

Linguistic Mobility: Performance and Attitudes of Heritage Language Speakers in Australia The Role of Language Policies

Heritage languages (HL), i.e. naturalistically acquired languages different from a society's dominant language(s), can be understood as a linguistic product of human mobility. Differential lexical and grammatical structures observed in Heritage Language Speakers' (HLSs) language use are frequently regarded to be the outcome of so-called simplification processes induced by cross-linguistic influence. A prevalent notion which situates the majority of research on HLs and their speakers within a deficit perspective.

Moving away from differential linguistic structures, I seek to discuss how heritage language speakers conceptualise and frame their linguistic heritage. Drawing on qualitative data elicited from different generations of HLSs of German in Southern Australia by means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, I will discuss different attitudes and motivations regarding the use and maintenance of a HL. The speakers' individual experiences are correlated with language data obtained from experimental studies and further considered in light of Australian language policies. How do conscious acts of language planning affect an individual's linguistic identity? In how far do Australia's language policies enable, encourage, or inhibit linguistic mobility?

In doing so, I intend to go beyond the predominant deficit perspective and offer an alternative lens. Positing HLSs at the centre of an investigation allows us to uncover extra-linguistic factors which affect HLSs linguistic performance and to recognise their crucial impact on the (linguistic) identity of these speakers. Within this approach, differential linguistic structures are, therefore, argued to reflect a complex linguistic identity rather than a deterioration of linguistic capabilities.

Bio Note

Friederike Zahn is a PhD candidate in English philology at the University of Cologne. Her PhD projects investigates morphosyntactic structures of immigrant languages induced by language contact and shaped by national language policies in the context of Australia. After completing her master's degree in Applied Linguistics at the University of Bonn, Friederike joined the University of Cologne as a research assistant in 2021. In April 2022, she took up an additional research assistant position that is part of the "Australian Studies" project set out to establish a collaborative online master's programme. Her main research interests include psycholinguistics, computational linguistics, and bi-and multilingualism.