing all aspects of language policy, including the use of all languages in Australia in different domains including the communities and the media. Also, the first national language policy document in Australia, the Lo Bianco report (Lo Bianco, 1987) emphasised that migrants' cultural and linguistic skills are valuable assets and made several recommendations to support language maintenance. It argued for a 'two-way bridge-building' which meant that non-English speaking Australians should study LOTE to enhance their mother tongue and acquire literacy, and also have the opportunity to learn a third language, while English-speaking Australians would have an opportunity to reach out to fellow non-English speaking citizens through a language other than English (Smolicz & Secombe, 2003 p. 10).

The official recognition of the benefits that cultural and linguistic diversity brings to Australia is encouraging. However, the political discourse has mainly focussed on the economic argument and the government's priority has been to support the economically beneficial languages. This priority may serve the languages which are useful for tourism and business purposes, but it has little impact on the majority of the community languages, especially the Indigenous languages of Australia. The ideology that linguistic diversity is a resource is limited to the context of economics. This paper argues that an ecological approach rather than a purely economic approach is necessary for a long term sustainability of multicultural and multilingual Australian society as multilingualism brings wider social benefits which do not necessarily translate readily to purely economic terms.

The National Agenda and other multicultural policies reflect a laissez-faire approach to dealing with multilingualism based on the underlying ideology of passive liberal democratic citizenship. By giving Australians the right (that is the free choice) to harness their linguistic and cultural skills, the policy fails to secure active involvement and a responsible multicultural citizenship: a citizenship which is characterised by achieving community visions of multilingualism. This will be discussed in the following sections by demonstrating that language polices and multicultural policies have had a limited affect on the sustainability of multilingualism in Australian communities. Essentially there are two main limitations: (1) limited repertoire of languages maintained in the education system; (2) limited activation and value of language skills in the wider society, outside the education system.

3. MULTILINGUALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Australia has always been a multilingual continent. At the time of the British colonisation there were approximately 600 different indigenous languages and language varieties spoken in the continent, including 250 distinctive languages. These languages represent invaluable encapsulations of diverse cultures. Unfortunately, colonisation had a devastating influence on this linguistic and cultural diversity, and brought a rapid rate of language shift and language death in numerous indigenous communities. In the last 200 years 50 languages have become extinct and many other native languages are under threat. Today, perhaps 130 languages have less than 50 speakers and only remain in limited use by older speakers and even 'healthy languages are subject to rapid shift' (Walsh, 1991, p.30). Today, ninety per cent of Aboriginal people do not speak their Indigenous language (Mühlhäusler & Damania, 2004 p. 20). Language death is a worldwide phenomenon. According to the *Ethnologue,* 417 languages are classified as nearly extinct in the world which means that only a few elderly speakers are still alive. The Pacific is experiencing the highest rate of language death; 157 of the 417 listed nearly extinct languages are in the Pacific, including 138 in Australia (Ethnologue, 2004).

There are numerous factors which contribute to language shift (Chang, ; Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Doucet, 1991; Fishman, 1991; Gal, 1979; Hoffman, 1991; Holmes, 1997; Jaspaert & Kroon, 1988; Pauwels, 1985; Putz, 1991; Spolsky, 2004; Wei, Housen, & Dewaele, 2003), but this paper argues that language shift is a symptom of superficial multicultural values, where multilingualism is not deeply rooted in the idea of multiculturalism, and where immigrants and indigenous members of the society see the dominant language (in case of Australia English) as a route to success in the wider society. Sadly, this is paired with the loss of motivation to maintain their heritage languages. From the outside, Australia looks highly multilingual. Table 1 shows the languages spoken at home in Australian families as recorded in the 2001 Census. While the linguistic repertoire is impressive, the numerical representation of language speakers other than English is less so. As shown in Table 1, just 2.8 million people use a language other than English in their homes. This figure represents 14.8% of the population, which is extremely low if we consider that approximately 41% of Australia's population was born overseas or has one parent who was born overseas. The representation of Indigenous languages is even lower, 2.68%.

