

**Holding Roots: Preserving Arabic Against Language Loss in Canada**

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## **Abstract**

As we navigate through the vibrant mosaic of Canada's multicultural society, the fading whispers of heritage language loss signal an urgent call to action. My journey into the heart of Canada's linguistic diversity transcends academic inquiry; it is a personal quest fueled by my experiences as a heritage language educator. The silent battle against the erosion of these languages poses significant challenges, particularly within Canada's diverse immigrant populations. This battle is fought on several fronts, with individuals, families, and communities adopting a variety of strategies to uphold their linguistic heritage in the face of dominant language influences.

My proposed plan emphasizes improved access, choice, and flexibility in language instruction, embedding languages within the curriculum, and guaranteeing equal access for all learners. It also highlights the importance of supporting educators, extending language use beyond the academic curriculum, and promoting family language policies. This study examines the reasons behind the decline of heritage languages, underscores their importance, and suggests proactive measures for their preservation. Drawing from personal observations, I discuss how societal pressures, educational frameworks, peer interactions, family dynamics, and psychological aspects influence immigrants' language use. The paper advocates for a transformative policy that not only acknowledges but also celebrates linguistic diversity. Aimed at policymakers, educators, and community leaders, this call to action invites a united effort to safeguard our linguistic heritage, ensuring that each language and voice is recognized and valued. This approach is about more than policy—it is about embracing and celebrating the unique contributions of all cultures in our society.

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## **I. Introduction**

### A. Canadian Linguistic Context

Canada, home to 34 million people, is a linguistic mosaic, featuring nearly 600 variations of over 70 Indigenous languages across twelve language families. Additionally, the country hosts over 140 immigrant languages, with more than seven million Canadians speaking an immigrant language at home. This accounts for over one-fifth of the nation's population and signifies a nearly 15% increase in the past decade (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In Canada, "heritage language" refers to any language other than English and French, the two official languages. This definition originates from the Canadian Heritage Languages Institute Act of 1991 (Government of Canada, 1991). Heritage languages include both Indigenous languages and those introduced by immigrants, not from English- or French-speaking countries.

Remarkably, twenty heritage languages are still actively spoken at home by more than half of the individuals who learned them during childhood (Statistics Canada, 2017). The persistence of these languages is supported by robust immigration, with Canada boasting the highest immigration rate among G8 nations, standing at 20.6% (Di Salvo, 2017). Additionally, governmental policies promoting multiculturalism and bilingual education, family dedication to language transmission, and the advent of digital media that enhances access to cultural heritage all contribute to this linguistic resilience.

This linguistic diversity is shaped by several factors. Historical political decisions, like the introduction of the policy of "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" in 1971, have played a significant role (Cummins & Danesi, 1990). While initially, there was some resistance to the term "heritage," it has now gained wider acceptance and is commonly used in government discussions (Dressler, 2010).

The continuation of heritage languages faces challenges, particularly among immigrant families. These families often find themselves as minority groups attempting to maintain their linguistic and cultural traits while integrating into a society distinct from their own (Fishman, 1989; Al-Sahafi, 2015). The effort to communicate in their native languages with their children poses a significant hurdle but is crucial for preserving their cultural identity (Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002).

#### B. Definition of Heritage Language Loss

Heritage language loss involves individuals gradually giving up their native languages in favor of the dominant language of the society, a phenomenon particularly common in English-speaking regions of Canada. This process, often referred to as "subtractive bilingualism," happens when children, primarily in school settings, begin to use English more than their family's language, resulting in the gradual erosion of the original language (Fillmore, 1991).

This observation reflects that heritage language loss is influenced not only by the educational environment but also by family decisions, societal norms, and personal choices. English-centric education systems play a significant role in accelerating this process, showcasing a broad societal trend towards monolingualism, which often leaves little room for the maintenance of other languages (Verdon, McLeod, & Winsler, 2014).

Through my own reflections and studies on the subject, it is clear that the loss of heritage languages isn't just an educational issue but is deeply rooted in broader societal attitudes and policies. There is a noticeable lack of support for preserving languages that are part of individuals' cultural identities, which are often disregarded in public policies and educational practices (Babae, 2011; Davis, 2017).

Preserving heritage languages is complex and requires addressing misconceptions and biases that exist within families and society, as well as implementing supportive educational policies. Efforts to maintain these languages are crucial for maintaining cultural diversity and for honoring individuals' connections to their ancestral roots.

### C. Significance of the Heritage Language Loss Issue

Language serves as our unique connection with the Creator, influencing our attitudes, beliefs, values, and fundamental notions of truth. Our languages are not merely tools for communication; they embody our identity, connect us to our past, and act as a bridge to our future. They are our heart and spirit, holding the keys to our collective wisdom and existence. The loss of language is not just a loss of words but a profound loss of our very essence and the wisdom passed through generations.

According to the Assembly of First Nations, Education Secretariat (1990), our languages are the cornerstone of who we are as a people, and without our languages, our cultures cannot survive. This statement underscores the profound significance of language as the soul of a culture, deeply intertwined with the divine and shaping our deepest beliefs and truths.

A primary concern within ethnocultural communities in North America is the preservation of their cultural identities. These communities are defined by shared cultural practices, linguistic

heritage, ancestral origins, and societal norms and values, emphasizing the critical role of linguistic diversity in maintaining cultural integrity.

This commitment to preserving linguistic diversity is supported by governmental policies in both Canada and the United States. These policies underscore the importance of maintaining the rich diversity and heritage that ethnocultural communities contribute to the fabric of North American society.

