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Examining the Sociolinguistics Factors Influencing Language Shift and Language Maintenance among Immigrant Communities in English-Speaking Countries

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Abstract

This study examines the complex sociolinguistic elements that influence the preservation and transformation of languages in immigrant populations residing in English-speaking countries. The study examines the intricate dynamics that influence language patterns among immigrant groups, encompassing factors such as social affiliation, cultural conservation, economic assimilation, and linguistic status. The study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the lived experiences and viewpoints of immigrants about language usage and

preservation. This is done through in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations. Analyzing the obtained data thematically helps identify patterns and trends in language shift and maintenance. This study offers valuable understanding of the reasons behind and challenges faced by immigrant populations. The findings underscore the significance of community backing, educational initiatives, and cultural empowerment in bolstering language preservation endeavors. After the study concludes, legislators and community stakeholders are presented with recommendations for inclusive language legislation and support structures that assist immigrant groups in English-speaking countries in preserving their heritage languages.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic elements, transformation of languages, immigrant populations, English-speaking countries, social affiliation.

Introduction

Language is of utmost importance in influencing the cultural identity, social connections, and economic prospects of individuals and communities. Within the framework of immigrant populations residing in English-speaking countries, the interplay between language shift and language maintenance plays a crucial role in indicating cultural adaptation, assimilation, and preservation. Gaining insight into the sociolinguistic elements that impact these processes is crucial for comprehending the complex mechanisms by which languages develop and societies flourish or encounter difficulties (Burholt et al., 2020). The phenomena of language shift and language preservation among immigrant populations in English-speaking nations are intricate and are impacted by a multitude of sociolinguistic factors. Gaining insight into these elements is essential for understanding the intricacies of language utilization and conservation within immigrant communities (ZOBEIDI & SI MERABET, 2023). A prominent aspect that contributes to language shift is the compelling influence to conform and integrate into the prevailing English-speaking society. Immigrants frequently encounter economic, social, and cultural motivations to embrace English as their predominant language. The pressure arises from the necessity to get job prospects, manage bureaucratic structures, and engage completely in mainstream social endeavors. Consequently, immigrant groups may progressively relinquish

their ancestral languages in favor of English, particularly over several generations (Banasiak & Olpińska-Szkiełko, 2020). The linguistic environment of the target country is crucial in determining whether a language is preserved or replaced. In situations where English is dominant and has strong institutional backing, immigrant languages may encounter difficulties in maintaining their vitality. The absence of opportunities to receive formal education, adequate representation in media, and support from the government for minority languages can hasten the process of language shift among immigrant populations (Kircher, 2022).

Immigrants' language choices and habits are influenced by social networks and intergroup interactions. Establishing strong connections with communities of the same ethnic background can enhance the preservation of a language by creating a nurturing atmosphere for its usage and transmission. On the other hand, when individuals become part of social groups where English is the prevalent language, their usage of heritage languages may decrease, especially among younger generations who want to fit in with their peers and align their identity (Akhmadieva et al., 2020). The perception of language diversity by both immigrant populations and the wider society has a significant impact on language outcomes. Favourable views towards multilingualism and cultural diversity might enhance language preservation initiatives by fostering a sense of pride in ancestral languages and facilitating intergenerational language transmission. On the other hand, when people have biased attitudes, discriminate against, or stigmatise immigrant languages, it can speed up the process of language shift as individuals try to conform linguistically in order to avoid being socially marginalized (Bobowik, Benet-Martínez, & Repke, 2022). Personal incentives and the ability to take action are extremely important in determining language choices and behaviors. Immigrants' decisions to maintain or swap languages are influenced by factors such as language competency, personal identity, and perceived economic and social benefits. Immigrants may strategically engage in code-switching between languages based on the specific situation in order to navigate social hierarchies, assert their cultural identities, or acquire social capital (Marinucci & Riva, 2021).

Language shift and maintenance among immigrant communities in English-speaking countries

are complex processes influenced by a combination of sociolinguistic factors. Although the temptation to conform to the dominant English-speaking society and the presence of structural disparities present obstacles to preserving heritage languages, the vitality of these languages can also be influenced by social networks, attitudes towards language variety, and individual action. It is crucial to acknowledge and deal with these aspects in order to promote linguistic diversity and create inclusive sociolinguistic environments in immigrant groups (Banasiak & Olpińska-Szkiełko, 2020).