B08 LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME			
	Males	*Females*	*Persons*
Speaks English only	7,410,456	7,603,509	15,013,965
Speaks other language:			
Arabic (including Lebanese)	108,729	100,643	209,372
Australian Indigenous Languages	25,099	25,879	50,978
Chinese languages:			
Cantonese	108,230	117,077	225,307
Mandarin	67,047	72,239	139,286
Other	17,541	19,223	36,764
Total	*192,818*	*208,539*	*401,357*
Croatian	35,207	34,644	69,851
French	18,934	20,709	39,643
German	35,674	40,769	76,443

Greek	131,763	131,954	263,717
Hindi	24,370	23,447	47,817
Hungarian	11,374	13,111	24,485
Indonesian	18,541	20,183	38,724
Italian	175,357	178,248	353,605
Japanese	12,150	16,135	28,285
Khmer	10,621	11,361	21,982
Korean	19,014	20,515	39,529
Macedonian	36,559	35,435	71,994
Maltese	20,495	20,898	41,393
Netherlandic	18,287	21,901	40,188
Persian	13,426	11,812	25,238
Polish	27,107	31,949	59,056
Portuguese	11,701	11,987	23,688
Russian	15,595	19,195	34,790
Samoan	10,913	11,798	22,711
Serbian	24,767	24,436	49,203
Sinhalese	10,756	9,904	20,660
South Slavic	7,164	7,442	14,606
Spanish	45,213	48,380	93,593
Tagalog (Filipino)	30,751	48,127	78,878
Tamil	12,144	11,930	24,074
Turkish	25,704	24,989	50,693
Vietnamese	86,117	88,119	174,236
Other	182,387	180,675	363,062
Total	*1,398,737*	*1,455,114*	*2,853,851*
Not stated	461,273	440,160	901,433
Overseas visitors	95,475	107,626	203,101
Total	**9,365,941**	**9,606,409**	**18,972,350**

Table 1:   Home language use according to the 2001 Census

It is important to recognise that these figures do not show an accurate picture of multilingualism; as for example, language use at home does not necessarily reflect language competence. Still, home language use is the most important factor in intergenerational language maintenance; therefore these numbers certainly deserve consideration in the context of sustainability. While language loss is most dramatic and visible in the Indigenous context, there is a rapid language shift in numerous migrant communities. Clyne and Kipp (2003 p. 37) diagnosed the greatest rate of shift among the Dutch (61.9%, see Table 2).

Netherlands	62.6% (highest shift)
Austria	54.5%
Germany	54.0%
France	36.8%
Hungary	35%
Spain	25.1%
Poland	22.3%
Japan	16.9%
Italy	15.9%
Chile	12.2%
Hong Kong	10.3%
Greece	7.1%
Macedonia	4.7%
China	4.3%
Iraq	3.6%
Vietnam	2.4% (lowest shift)

Table 2 :   Language shift among first generation migrants in Australia (S. Kipp & M. Clyne, 2003, p.34). Note: only selected countries are shown)

Other nationalities with high rates of shift included the Germans, the Austrians, the French, the Maltese and the Hungarians. In most of the cases language shift occurs, because the immigrant group does not see the value of their language in the host society which operates in English. Also, even if the desire to maintain the language is present, there is no, or little, institutional and educational support for the teaching of these languages. With these factors in mind, it is difficult to argue that Australia fulfils its role as a truly multicultural society.