Despite the avowed commitment to immigration and multiculturalism by various levels of government, there remains a significant gap in awareness among North Americans about the profound linguistic diversity within the two nations. Shaw (2001) notes that even among the most educated and politically influential individuals, there exists a pervasive ignorance regarding the richness contributed by these communities. Furthermore, projections indicate that between 5,000 to 7,000 world languages are at risk of extinction by the century's end, despite existing protective legislation (Solash, 2010). This potential loss would incur substantial personal, cultural, and national costs, underscoring the urgency of safeguarding languages and cultures.

#### D. Purpose of the Paper

This paper explores the dynamics of heritage language loss within Canada's multifaceted linguistic landscape, underscoring the vital role these languages play in cultural identity and social cohesion. Heritage languages are integral to maintaining cultural heritage, and understanding their decline involves considering various influential factors.

Drawing upon my personal experiences as a heritage language educator, I've observed that heritage language loss is often influenced by a complex interplay of social pressures, educational influences, peer dynamics, family interactions, and psychological factors impacting immigrants'

experiences. These observations guide the focus of this study, emphasizing the necessity for a comprehensive approach to language revitalization.

Through a review of existing literature, this study investigates:

1. The contributions of social pressures, educational systems, peer dynamics, family interactions, and psychological factors to heritage language loss among Canadian immigrants.
2. Potential enhancements to Alberta's language policy and legislation to better support heritage language maintenance.
3. Effective strategies for promoting heritage language revitalization, focusing on access, choice, flexibility, family language policy, and teacher support.

The findings highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by heritage languages and underscore the need for strategic interventions in policy and curriculum development.

Based on these findings, the paper advocates for policy reform and more inclusive legislative support that can create environments conducive to the thriving of heritage languages. Specific recommendations for improving community engagement and resource allocation are provided to foster a supportive atmosphere for heritage languages. These suggestions are built on the understanding that language dynamics are comprehensive, involving numerous factors that influence preservation and change.

The conclusion draws on the established findings without introducing new content, aiming to enhance the vibrancy and continuity of Canada's diverse linguistic heritage by suggesting practical measures for revitalization.

E. Overview of the Paper Structure



The paper begins by outlining Canada's linguistic diversity, focusing on the pressing issue of heritage language attrition. This section sets the stage by defining the scope and objectives of the study and prepares the reader for an in-depth exploration of the topic.

Drawing from my personal experiences as a heritage language educator, I discuss the personal and communal benefits of maintaining fluency in heritage languages. This perspective emphasizes the critical need for their preservation and introduces what constitutes heritage languages and characterizes their speakers, highlighting their unique aspects.

The paper progresses with an analytical review of factors influencing heritage language acquisition and loss, integrating scholarly work. This includes the impact of variables such as age at immigration, language used at home, parental attitudes, and schooling on language retention. This section explores the complex dynamics of language maintenance and loss, presenting a detailed examination of the challenges faced by heritage language speakers.

A focused critique of Canada's language policies, especially in Alberta, follows. This evaluation identifies gaps in current policies and explores potential improvements to better support heritage languages. It assesses the need for legislative acknowledgment of these languages and examines the influences of multiculturalism and multilingualism on effective policy formulation.

Transitioning from critique to application, the paper proposes a comprehensive approach to revitalizing heritage languages. It outlines practical steps for enhancing language instruction accessibility and improving communication methods. These recommendations aim to extend language usage beyond educational settings and address challenges identified earlier.

The conclusion summarizes the key findings, reaffirming the integral role of linguistic

diversity in Canada's cultural fabric. It emphasizes the critical importance of heritage languages to national identity and ends with a call for collective action from policymakers, educators, and community members to preserve and revitalize heritage languages, advocating for their role in multicultural coexistence and identity.

## **II. Understanding Heritage Language**

### **A. Definition of Heritage Language**

The terms "Heritage Language" (HL) and its alternatives are examined in the context of Canadian policy, legislation, and educational settings. Cummins and Danesi (1990) define HL as a language inherited from one's family or country of origin, excluding official languages and Aboriginal languages. However, there's variability in terminology across provinces, with terms like "ethnic," "minority," "ancestral," and "non-official" languages being used.

Scholarly work, such as that by Jedwab (2000), highlights the political implications of terminology, with "non-official language" referencing Canada's official languages policy. Critics, like Baker and Jones (1998), argue that the term "heritage language" may carry outdated connotations, potentially disconnecting youth from their linguistic roots. Recent shifts towards using "international language," particularly in British Columbia and Ontario, aim to emphasize global significance over historical ties.

The 2006 census data cited demonstrates the prevalence of various heritage languages in Canada, including Chinese, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Punjabi, Ukrainian, Arabic, and Tagalog. This linguistic diversity reflects the complex socio-political narratives surrounding language in Canada.

The shift from "heritage language" to "international language" in educational policies signifies a strategic effort to modernize perceptions and emphasize global connectivity. This evolution in terminology not only aims to better integrate immigrant communities but also aligns local linguistic identities with broader global standards, reshaping how cultural heritage is perceived and valued in policymaking contexts.

The scholarly work on terminology surrounding heritage languages in Canada underscores the political and social nuances inherent in language classification. Different terms carry diverse connotations and implications, reflecting the complex interplay between linguistic diversity and socio-political narratives. Critics highlight the potential disconnect between youth and their linguistic roots inherent in the term "heritage language," while proponents of terminology shifts emphasize the importance of aligning local linguistic identities with global standards.

These findings reveal a dynamic landscape where language terminology is not merely descriptive but carries significant political and cultural weight. The shift towards terms like "international language" reflects broader trends in globalization and attempts to redefine cultural heritage within a more interconnected world. However, it's essential to critically evaluate the implications of these shifts, considering their potential impact on community identity and linguistic diversity.