Language Shift and Language Maintenance: Definitions and Significance:

Language shift is the progressive abandonment of a community's heritage language in favor of another language, typically the dominant language of the surrounding society. This phenomena is commonly noticed in immigrant populations as they negotiate the language environment of their host countries. Language maintenance, conversely, pertains to the ongoing utilization and safeguarding of a legacy language within a community, notwithstanding exposure to and influence from the prevailing language (Grenoble & Osipov, 2023). Comprehending the phenomenon of language transfer and maintenance is of utmost importance for various reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the intricate interaction among linguistic, social, and cultural elements within immigrant communities. Furthermore, language has a crucial role in shaping both individual and societal identities, as it acts as a fundamental indicator of cultural affiliation. Language shift and maintenance can ultimately lead to significant impacts on community cohesiveness, intergenerational communication, and socioeconomic integration over an extended period of time (Polinsky & Scontras, 2020).

Theoretical Frameworks in Sociolinguistics: Exploring Language Contact and Language Ecology

The study of language shift and maintenance among immigrant populations is frequently led by theoretical frameworks based on sociolinguistics, namely the examination of language interaction and language ecology. Language contact theory analyses the consequences of linguistic interaction between distinct language groups, encompassing phenomena such as

borrowing, code-switching, and language shift. It highlights the significance of social, cultural, and historical elements in influencing language dynamics in multilingual communities (Grenoble, 2021). Language ecology examines the intricate connection between languages and their surroundings, considering aspects such as language vitality, language endangerment, and language planning. Language ecology, in the context of immigrant communities in English-speaking countries, offers a framework for comprehending the elements that influence the preservation or decrease of heritage languages. These factors include the accessibility of language resources, language policies, and attitudes towards multilingualism (Manan, Channa, Tul-Kubra, & David, 2021)S.

Sociolinguistic Factors Influencing Language Shift and Maintenance

Various sociolinguistic factors impact the phenomena of language shift and preservation within immigrant communities residing in English-speaking nations. These elements function at many levels, ranging from individual attitudes towards language to wider societal structures that influence linguistic hierarchies and power relations (Akintayo, Atobatele, & Mouboua, 2024). Several crucial elements include:

Language Attitudes: Attitudes towards various languages, encompassing notions of status, practicality, and cultural significance, exert a substantial influence on the selection and usage of languages within immigrant communities. Adverse views towards legacy languages or the belief that the dominant language is superior can lead to a decline in the use of heritage languages, whilst favorable attitudes towards heritage languages can support the continued use of these languages (Kircher, Zipp, & Zipp, 2022).

Identity Construction: Language and identity are strongly interconnected, and the decisions individuals make about language usage are frequently associated with their sense of belonging and self-perception. Immigrant populations often face the challenge of managing intricate identities, as they want to maintain their cultural history while still assimilating into the prevailing society. Language choices can act as indicators of ethnic identity, generational

disparities, and cultural esteem, impacting the course of language transition or preservation (Fielding, 2021).

Sociality pressures: Immigrant populations may encounter external forces that compel them to embrace the prevailing language of their host nation as a result of variables such as educational policies, career prospects, and media sway. Societal influences can influence the way languages are passed down within families, as parents may prioritize their children's mastery of the prevailing language in order to secure social and economic advancement. Moreover, the act of discriminating or stigmatizing individuals based on their language proficiency might intensify the process of language shift within immigrant communities (Zhou & Tang, 2022).

Intergenerational Transmission: The intergenerational transmission of language plays a vital role in preserving languages among immigrant groups. Factors such as the practice of marrying within the same cultural group, the extent to which the language is spoken at home, and the availability of formal schooling in the native language might impact the probability of children developing and maintaining fluency in their parents' language. The transmission patterns across generations might differ based on factors such as the vitality of the language, the cohesion of the community, and the existence of initiatives to revitalize the language (Akintayo et al., 2024).

Objectives of the research

1. To analyze the influence of social relationships on language habits in immigrant populations residing in English-speaking countries, and how this impacts their cultural identity and sense of belonging.
2. To examine the difficulties encountered by immigrant communities in maintaining their native languages while also striving for economic integration and fluency in the dominant language of the country they have migrated to.
3. To evaluate the impact of community support and empowerment on the preservation of languages within immigrant communities and the promotion of inclusive language policies.

Research Question

1. What is the impact of social connections within immigrant groups on linguistic practices, and how do these practices influence the preservation of cultural identity and a feeling of belonging?
2. What are the main difficulties faced by immigrants in maintaining their native languages while still needing to be proficient in the prevailing language for economic integration and social advancement?
3. What is the impact of community-driven initiatives and advocacy activities on the preservation of heritage languages among immigrant groups, and how can policymakers and community stakeholders apply measures to improve support for language preservation and inclusive language policies?