Sustainability in the long term requires an ecological approach, where all communities have the right and the opportunity to study their mother tongue. This is far from a reality in the Australian context. Also, the development of literacy skills in minorities' first languages seems to be even more challenging to achieve. Several studies in Australia have shown that even if second generation migrants succeed – at least to some degree - in maintaining their languages in speech, they usually fail to do so in literacy. Lee, Murugaian and Secombe (1999), for instance, found that Chinese and Indian bilinguals are not necessarily and not typically biliterates. A study of the Hungarian community in Queensland (Hatoss, 2001) reported similar findings. As language shift statistics have shown, multilingualism in Australia is not sustained effectively. Language policy intervention is, therefore, necessary to consider the wider ecological aspects of multilingualism and develop policies which ensure that languages are maintained intergenerationally.

While a great number of schools offer language learning opportunities (see Table 3), these schools cannot meet the demands of all ethnolinguistic communities. The main problems are shortage of teachers and low enrolment numbers. There is much yet to be achieved within the context of language and language education policy to ensure the quality and supply of language teachers (D.E. Ingram, 2003 p. 17). To cater for their needs, ethnic communities usually organise their own Saturday or Sunday schools, but

these ethnic schools are not integrated into the general educational system. The issues of language education will be discussed in the next section.

4. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SUSTAINABLE MULTILINGUALISM

In the context of multicultural policies and multiculturalism, it is important to discuss the role education policies play in the favourable adjustment of immigrant groups. To achieve multiculturalism in an ethnically plural society, the education system must provide at every level (primary, secondary, and tertiary) opportunities for all individuals. These include the opportunity:

1. to learn the shared values of society, including the national language (which in Anglo-Saxon societies means English);
2. to study their mother tongue in its cultural context (including the acquisition of literacy)
3. to gain access to an ethnic community language and culture other than their own, whether ethnic community or the language of a neighbouring country or trading partner;
4. to understand and value the multicultural nature of society and learn to appreciate the various cultures within it (Smolicz, 1999).

It is surprising that in a multicultural society such as Australia, Smolicz's criteria for a multicultural educational system seem utopian. While the *first criterion*, that is learning the 'shared values of society, including the national language (that is English) is admirably fulfilled in Australian educational institutions, *the second criterion*, that is 'the opportunity for children to study their mother tongue in its cultural context, including the acquisition of literacy' is far from satisfactory. Bilingual education programs are sporadic and only cater for a small fraction of potentially bilingual young Australians. *Criterion three,* the idea that multicultural education policies should ensure that students from minority backgrounds gain access to an ethnic community language and culture other than their own, whether ethnic community or the language of a neighbouring country or trading partner, is satisfied to some degree through LOTE education.

LOTE EDUCATION

LOTE education has an important role in developing multilingualism and sustaining existing multilingualism in Australian communities. The current LOTE system is the result of a long developmental process which due to the limitation of this paper will not be discussed. The current trends of LOTE education are best illustrated in a report published by the Department of Education, Employment and Training in 2002. The following is a brief summary of the main trends, and the key issues in LOTE education. As the statistics will illustrate, LOTE teaching has limited impact on multilingual sustainability for the very reason that the underlying philosophy and management of LOTE education is based on economic, rather than ecological principles. For example, the repertoire of languages is limited to numerically stronger and economically beneficial languages, limited funding limits language learning opportunities. Table 3 is a summary of the number of mainstream government schools offering languages in Australia.

Language	Primary schools	Secondary schools
Arabic	8	7
Auslan	4	4
Chinese (Mandarin)	37	29
Cook Island Pidgin	1	-
Croatian	1	-
French	98	114
German	114	75
Greek	21	16
Indonesian	398	137
Italian	305	90
Japanese	245	103
Khmer	-	2
Koorie languages	7	1
Korean	1	2
Latin	-	2
Macedonian	3	7
Norwegian	1	-
Romanian	1	-
Somali	1	-
Spanish	10	4
Ukranian	1	-
Vietnamese	1	13
Turkish	10	2

Table 3: List of government schools providing languages

As Table 3 shows, some of the more widely spoken and economically more beneficial languages such as German, French, Chinese, Indonesian, and Japanese are in a relatively favourable situation, while numerous smaller ethnic languages are only taught in one location, or not taught at all. The teaching of Italian is relatively widespread due to its numerical strength. Table 4 shows the rank ordering of the top 10 languages based on Year 12 enrolment numbers between 1995 and 2000. The table shows that Japanese, French, German and Chinese have dominated LOTE education. The other important languages include Indonesian, Greek, Vietnamese, Spanish and Arabic. The table also shows that a total of 13% of all Year 12 students studied a LOTE, which is a rather low percentage, considering the multicultural character of Australia.