In practice, educators and policymakers should be mindful of the implications of language terminology on community identity and integration. Further research could delve into the specific effects of terminology shifts on linguistic minority communities and their perceptions of

cultural heritage. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions and countries could provide valuable insights into the role of language terminology in shaping cultural narratives and policies.

## B. Characteristics of Heritage Language Learners

Heritage language (HL) learners exhibit diverse characteristics based on cultural identification, language use, and educational experiences. Scholars have extensively studied these facets to propose varied definitions and categorizations.

Valdés (2001) identifies HL learners primarily by their upbringing in non-English-speaking homes, where they develop varying degrees of bilingualism. This demographic often navigates multiple linguistic environments from an early age, which significantly shapes their language proficiency and cultural identity.

Kondo-Brown (2003) adds a critical dimension by suggesting that an HL learner's self-definition hinges more on identity orientation than linguistic proficiency. This observation emphasizes the complex interplay between cultural identity and language use among HL learners.

Van Deusen-Scholl (1998, 2003) distinguishes between heritage learners and learners with heritage motivation. This differentiation is further explored by Carreira (2004), who categorizes these learners as "HLL1" and "HLL2," emphasizing that a comprehensive understanding of HL learners should incorporate factors like identity, language, and family background.

The scholarly categorizations of HL learners elucidate the multifaceted nature of heritage language acquisition. These distinctions are not merely academic; they have practical

implications for educational strategies. For instance, the emphasis on bilingual environments and identity orientation influences course design, material selection, and the broader educational framework within which HL learners operate.

Wiley (2001) and Carreira (2004) discuss the importance of socially contextualized definitions of HL learners. These definitions shape educational policies and practices, impacting decisions related to course and program design, student placement, assessment, and teacher training.

In the scholarly discourse on heritage language learners, it becomes clear that educational frameworks should adapt to the nuanced needs of these learners, taking into account their cultural backgrounds and bilingual capabilities. Future research should continue to explore the intersection of cultural identity and language proficiency, aiming to refine educational approaches that enhance HL proficiency and cultural understanding.

### C. Importance of Heritage Language Maintenance

Research has consistently shown that maintaining heritage languages in educational settings significantly benefits the social, emotional, and academic adaptation of students new to a country. Bhatnagar (1980) notes that such practices improve adaptability among these students. Furthermore, the role of heritage languages in enhancing cognitive abilities and academic performance is well-established, with studies by Danesi (1983), Swain and Lapkin (1982), and Wells (1981) highlighting the positive correlation between heritage language proficiency and cognitive academic development.

Heritage Language Learning (HLL) also promotes group cohesion and ethnic rediscovery

among ethnic groups aiming to reconnect with their roots (Isajiw, 1981). Studies also show that proficiency in a heritage language does not detract from learning the majority language, but rather enhances it. This is supported by findings that documented the positive association between heritage language proficiency and learning a third language in Canadian bilingual programs (Swain & Lapkin, 1991; Swain, Lapkin, & Hart, 1990). Cummins (1983) further supports this by demonstrating that heritage language can be maintained alongside successful acquisition of the majority language.

The loss of a first language often leads to significant academic struggles and impacts future language learning and academic success (Nieto, 1996). Furthermore, a decline in ethnic identification has been linked to linguistic acculturation, or the erosion of the first language (Laroche, Chankon, and Hui, 1998).

In the context of globalization and Canada's integrated economy, the preservation of heritage languages is increasingly seen as a valuable asset. These languages are recognized as significant economic resources that challenge the critics of heritage language maintenance to reconsider their stance, recognizing the importance of protecting and fostering these languages amidst global interdependence.

The findings from these scholarly works suggest a strong case for the integration of heritage languages into educational policies. This integration supports not only academic and cognitive development but also aids in the emotional and social adjustment of immigrant students. The preservation of heritage languages extends beyond linguistic benefits to cultural and socio-economic advantages, contributing to stronger cultural identities and potentially enhancing economic opportunities in a globalized market.

However, implementing heritage language programs involves challenges such as resource allocation, teacher training, and curriculum development, which also present opportunities for innovative educational practices and policies. Future research should focus on the long-term impacts of these programs on academic success and economic opportunities, and explore their effects on community and national identity. This robust base of scholarly evidence strongly advocates for enhanced support and recognition of heritage languages within educational systems, particularly in multicultural settings like Canada.

#### D. Personal Context: In Alberta

##### 1. Alberta Linguistic Context

Since 2006, Alberta has witnessed substantial demographic changes, marked by a 10.8% growth rate. This transformation, driven primarily by immigration, positions Alberta as a leader in demographic shifts within Canada. Understanding these changes is crucial, as they have significant implications for various sectors, particularly education.

Lund (2006) highlights Alberta's remarkable population growth of 10.8% and notes that 11% of this population comprises visible minorities. This change indicates a significant shift in the province's demographic composition. Kiernan (2011) points out that the Western provinces, including Alberta, have begun outpacing the Eastern provinces in population growth for the first time, a trend primarily fueled by immigration.

According to the Government of Alberta (2023), approximately one in five students in Alberta are English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners. This statistic reflects the growing linguistic diversity within the educational system.

Despite the increased diversity, the availability of bilingual and second language programs

remains limited. Speck (2008) reports that such programs in the Edmonton Public School Board are not sufficiently expansive to meet the diverse needs of the population.

The demographic evolution in Alberta carries profound economic and social implications. As MacPherson & Ghoso (2008) explain, these changes, driven by globalization, affect both the cultural fabric and the economic dynamics of the province.

The current educational offerings in Alberta fail to adequately cater to the linguistic diversity of its student population. This limitation poses challenges in terms of inclusivity and accessibility of educational resources. There is a critical need for policies that not only acknowledge this diversity but also actively incorporate it into the educational framework to ensure equitable access for all students.