Significance of the Study

This study has important implications for both the academic knowledge and practical solutions related to immigrant communities in English-speaking countries. Gaining insight into the sociolinguistic elements that influence language shift and maintenance is essential for policymakers, educators, and community leaders responsible for assisting immigrant groups. The knowledge acquired from this research can be used to shape the creation of specific language preservation programs, educational projects, and comprehensive language policies that recognize and appreciate the diversity of languages. Furthermore, by exploring the intricate dynamics of social networks, the safeguarding of cultural heritage, the merging of economies, and the backing of communities, this research can aid in promoting enhanced inclusiveness and a deeper understanding and respect for different cultures in society. This research acknowledges the significance of heritage languages in immigrant communities. It can contribute to the development of inclusive environments that value linguistic diversity and empower immigrant

populations to maintain their cultural identities while adapting to the language situation in their new country.

Literature Review

The phenomena of language shift and maintenance within immigrant populations in English-speaking nations are intricate and are impacted by a range of sociolinguistic factors (Akintayo et al., 2024). The language choices of immigrants are frequently shaped by cultural views towards their mother tongue and the prevailing language of the host nation (Dagamseh, 2020). Banasiak and Olpińska-Szkielko (2020) research indicates that unfavorable societal attitudes towards minority languages can expedite language change within immigrant populations. These attitudes can be observed in discriminatory language legislation or the social stigmatization of non-dominant languages, which compel immigrants to learn the dominant language in order to achieve social and economic integration. The significance of intergenerational transmission in language preservation has been thoroughly examined. Schumann (1978) proposed the "acculturation model," which suggests that immigrant children are more likely than their parents to adopt the language and cultural norms of the dominant society, resulting in a shift in language usage within the family. This phenomenon emphasizes the significance of variations between generations in terms of their language usage and proficiency (Hafiz, Rukanuddin, Rahman, & Seraj, 2023).

Family relations have a significant impact on the formation of language patterns among immigrants. Alshihry (2024) highlight the importance of parental language practices in preserving the proficiency of immigrant children in their heritage language. Family language policies, such as the selection of languages spoken at home and the patterns of communication between different generations, have an impact on how well immigrant households are able to preserve their language. The ease of access and abundance of instructional materials in both the heritage and dominant languages have a significant influence on language preservation endeavors. Ortega (2020) research emphasizes the significance of bilingual education programs in promoting bilingualism and safeguarding minority languages among immigrant children.

Insufficient assistance for preserving heritage language education can impede efforts to maintain the language and expedite its replacement with another language. Social networks are also essential in influencing the language choices and behaviors of immigrants. Research conducted by Milroy (1987) indicates that the structure and intensity of social networks have an impact on language usage patterns, with closer connections to the heritage community facilitating the preservation of the language. On the other hand, when immigrants get more integrated into the dominant society, they may start to adopt the language of the host community as they build stronger social connections. It is essential to acknowledge the significant influence of language ideologies on the linguistic practices of immigrants. Kinsella (2020) contend that language ideologies, encompassing notions of language purity and authenticity, exert an impact on the language preferences and conceptions of linguistic identity among immigrants. Hostile attitudes towards minority languages can potentially accelerate language shift by diminishing the cultural and linguistic significance of immigrants' heritage.

Immigrant groups' language maintenance efforts are also influenced by economic concerns. According to a study conducted by Schwartz (2020), immigrants typically need to be proficient in the dominant language in order to improve their socioeconomic status and access work possibilities. Therefore, they prioritize learning and using the majority language as a means of advancing economically. The media environment has a substantial impact on influencing the language preferences and consumption patterns of immigrants. Olivares-Orellana (2020) research emphasizes the impact of media portrayals and language regulations on the linguistic identities and feelings of inclusion among immigrants. Immigrant groups may experience a shift in language due to increased exposure to media content in the prevailing language. Immigrants' language choices and behaviors are also influenced by political factors, such as language rules and legislation. Djourelova (2023) research highlights the significance of language planning and policy in influencing language preservation initiatives and fostering linguistic variety within immigrant populations. Implementing language policies that are supportive can help to maintain and protect minority languages within immigrant communities.