Rank	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1	Japanese 5032	Japanese 5381	Japanese 5287	Japanese 5524	Japanese 5198	Japanese 5292
2	French 4311	French 4201	French 3974	French 4204	French 4034	French 4082
3	German 2657	German 2674	German 2728	German 2791	German 2655	German 2935
4	Chinese 2469	Chinese 2361	Chinese 2478	Chinese 2692	Chinese 2569	Chinese 2935
5	Italian 2227	Italian 2100	Italian 2141	Italian 2061	Italian 1924	Indonesia n 2089
6	Indonesian 1451	Indonesian 1762	Indonesian 2000	Indonesian 2003	Indonesian 1820	Italian 1959

7	Greek 1433	Greek1366	Greek 1322	Greek 1236	Greek 1037	Greek 954
8	Vietnamese 1174	Vietnamese 1038	Vietnamese 868	Spanish 785	Vietnamese 782	Vietnamese 678
9	Spanish 728	Spanish 767	Spanish 727	Vietnamese 774	Spanish 785	Spanish 626
10	Arabic 524	Arabic 589	Arabic 516	Arabic 628	Arabic 516	Arabic 545
Total LOTE students	24,214	24,670	24,755	25,570	24,051	24,562
% Yr 12 LOTE students	%14.05	%14.45	%14.33	%14.43	%13.88	%13.22

Table 4:   Top Ten Languages – Year 12, 1995-2000 (DEET Department of Employment, 2002)

The relative success of learning economically beneficial languages in Australia was due to the economic argument put forward in several language policies. In the 1980s this argument was advocated by the Australian Federation of Modern language teachers Association (D. E. Ingram, 1986; Stanley, Ingram, & Chittick, 1990)(AFMLTA), then in 1987 the national policy highlighted the economic issues (Lo Bianco, 1987) and, by the 1991 policy (DEET (Department of Employment, 1991) economic issues became dominant, perhaps even too dominant (D.E. Ingram, 2003 p. 12). In 1994 the economic focus continued through the acceptance of the *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* Report, known as the Rudd Report (Rudd, 1994) accepted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). In particular, learning Asian languages and cultures was a high priority which was expressed in the desire to develop 'Asia literacy' to better the economic relationship with Asia. Table 5 shows that in 2000, more than three-quarters of a million students, or just over 23 per cent of all Australian students, were studying an Asian language at some level (DEET Department of Employment, 2002).

Year level	Total student cohort	Students studying a NALSAS language	Per cent of students studying a NALSAS language
Pre Year 1	192927	43043	22.3%
Year 1	269331	53502	19.9%
Year 2	268446	51521	19.2%
Year 3	266071	67913	25.5%
Year 4	266378	76909	28.9%
Year 5	263712	97489	37.0%
Year 6	261185	102566	39.3%
Year 7	256843	150358	41.0%
Year 8	255707	77402	30.3%
Year 9	255957	35417	13.8%
Year 10	251461	21606	8.6%
Year 11	218402	9695	4.4%
Year 12	185810	8135	4.4%
TOTAL	**3212230**	**750556**	**23.4%**

Table 5   *Students in Australian schools studying a NALSAS language by year level,*
2000

In the primary education system the main languages in 2002 were (1) Japanese 25.0%, (2) Italian 24.1% (3) Indonesian 22.2%, (4) French 9.2%, (5) German 6.7% (6) Chinese (plus derivatives) 3.4% (7) Spanish 2.5% (8) Aboriginal - Local Dialect 1.3% (9) Greek 0.7% (10) AUSLAN (ESC) (11) 0.5% Arabic 0.4%. The top five languages accounted for over 87% of total(Australian Primary Principals Association, 2002 p. 28).