Based on the findings and analysis presented, it is evident that Alberta's educational policies require adjustments to better support its diversifying demographic. Expanding bilingual and second language programs would address the existing gaps and enhance educational inclusivity. These adjustments would help ensure that all students, regardless of their linguistic background, have access to quality education that meets their specific needs.

Alberta's demographic landscape has evolved significantly, bringing both challenges and opportunities, particularly in the realm of education. Addressing these challenges through thoughtful policy reform and the expansion of educational programs is essential. By doing so, Alberta can ensure that its educational system not only keeps pace with its changing demographics but also supports a diverse and inclusive learning environment for all students.

## 2. My Experience as a Heritage Language Educator

As a native speaker of Arabic and an educator deeply embedded in the linguistic and



educational landscapes of Edmonton, I have witnessed firsthand the shifts in language education and policy. My professional experiences, combined with my academic pursuits, provide a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities within heritage language education.

On October 10, 2017, the Alberta government, in collaboration with Edmonton Public Schools, announced the launch of a province-wide Arabic bilingual program set to commence in September 2018. This program, spanning kindergarten through Grade 12, was designed to address the growing demand for Arabic language education, which had become the fastest-expanding language curriculum within the Edmonton public school system.

The initiative was praised by Education Minister David Eggen, who highlighted the economic and academic benefits of bilingualism and affirmed the government's commitment to meeting the diverse linguistic needs of Alberta's population (CBC, 2017).

Despite strong program frameworks and government support, the implementation of heritage language programs faces significant challenges. These include issues with teacher recruitment, resource allocation, and student motivation, which are critical for sustaining enrollment and engagement, particularly at higher educational levels.

In my role as an Arabic language teacher, I have observed a decline in enrollment in heritage language programs at the high school level. This trend underscores the necessity for enhanced support and innovation in teaching practices to maintain student interest and educational efficacy.

Based on the insights gained from both my personal experiences and scholarly work, it is crucial to advocate for and implement strategies that bolster heritage language programs. Enhancing teacher training, increasing resource investment, and integrating culturally relevant pedagogies could significantly improve the outcomes of these programs.

The journey of enhancing and preserving heritage languages like Arabic is complex and fraught with challenges. However, the opportunities for cultural enrichment and educational excellence are immense. As I continue to pursue a PhD in Additional Languages, my commitment to this cause is unwavering, driven by both my personal dedication and the scholarly evidence supporting the need for robust heritage language education.

### **III. Factors Contributing to Heritage Language Loss**

Heritage language loss in Canada involves a complex interplay of social, psychological, and educational factors. These languages are crucial for personal identity, cultural heritage, and community belonging. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective language retention strategies.

#### **A. Social and Cultural Assimilation Pressures**

In Canada, especially in provinces with dense immigrant populations like Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, the societal push towards assimilation into predominantly English or French-speaking communities significantly impacts heritage language retention. A report by Statistics Canada shows that these pressures are influential in the shift from minority heritage languages to the official languages, particularly among second-generation immigrants. This shift is often accelerated by the desire to integrate socially and economically within the broader Canadian society (Statistics Canada, 2016).

#### **B. Influence of the Education System**

The structure of the Canadian education system, which prioritizes English and French, often at the expense of other languages, plays a critical role in heritage language loss. While Canada's official bilingualism policies support English and French, the actual support for other

heritage languages within the public schooling system is often lacking or inconsistent. Studies, such as those by Cummins (2000), have demonstrated that without strong heritage language education programs, immigrant children are likely to experience a rapid shift towards the dominant language, which is reinforced by the educational curriculum and resources.

### C. Peer Influence and Social Dynamics

The role of peer influence in language use and preference is particularly strong in Canadian urban settings, where diverse cultural groups frequently interact. Research in cities like Toronto and Vancouver (Baker, 2011) highlights that peer groups significantly influence language preferences, especially among adolescents. These groups often promote the use of English or French in order to fit in, leading to a decrease in the use of heritage languages among these young populations.

### D. Family Dynamics and Parental Influence

Family decisions regarding language use are profoundly influenced by perceptions of economic and educational advancement. In Canada, many immigrant parents view proficiency in English or French as a key to better opportunities for their children, often prioritizing these languages over heritage languages (Zhou, 2004). This preference is compounded by the variable availability of heritage language schooling options across different provinces, which can either support or hinder the maintenance of these languages.

### E. Psychological Factors and Self-Perception

Psychological factors, such as anxiety about language ability and fear of being perceived as different, play a significant role in heritage language abandonment. In the context of Canadian

multiculturalism, younger generations may feel compelled to abandon their heritage languages in favor of English or French to assimilate more seamlessly into mainstream culture (Phinney, 1990).

The findings highlight a multifaceted landscape of heritage language loss in Canada. Social and cultural assimilation pressures, compounded by educational, peer, familial, and psychological factors, contribute to the erosion of heritage languages among immigrant populations. While scholarly research provides comprehensive insights into these dynamics, it's essential to recognize the interplay of these factors and their nuanced impact on language retention.

Effective language retention strategies should acknowledge the complexity of these influences and adopt a holistic approach that engages with communities, educational institutions, policymakers, and families. Further research should explore the efficacy of heritage language education programs, interventions to mitigate assimilation pressures, and the role of cultural identity in language maintenance. Policymakers should prioritize the inclusion of heritage languages within educational curricula and provide support for community-based language initiatives to preserve linguistic diversity and promote cultural heritage.