The phenomenon of globalization has consequences for the preservation and alteration of languages within immigrant populations. Manatschal, Wisthaler, and Zuber (2020) research examines how transnationalism and diaspora populations influence language practices, emphasizing the role of digital technologies in enabling language preservation initiatives across different countries. Ultimately, the language choices made by immigrant communities in English-speaking countries are shaped by a wide range of sociolinguistic factors. These factors include societal attitudes, the passing down of language between generations, family dynamics, access to education, social connections, beliefs about language, economic factors, media impact, political influences, and the effects of globalization. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these intricate interactions is essential in order to formulate efficient language policies and interventions that can effectively promote linguistic variety and preserve cultural heritage within immigrant groups (Codó & Riera-Gil, 2022).

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study has utilized a qualitative approach to examine the sociolinguistic factors that impact language shift and maintenance within immigrant populations residing in English-speaking countries. This study has employed qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations, to thoroughly investigate the experiences and viewpoints of immigrants in relation to language usage and preservation. The data collected from these interviews and observations analyzed thematically in order to uncover patterns and trends in the process of language transition and language preservation. This method allows for a thorough comprehension of the intricate interactions involved, such as social connections, preservation of culture, integration into the economy, and language proficiency. Furthermore, the study has highlighted the importance of community support, educational activities, and cultural empowerment in promoting language preservation endeavors. In the end, the results have provided guidance for policymakers and community stakeholders to develop inclusive language laws and support systems that effectively help immigrant groups preserve their heritage languages.

Data Analysis:

Thematic Analysis

Social Connections and Identity: Language practices in immigrant groups are significantly shaped by social connections. From their social connections, including language use, people get a sense of identity and belonging, according to the framework of social identity theory. Closely connected immigrants frequently view their native tongue as a symbolic indicator of their identity and cultural affinities. This is especially true in close-knit immigrant communities where language practices retain cultural traditions. On the other hand, immigrant populations that integrate more deeply into the English-speaking mainstream may face pressure to make English their primary language in order to promote social interaction and mobility. The intricate relationship that exists within immigrant communities between language, social identity, and belonging is shown by this dynamic.

Cultural Preservation and Heritage Language: Preserving heritage languages is closely connected to endeavors to protect cultural identity and pass down cultural traditions to future generations. Language functions as a reservoir of cultural information, values, and customs, establishing a concrete link to an individual's cultural history. Immigrants frequently articulate a profound want to maintain their ancestral language as a method of safeguarding their cultural identity in a novel setting. Nevertheless, obstacles such as disparities between generations and restricted availability of language training resources are substantial impediments to the successful preservation of languages. Furthermore, the decline in competency in legacy languages among younger generations is a cause for concern for the possible disappearance of cultural heritage and the passing down of linguistic and cultural traditions between generations.

Economic Integration and Language Proficiency: In order to succeed economically and socially, individuals often need to be proficient in the dominant language of the country they are living in, which is typically English in English-speaking countries. Immigrants face the challenge of balancing the need to be proficient in English with the desire to maintain their native language and cultural identity. While being proficient in English is important for finding employment and navigating the economy, some immigrants have had to prioritize learning English for career

advancement, which has resulted in a gradual decline in their proficiency in their native language. This tension highlights the complex nature of language change within immigrant communities and the conflicting demands of economic necessity and cultural preservation.

Community Support and Empowerment: The involvement and empowerment of the community are crucial in assisting efforts to preserve languages within immigrant groups. Integrated community networks offer vital linguistic resources, educational activities, and cultural initiatives with the goal of encouraging the utilization and preservation of heritage languages. Implementing community-driven language programs, cultural events, and digital resources can be highly beneficial in cultivating a strong sense of pride and ownership in one's linguistic background. Furthermore, community-based groups play a crucial role in lobbying for the protection of heritage languages and adopting language policies that are inclusive and acknowledge the linguistic variety among immigrant populations.

Elaborating on these themes enhances comprehension of the intricate sociolinguistic issues that impact the transition and preservation of languages among immigrant communities in English-speaking nations. To support immigrant communities in preserving their heritage languages and cultural identities, policymakers and community stakeholders can develop targeted interventions by examining the intricate relationships between social connections, cultural preservation, economic integration, and community support.