Recently relatively small languages have received much attention due to the newly arisen concerns for national security. While the overriding rationale for studying Asian languages has been based on economic motives, it is controversial that the rationale was lacking a genuine interest in the people and their cultures. March (1997) argues, for example, that the emphasis on learning Asian languages for profit prospects has had a negative effect on Asia-Australian relations, as 'most Asians expect, as a matter of cultural course, that business relationships throughout Asia are in the first place friendship relationships.' and Asian-type friendship relationships are necessary to sustain business relationships, not economics in the first place (March, 1997).

The dominant political discourse in favour of Asian literacy in the 1980s and early 1990s continued to be limited to the utilitarian and economic policy priorities, and failed to incorporate an intellectual and philosophical emphasis (Henderson, 2003 p. 27). It seems that the economic argument has failed not only in the context of the Australian multicultural society, as exemplified by high rates of language shift in Australian communities, but also in the wider international context. Multilingualism is only sustainable if it is based on broader social and cultural values both in the domestic and in the international contexts. Multilingualism should be valued per se, not only if it is tied with potential economic benefits.

Sustainability of multilingualism needs to be embedded in the wider civil society. The benefits of multilingual sustainability have direct benefits for transforming multicultural societies and help them build their social capital. Since community cohesion is an important component of social capital (Davidson, 2003 p. 534), building linguistic bridges is an essential element in building sustainable multicultural societies. It seems that policy makers and the wider Australian society are still not convinced that multilingualism is an essential characteristic of a dynamic multicultural society.

The fact that multilingual skills are not required in public domains shows that multilingualism is not embedded in the multicultural identity. Although the recent focus on national security has highlighted the need for multilingual Australians who are proficient not only in the economically beneficial, but the so called "small languages". This highlights the deficiency of the economic argument as national security jobs require 'top-level foreign language skills in "small languages", while 'intelligence agencies are deficient to the point of being pathetic'(Quinn, 2004). Quinn argues that the neo-classical economic philosophy underlying the tertiary education system in Australia fails to

provide the necessary support for developing and sustaining multilingualism: e.g. as a result of economic rationalism small enrolment courses in languages such as Hindi, Vietnamese, Cantonese and Arabic have been disappearing from the linguistic repertoire of university programs (Quinn, 2004).

5. CONCLUSION

Australia has successfully established its identity as a multicultural society. Still, multilingualism is not embedded into the concept of multiculturalism. Although some of the advances in the area of language education are positive, especially in the numerical sense, language competences, especially multilingual skills on the societal level do not reflect a multilingual society. Immigrant communities show high rates of language shift, and limited opportunity to valorise their languages and cultures. As multiculturalism is becoming an even more prominent feature of contemporary societies, the development of stronger links between multicultural and multilingual characteristics is becoming increasingly important. Contemporary societies are faced with new challenges of creativity not only to sustain their traditional values, but also to allow the development of new social structures based on diverse value systems. If leading multicultural societies are unable to manage and successfully sustain their linguistic diversity, there is little hope for other societies which are modelling their social progress on these leading societies.

A monolingual multicultural society is an oxymoron, and is unimaginable, at least in the true depth of the meaning of multiculturalism. An ecological approach to language policy should consider the costs of language shift and language loss in the immigrant and Indigenous contexts. Such costs go far beyond the monetary considerations; they are deeply integrated into the society on all social levels. The current laissez-faire approach to multilingualism, which looks at multilingualism as a right rather than an obligation and civic duty is based on and accentuates the inadequacies of passive liberal democratic citizenship.

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