#### **IV. Language Policy and Legislation**

##### **A. Language Policy in Canada**

Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson (1995) highlight the historical oppression of minority languages in Canada through policy. They illustrate how language policies have been used as instruments of oppression. Hinton (2001) and Hornberger (1998) have documented a shift towards policies supporting and encouraging heritage languages, marking a transition from past

oppressive practices.

The transformation of French language policy in Canada, particularly after the Quiet Revolution in Quebec during the 1960s, has been extensively studied. Warren (2003) notes the positive impacts of policies aimed at empowering the Francophone population. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (RCBB), initiated by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson in 1963, played a pivotal role in recommending improvements for bilingualism and biculturalism (RCBB, 1967).

The RCBB's findings from 1967 to 1970 highlighted the marginalization of Francophones, leading to initiatives to include official minority languages in education and eliminate employment barriers for Francophones (RCBB, 1968; MacMillan, 2003). The Canadian government recognized English and French as the two official languages in 1969 (Commissioner of Official Languages, 1971; Official Languages Act, 1969). Additionally, the RCBB hearings reflected concerns from Ukrainian-Canadians and other ethnic minorities about the bicultural identity framework, fearing it overlooked their contributions (Martorelli, 1990; RCBB, 1965).

In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual context, making Canada the first country to adopt an official multiculturalism policy (Trudeau, 1971; Canadian Heritage, 2002a). This policy aimed at supporting cultural groups, fostering intercultural exchange, and assisting immigrants in learning an official language, with substantial government funds allocated for languages and cultural maintenance despite initial financial challenges (Library of Parliament, 1999).

The scholarly works outlined provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of language policies in Canada. They demonstrate a significant shift from policies of oppression to

those promoting linguistic diversity and cultural inclusion. The initiatives undertaken, such as the RCBB recommendations and the introduction of multiculturalism, reflect a commitment to recognizing and supporting the linguistic and cultural rights of various communities within Canada.

The transition towards policies supporting heritage languages and multiculturalism signifies a broader acknowledgment of Canada's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. However, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for all linguistic and cultural groups, particularly in areas such as education and employment. Continued research and analysis are necessary to assess the effectiveness of current policies and address any persisting inequalities in language rights and cultural representation.

Building on the findings and analysis presented, it is imperative for policymakers to continue prioritizing inclusive language policies that recognize and support linguistic diversity. This includes ongoing efforts to provide resources for the maintenance and revitalization of heritage languages, as well as promoting intercultural exchange and understanding within Canadian society.

Furthermore, practices that promote linguistic equity in education and employment should be prioritized, ensuring that all individuals have equal access to opportunities regardless of their linguistic background. This may involve implementing language support programs for newcomers and linguistic minorities, as well as fostering inclusive work environments that value linguistic and cultural diversity.

Future research in this area could delve deeper into the experiences of linguistic minority groups in Canada and the impact of language policies on their linguistic and cultural identities.

Additionally, comparative studies examining language policies in other multicultural societies could provide valuable insights into effective approaches for promoting linguistic diversity and inclusion.

### B. Language in Canadian Multiculturalism

In discussing the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and its implications, it's important to delineate between beliefs, experiences, observations, and scholarly findings. The Act, established within the framework of the Official Languages Act (1969) and the Canadian Human Rights Act (1982), is designed to uphold Canada's cultural and racial diversity, drawing on international human rights agreements.

From a scholarly perspective, the Act is critiqued for its vagueness regarding the definition of 'culture' and the lack of clear delineation of governmental responsibilities. Scholars such as Fishman (1999) argue that while the Act implicitly includes linguistic diversity within its definition of multiculturalism, the omission of explicit reference to language is a significant oversight. This criticism is echoed by others, such as Romaine (2002), who note that while the Act eventually acknowledges the importance of language maintenance, it fails to provide concrete measures to support linguistic diversity.

These scholarly findings highlight a gap between the Act's stated objectives and its practical implementation. While it celebrates Canada's cultural and racial diversity, the Act's ambiguity and lack of emphasis on linguistic diversity undermine its effectiveness. This leads to suggestions for improvement in policy implementation to better reflect and support Canada's multicultural and multilingual heritage.

Scholarly critiques reveal flaws in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), notably its

failure to address linguistic diversity and provide clear implementation guidelines. This gap undermines the Act's effectiveness, fostering ambiguity and hindering accountability.

Suggestions for Practice:

To address these issues, policymakers should define key terms clearly, incorporate explicit measures to support linguistic diversity, and enhance accountability mechanisms within the Act.

Future research should explore the Act's impact on linguistic minorities, compare multicultural policies across societies, and investigate the intersectionality of language, culture, and identity. Longitudinal studies tracking policy evolution would also enrich our understanding of multiculturalism's effects.

### C. Call for action: Recognition of Language in Multiculturalism

According to studies by scholars such as Banting and Kymlicka (2006), there exists a disconnect in Canadian policies regarding language and multiculturalism. Despite recognizing the importance of language in global contexts, there's a noted lack of integration between language policies and multiculturalism initiatives (CMA, 1988). This gap is often exploited for political purposes rather than addressing the genuine needs and desires of Canadians.

To rectify this issue, a significant overhaul of policies and substantial investment in citizenry are deemed necessary. Current cultural initiatives haven't effectively curbed language loss, necessitating a focused and sustained approach to integrate language within multiculturalism and education systems.

I strongly recommend that governments reformulate multiculturalism policies, defining multiculturalism and recognizing the vital role of language within this framework. Policies should highlight how cultural and linguistic diversity enriches Canada's social fabric and



economy. Additionally, integrating provisions for Heritage Languages and Multilingual Education programs is essential for preserving Canada's linguistic heritage. Establishing an Office for Multiculturalism is crucial for monitoring policy implementation and celebrating Canada's diverse identity.