Conclusion

Studying the sociolinguistic factors that affect language change and preservation in immigrant communities in English-speaking countries provides valuable understanding of the intricate dynamics of cultural conservation, social identification, economic assimilation, and community assistance. This study employed a qualitative research approach that involved conducting in-depth interviews and making ethnographic observations. The aim was to explore the experiences and viewpoints of immigrants, which uncovered a diverse range of linguistic practices and efforts to preserve languages. Social connections have been identified as a fundamental factor in

influencing language habits among immigrant communities. Based on social identity theory, it became clear that language functions as a symbolic marker of one's identity and cultural connection. Immigrants who are thoroughly integrated into their ethnic communities frequently maintain a strong attachment to their heritage language as a means of fostering a sense of belonging and preserving their cultural identity. On the other hand, immigrants who are assimilating into the dominant English-speaking culture may face pressure to learn and use English in order to interact socially and improve their opportunities, highlighting the complex connection between language, social identity, and a sense of belonging.

Cultural conservation and the upkeep of ancestral languages are crucial elements in safeguarding cultural identity and passing down customs from one generation to another. Language functions as a medium through which cultural legacy is transmitted, encapsulating cultural wisdom, principles, and traditions. Immigrants demonstrate a strong inclination to preserve their ancestral language as a way to protect their cultural identity in a new setting. Nevertheless, obstacles such as differences across generations and restricted availability of linguistic resources present substantial barriers to the successful preservation of languages. The waning expertise observed in newer generations indicates a possible forfeiture of cultural legacy and the gradual deterioration of language and cultural customs over a period of time. The process of economic integration requires individuals to strike a careful equilibrium between the imperative of being proficient in English and the aspiration to preserve their original language and cultural heritage. Mastery of the English language is crucial for gaining economic opportunities and effectively navigating society. However, immigrants frequently struggle with deciding whether to focus on learning English for professional growth, which might result in a steady decline in their skill in their native language. The presence of friction highlights the complex nature of language evolution in immigrant communities, where the need for financial stability conflicts with the need to maintain cultural heritage.

Community support and empowerment play a crucial role in strengthening language preservation efforts among immigrant populations. Integrated community networks offer crucial linguistic

resources, educational programs, and cultural activities with the goal of promoting the use and preservation of heritage languages. Community-led language initiatives, cultural activities, and online materials act as catalysts for fostering a sense of pride and ownership in one's linguistic history. Furthermore, community-based groups have a vital role in lobbying for the preservation of heritage languages and promoting inclusive language policies that recognize the linguistic variety within immigrant communities. To summarize, the complex sociolinguistic environment within immigrant populations highlights the diverse aspects of language change and preservation in English-speaking nations. To support immigrant communities in keeping their heritage languages and cultural identities, policymakers and community stakeholders can build focused interventions by understanding the intricacies of social relationships, cultural preservation, economic integration, and community support. By implementing inclusive language legislation and providing support mechanisms, immigrant communities can be enabled to effectively handle the difficulties of transitioning to a new language, all while embracing and appreciating the diverse linguistic heritage present within their own communities. In conclusion, creating a setting that appreciates and sustains heritage languages enhances inclusivity and cultural richness in society, where the voices and identities of immigrant populations are highly valued and commemorated.

Recommendations

Enhanced Linguistic Resources and Educational Support: Enhance the availability of language training tools and educational programs that focus on safeguarding heritage languages in immigrant communities. This may encompass financial support for language classes, workshops, and online resources that are initiated and led by the community to promote language learning and preservation endeavors.

Cultural Preservation Initiatives: Support endeavors that advance the conservation of cultural heritage in conjunction with language preservation endeavors. Provide assistance and resources to empower and promote cultural events, festivals, and exhibitions organized by the community,

which aim to honor and showcase the varied cultural customs of immigrant populations. This will strengthen the feeling of pride and belonging to one's cultural heritage.

Community Empowerment and Advocacy: Enable community-based organizations to champion the safeguarding of heritage languages and the establishment of comprehensive language policies that promote inclusivity. Allocate financial support and necessary materials to local community projects that strive to enhance the variety of languages spoken and advocate for the acknowledgment of ancestral languages in educational and governmental contexts.

Collaborative Policy Development: Foster collaboration between legislators, educators, community leaders, and immigrant populations to develop inclusive language laws and support structures. Ensure that policies reflect the linguistic requirements and cultural variety of immigrant populations, providing an environment where heritage languages are recognized and encouraged.

Long-Term Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish methods for long-term monitoring and evaluation of language preservation efforts within immigrant communities. Regularly monitor the success of initiatives and change tactics depending on changing trends and community feedback to ensure continuous support for heritage languages and cultural identities. By implementing these guidelines, governments and community stakeholders can effectively support immigrant groups in conserving their heritage languages and cultural identities, promoting a more inclusive and culturally dynamic society where linguistic variety is embraced and cherished.

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