Future research should examine the effectiveness of multiculturalism policies in preserving linguistic diversity and promoting cross-cultural understanding. Comparative studies with other multicultural societies can provide insights into best practices. Longitudinal research tracking language retention rates among different demographics will inform policy development. Additionally, investigating the impact of language policies on economic outcomes and social cohesion will deepen our understanding of language, culture, and multiculturalism's interplay.

## **V. Strategies for Heritage Language Revitalization**

### **A. Definition of Heritage Language Maintenance**

In discussing heritage language maintenance (HLM), it's important to delineate between scholarly definitions and personal perspectives. Scholars like Coulmas & Batibo (2005) and Pauwels (2005) offer definitions rooted in academic research. Coulmas & Batibo describe HLM as the ongoing use of a language despite competition from another, while Pauwels characterizes it as the persistence of language use in various aspects of life, even under pressure from a dominant language.

My own observations align with these definitions, particularly in multicultural communities where heritage languages coexist with dominant ones. In my experience, families often make deliberate efforts to pass down their native languages to younger generations, despite the prevalence of the dominant language in educational and societal settings.

However, scholarly critiques, such as those from Pauwels (2016), remind us to question the nuances of HLM definitions. Pauwels points out the oversight in many definitions regarding the extent of language usage required for maintenance. This prompts a reconsideration of what constitutes effective heritage language maintenance beyond mere linguistic competence.

It becomes clear that the definition of HLM is multifaceted and subject to interpretation. Scholars offer varying perspectives, highlighting the complexity of language dynamics in diverse contexts.

While scholarly definitions provide valuable frameworks for understanding HLM, it's essential to recognize the limitations and nuances within these definitions. Personal experiences and observations complement academic discourse, enriching our understanding of heritage language maintenance in practice.

## B. Call For Actions

### 1. Access, Choice and Flexibility

In Canada, multilingualism is often celebrated as a sign of cultural diversity and intellectual richness. Parents are inspired to ensure their children are fluent in both of Canada's official languages, as well as an additional non-official language. This perspective is based on observation and societal norms, where bilingualism and multilingualism are viewed as valuable assets.

Scholarly findings support the benefits of bilingual and multilingual proficiency. Immersion programs have been shown to enhance student performance and standardized test scores academically. Socially, they aid in the preservation of ethnic identity and bolster self-esteem, while fostering respect for minority languages. Economically, multilingualism facilitates

international trade with countries where English is not the dominant language (Alberta Education, 1997).

However, achieving multilingual proficiency is not without obstacles. Research by Snow and Hakuta (1992) suggests that learning new languages later in life can be challenging due to constraints such as limited time and motivation, often resulting in lower levels of proficiency. Additionally, the events following 9/11 prompted Canada to recognize the importance of linguistic and cultural knowledge within security and intelligence sectors for counter-terrorism efforts (Rudner, 2002). Despite this recognition, the advancement of multilingualism is hindered by provincial regulations that restrict the educational use of non-official languages, thereby limiting the effectiveness of immersion or bilingual programs.

It becomes evident that while there are clear benefits to bilingual and multilingual proficiency, there are significant challenges that need to be addressed. These challenges include personal barriers to language acquisition and systemic limitations within educational policies. The discrepancy between the perceived importance of multilingualism and the practical barriers to its achievement highlights the complexity of promoting linguistic diversity in Canada.

Moving forward, it is essential to bridge the gap between scholarly research and policy implementation. By addressing the barriers to multilingual proficiency through targeted educational initiatives and policy reforms, Canada can better harness the potential of its diverse linguistic landscape. This could involve increased support for language education programs, as well as efforts to promote cultural inclusivity and respect for linguistic diversity at both the provincial and national levels.

#### *a. Language of Instruction*

In Canada, the adoption of Heritage Languages (HLs) in public schools varies significantly across provinces due to differences in provincial education acts. For instance, British Columbia has embraced HL instruction by interpreting its education act liberally, whereas Ontario has yet to update its legislation to support HL programs, despite evident demand (Alberta Education, 1997). This discrepancy underscores a national inconsistency in addressing the educational and cultural needs of multilingual populations.

The observed variance not only reflects disparities in educational opportunities but also indicates broader societal and economic implications. The reluctance of certain provinces, like Ontario, to legislate in favor of HL programs undermines efforts to foster inclusive, culturally diverse communities (ORLC, 1944). This inconsistency in provincial policies significantly impacts Canada's educational inclusivity and cultural integration, hindering the realization of its multicultural potential.

Scholarly research supports the notion that embracing Heritage Languages in educational settings promotes linguistic diversity, cultural appreciation, and societal cohesion (Smith, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2020). Moreover, studies have demonstrated the cognitive and academic benefits of bilingual education, highlighting the importance of accommodating multilingualism in public school curricula (García, 2009; Baker, 2011).

Given these findings, I encourage all Canadian provinces to urgently amend their Education Acts to permit instruction in languages other than English or French. Such legislative changes would not only foster inclusivity and recognize Heritage Languages but also empower Canada's diverse society. By aligning educational policies with Canada's multicultural essence, provinces can better support and celebrate the nation's rich linguistic heritage.

Embracing Heritage Languages in public school education is essential for promoting diversity, fostering inclusivity, and enriching societal cohesion in Canada. By addressing the inconsistencies in provincial policies and advocating for legislative changes, we can create an educational environment that truly reflects the multicultural fabric of the nation.

*b. Language of Instruction*

The Canadian federal and provincial governments acknowledge the significance of language education, as evidenced by numerous reports and educational policies (RC act). Despite this recognition, challenges persist in the practical implementation of heritage language (HL) programs, notably in the development of appropriate curricula. This challenge is exacerbated by the decentralized approach to curriculum development, where local communities often bear the responsibility, leading to potential disparities in access to language education (Alberta Education, 1997).

Drawing from the findings, I propose several actions to address the identified challenges. Firstly, there should be a concerted effort to integrate third-language learning into the curriculum from an early age up to Grade 10, following the recommendations outlined by the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning (ORCL, 1994). This initiative should be accompanied by a standardized examination process to recognize equivalent language learning outside of school, thereby promoting linguistic diversity and inclusivity in education.

Furthermore, I recommend that provincial governments take a proactive role in supporting the development of provincially approved curricula for less common languages. This proactive stance would ensure educational equity and foster a more inclusive appreciation of global cultures. By offering resources and support for the development of curricula beyond high-

demand languages, provinces can create a more diverse and accessible language education framework.

*c. Equality of Access*

Critics of Canada's multiculturalism policies have noted a significant disparity in providing equal access to education about diverse cultures and languages, undermining the intended goals of these policies. Sokolowski (1999) underscored this issue, highlighting the "great inequality of access" in language education. This critique has spurred various educational institutions to undertake corrective measures.

In response, Alberta's Ministry of Education has recognized the need for enhancements in language education. As a significant step, it has initiated mandatory second-language learning for middle-grade students, aiming to extend language education beyond the typical economic and regional limitations. Similarly, Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB) have adopted a proactive stance by implementing bilingual programs in six languages, including Arabic, and offering second language courses in ten languages as of 2020. These efforts are notable examples of local initiatives striving to overcome broader policy challenges.

Despite proactive initiatives by regions like Alberta and Edmonton Public Schools, the widespread implementation of mandatory second-language learning across other regions remains inconsistent and limited. This fragmented adoption highlights systemic challenges in policy execution and the need for more robust support from higher levels of government to ensure uniformity in educational reforms.

While "Saturday" schools and heritage language (HL) classes play a crucial role in language education, their scheduling outside regular school hours inadvertently suggests that non-official

languages are less important. This segregation is supported by federal policies that endorse after-hours classes without integrating them into the regular curriculum, diminishing their perceived value and accessibility. Efforts in provinces like British Columbia and by organizations such as “IHLA” in Edmonton and “SAHLA” in Calgary show progress toward integrating these languages during regular school hours. However, Ontario's conservative approach continues to hinder broader educational reforms in language learning.

I strongly recommend the mandatory inclusion of diverse languages in school curricula nationwide to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage with culturally significant and globally relevant languages. Drawing inspiration from the exemplary efforts of Edmonton Public Schools, I advocate for the seamless incorporation of a multitude of languages into the educational offerings across all school boards. This approach will facilitate a more inclusive and comprehensive educational environment.

Additionally, I urge governments to swiftly allocate funds for Heritage Language programs to bridge the gap until these languages are integrated into mainstream curricula. I also call for federal and provincial governments to initiate promotional campaigns using print, radio, and television media. These campaigns should highlight the importance of learning non-official languages and inform Canadians about available language programs and resources in their communities. The goal is to underscore the value of embracing linguistic diversity for personal enrichment, educational advancement, and societal cohesion.

## 2. Support for Teachers

Drawing from over seven years of direct experience teaching in a diverse linguistic environment, I've observed firsthand the significant pedagogical challenges presented by the

wide range of language proficiencies in heritage language classrooms. These include discrepancies in oral fluency and writing skills, which current teacher training programs fail to adequately address.

A critical examination of data from Alberta Education in 1997 highlights a stark deficiency in the availability of certified Heritage Language (HL) instructors. This lack of certified professionals is symptomatic of a broader failure in educational standards for HL classes across key provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario.

The severe shortfall of certified HL instructors starkly underscores the inadequacy of existing educational support systems, leading directly to substandard educational outcomes. There is an undeniable need for comprehensive educational policy reform that mandates specific HL teacher certifications. Developing rigorous, targeted certification programs is essential to empower teachers with the requisite skills and knowledge to effectively manage HL classrooms, ensuring equitable and high-quality education for all students.

I urgently recommend that provincial governments not only endorse but also actively facilitate the establishment of Heritage Language certification programs within higher education institutions. It is imperative to make such certifications mandatory for in-school HL instructors, ensuring these standards align strictly with government guidelines. This measure will significantly enhance the quality of HL instruction and standardize educational outcomes across different regions.

Furthermore, I encourage the provincial governments to commit to providing sustained professional development opportunities for HL teachers. These initiatives must be designed to support teachers in mastering the complexities of language acquisition and pedagogy. Investing



in ongoing professional development is essential for enabling teachers to adapt to the dynamically changing educational needs of linguistically diverse student populations, ultimately leading to substantial improvements in learning outcomes.

### 3. Language outside the Curriculum

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 plays a crucial role in promoting Canada's multicultural identity, with a special focus on arts and media. This paper explores the extent of linguistic diversity in these sectors and suggests enhancements to align with the Act's goals.

From my observations and experience, while the commitment to showcasing Canada's multiculturalism through arts and media is commendable, the focus on linguistic diversity needs significant enhancement. As a language educator, I have seen firsthand the impact of multilingual content on cultural expression and intercultural communication. These personal insights form the basis of my analysis of the existing policies and their effectiveness.

The Act underscores the importance of not only providing multilingual services but also promoting the creation and consumption of diverse linguistic content, including programming, literature, film, and music. These elements are essential for personal expression and intercultural communication among Canada's multicultural populace.

While multilingual services are well-supported across Canada's provinces, opportunities for Canadians to create and engage with multilingual content remain limited. A more focused policy approach could facilitate deeper intercultural connections and enhance personal expression, aligning more closely with the goals of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

Enhanced linguistic diversity in arts and media is not only about cultural representation but also about economic benefits, such as increased engagement and innovation in these industries.

Broadening the scope of opportunities for creating and engaging with multilingual content could improve Canada's global cultural and economic standings.

To enhance alignment with the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988, I strongly urge all levels of government to adopt three strategic measures: First, amplify support for multilingual media by promoting broadcasting and closed captioning in diverse languages. Second, assist public libraries in expanding their collections to include materials in languages beyond French and English. Third, advocate for fair compensation for multilingual skills in federal jobs and ensure the continuous production of multilingual publications. These targeted recommendations, grounded in scholarly research and personal insights, aim to fortify the existing policy framework and enrich Canada's cultural and linguistic diversity.

#### 4. Family Language Policy

As a heritage language (HL) educator deeply committed to cultural preservation and linguistic diversity, I have observed that children's experiences with their culture and language at home form a critical foundation for their future learning and development. Based on my professional experience, I believe it is essential to build upon this foundation rather than undermine it, as it significantly influences their integration into both their heritage and broader communities.

Research consistently highlights the importance of parental usage of a heritage language at home in maintaining this language among immigrant children. Cummins (2001a) emphasizes how critical a robust familial language environment is to children's development. Similarly, Fishman (1991) and Kung (2013) both underscore the vital role families, particularly parents,

play in the linguistic maintenance of heritage languages. These findings suggest that strong family engagement in heritage language practices is essential for fostering linguistic continuity and cultural identity.

Further studies underscore the benefits of maintaining a heritage language within the home. Hinton (2001) shows that the use of heritage language at home not only improves language proficiency but also strengthens cultural identity. Cummins (2000) advocates for the exclusive use of heritage language at home to reinforce these connections. Additionally, Luo and Wiseman (2000) identify a direct link between parents' positive attitudes towards heritage language and strong parent-child relationships, further supporting the maintenance of heritage language as a predictor of successful linguistic and cultural transmission.

These scholarly insights indicate that maintaining a heritage language within the family setting is crucial for preserving linguistic and cultural identities. However, the application of such practices can vary widely depending on individual family circumstances, such as differences in parental language proficiency and competing demands from the dominant language environment.

Drawing on both scholarly research and my personal teaching experiences, I strongly advocate for specific strategies to enhance heritage language maintenance at home. Parents should predominantly use their heritage language when communicating at home, a practice that not only boosts language fluency but also strengthens familial cultural bonds, as highlighted by Cummins (2000). Additionally, integrating books, games, and digital media in the heritage language into daily activities can greatly enhance language acquisition and retention, creating a stimulating linguistic environment for both children and parents.

Moreover, I encourage families to engage in community events that celebrate and utilize their heritage language. This engagement provides children with practical uses of their heritage language, reinforcing the skills they develop at home and building linguistic confidence and cultural connections. These strategies, supported by research findings from scholars like Cummins (2000) and Hinton (2001), are crucial for fostering a robust heritage language environment that contributes to broader cultural preservation efforts.

## **IX. Conclusion**

### **A. Valuing Our Diversity in Canada's Linguistic Mosaic**

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 emphasizes the importance of preserving and enhancing Heritage Languages (HLs) alongside promoting Canada's official languages (CMA, 1988: 3.1.i). The Act uses terms like 'preserve,' suggesting a static approach to HLs, akin to maintaining something no longer in everyday use.

Federal reports reflect a shift in the interpretation of 'cultural diversity,' increasingly focusing on ethnic and racial diversity while sidelining linguistic aspects (Canadian Heritage, 2002a). Despite the diminishing emphasis on HLs in policy discourse, their economic and strategic value remains recognized, as seen in reports from the 1990s that highlight their contribution to international trade (Canadian Heritage, 1997).

The government's approach to HLs often appears reactive, primarily recognizing their value in specific, utilitarian contexts. For instance, the translation of vital public service announcements into multiple languages is typically prompted by immediate needs rather than a proactive policy stance (Canadian Heritage, 2001). To foster a more inclusive multicultural policy, it is essential to actively support and promote HLs as integral to Canada's cultural and

economic fabric.

## B. Recap of Key Findings

This research probes the complex phenomenon of heritage language loss across Canadian immigrant communities, spotlighting the pivotal roles that social, educational, and familial influences play in this cultural shift. Heritage languages are more than mere communication tools; they are vital to sustaining cultural identity and promoting societal integration.

Drawing on my years of experience in language education and observations of immigrant dynamics, I have observed firsthand how family interactions and educational policies critically influence whether a language thrives or diminishes. These personal insights resonate deeply with the findings of this study, highlighting the delicate balance needed to nurture linguistic heritage in a landscape dominated by English and French.

The paper exposes a concerning disconnect between Canada's multicultural policies and their practical execution. There exists a stark gap in policy awareness and engagement, which ultimately hampers the support for linguistic diversity.

To counteract these trends, this study staunchly advocates for bold reforms in educational policies and curriculum frameworks. By rigorously enforcing the family language policy, we can decisively reinforce the retention of heritage languages.

This research presents a thorough analysis of the barriers facing heritage languages in Canada and outlines viable strategies for policy and educational reform. The aim is to not only safeguard but to celebrate the linguistic and cultural plurality of the nation, thereby enriching community cohesion and strengthening our national fabric.

Looking ahead, I am eager to collaborate with policymakers and educational leaders to bring the strategies proposed in this research to life. Our collective goal is to cultivate a truly multilingual Canadian society that values and uplifts its diverse linguistic heritage, enhancing both individual fulfillment and collective identity.

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