

How do ethnic groups differ with respect to the emphasis they give to their native language? In your opinion, does the English language constitute a core value for Anglo-Australians? What about other English speaking countries?

This essay will attempt to give an explanation of culture and language and provide a background about the importance language within ethnic groups. It will give examples of ethnic groups that consider language to be the most significant core value of their culture and why their language is so important to them. Other minority groups that put less emphasis on language and place more importance in other core values will also be addressed as well as multiculturalism and its effect on ethnic language maintenance. Finally, how important the English language to Anglo-Australians and people of other English speaking countries will be discussed.

It is imperative when discussing language of ethnic groups that culture and the importance of language within that culture is addressed. Culture can be defined as 'learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to regulate the behaviour of members of a particular society' (Batorowickz, 1994) It can also be described as shared beliefs, knowledge and ideas about values, norms and customs that can be passed from one generation to another. Culture is a product of social interaction, it is shared and it is continually evolving (Chiro, 2001). Culture is meaningful to human beings because of its symbolic quality and it is a basic determinant of personality (Singh, 1995). Some of the core values of culture include, language, religion, family structure and political systems. These core values are fundamental to the integrity, authenticity and viability of the group (Smolicz, 1992). Each ethnic group differs in the extent of emphasis they give to these core values.

Language is composed of an agreed system of signs, phonemes, graphemes and symbols, which allows people to form the meanings needed to communicate with each other (Batorowicz 1994). Language enables people to exteriorise thoughts and feelings, socialise and it assists cognitive development. Most importantly, language enables the construction and transmission of culture (Chiro, 2001). For many ethnic groups language is the most important core value of their culture, particularly within multicultural or plural societies (Batorowicz, 1994). Language is a way for ethnic minorities to identify themselves (Singh, 1995), a value that symbolises belonging to a particular group of people (Smolicz, 1994).

There are many ethnic groups that feel that maintaining their native language is the most predominant way of preserving their culture. These groups feel that their culture is rooted in their native tongues (Singh, 1995). Groups that place the utmost importance in language as a core value include the Greek, Quebecois, Baltic, Polish and Basque cultures as well as many others (Smolicz, 1992). The importance of language for the Greeks comes as a result of centuries of protecting their core values while under Ottoman rule where they faced 'linguicide' under the powerful occupier (Smolicz, 1995). Similarly, the Poles had to protect their core value of language after centuries of foreign rule by surrounding countries. The Baltic people believe that not only is language a carrier of their culture but they also feel they must guard their culture and particularly language from extinction after attempts were made by the Soviet regime post World War II to convert the culture to Russian (Smolicz, 1995). In the Canadian province of Quebec 85% of people speak French as their mother tongue and their values are different from

those of their English speaking counterparts. The language is the core of the Quebec culture and sustains their national identity (Smolicz, 1995). The culture of the Basque people strongly revolves around their language. The Basque language is not a member of the Indo-European language family and is not evidently related to any other known language. For the Basque people to maintain their culture, it is paramount they maintain their unique language (Singh, 1995). For all of these cultures, the maintenance and development of their ethno-specific language as a core value is vital for their 'existence as a distinct cultural and social entity' (Singh, 1995).

Certain ethnic groups consider other core values such as family and religion, to be equally if not more important than language that act to reinforce the language (Smolicz, 1994). Within many cultures, particularly Italian and Greek, language plays an important role as does family structure where family solidarity is more important than individual advancement (Smolicz, 1992). Within the families, relatives are 'close knit' and the collectivism of extended family is an important part of the family structure (Smolicz, 1994). In relation to the religion, some groups do not have the added reinforcement of an independent religious institution such as the Greek Orthodox or the Byzantine-rite Ukrainian Catholics and Orthodox (Smolicz, 1992). While there are profound differences between Anglo-Irish Catholicism and Italian Catholicism, they do share the centralised religion and the language used in religious devotions supports this core value (Smolicz, 1994). However, there are some examples where other core values do not have a direct relationship with language; Many people who follow Jewish beliefs strongly may not be able to speak Hebrew or any of the other Jewish-developed dialects; an Irish nationalist may not be able to speak Gaelic; Muslims practice their faith in countries all over the world and worshipers do not all speak the same language (Smolicz, 1992).

Australia is one of the most multicultural societies in the world. Ethnic groups are intertwined into Australian society. Australia has become more and more culturally diverse since the influx of immigrants after the Second World War (Smolicz, 1994). Large ethnic groups in Australia include Greek, Italian, German, Polish, Hungarian, Arabic and more recently an influx of Asian immigrants. Within this plural society, maintenance of a minority group's language is based upon structural and cultural factors (Chiro, 2001). Structural factors include migration characteristics, size of minority language group, concentration of group and degree of intermarriage within the ethnic group (Chiro, 2001). Factors that are associated with the core values of the minority language group comprise of culture and history of the group's presence of language supporting other core values and ethnocentrism of the minority group (Chiro, 2001). Aspects associated with the inter-relationship between the majority and minority group include the overlap of core values, social acceptability of the minority by the majority and the language policies of the majority group (Chiro, 2001). The importance of languages as a core value has affected the level of language maintenance of minority groups within Australia. The 1996 census of language shift towards English in the first generation showed that eastern European Orthodox cultures including Greek, Lebanese and Turkish as well as many Asian cultures had very little language shift while migrants from northern, central and western Europe were among those with the highest level of shift towards English (Clyne & Kipp, 1997). These results give an indication to the extent of emphasis language is given within certain cultures. Those with lower shift rates are groups who view language as the most important core value of their culture (Clyne and Kipp, 1997).

As language is a core value of culture, it is clear that the English language is a core value for Anglo-Australians and other English-speaking countries. Many of the core values of Anglo-Australian society are common with those of other English-speaking countries such as America, Canada, England and the British Isles. Each country places a different level of emphasis on the English language, yet it is always a core value as language allows humans to convey culture. For England, it has allowed the conveyance of literature by Shakespeare and Dickens, it has allowed America to convey the right to freedom of speech, independence and democracy. Values shared by Anglo-Australians and other English speaking cultures are family, education, the democratic political system, religious freedom, individualism, independence and self-reliance, economic pluralism and freedom to express ideas on improving the function of society (Smolicz, 1992). Many of these values of Anglo-Australians are derived from the British heritage of the majority group. An utterly new Australian culture was not invented when white settlers arrived in Australia, rather Australians lived their lives with 'resonant echo' of their British ancestors (Smolicz, 1992).

English is an international dialect which allows Australians and other English speaking countries to communicate with great ease. Within Australia, English is the "lingua franca", the dialect used for communication between people of different tongues. English is also the most commonly spoken language for business in Australia and the world. However, within a multicultural society such as Australia, there is a risk of complacency about the need for Anglo-Australians to 'cross linguistic bridges to other cultures' by learning languages that are spoken within Australia as well as languages of geopolitical, economic or trade importance (Smolicz, 1994). It is also important for the minority groups of Australia to maintain their dialects as a way of preserving their culture (Batorwicz, 1994). The most effective way to maintain these ethnic languages is for children to be educated in them within schools. It is paramount for Anglo-Australians to understand that while English is an integral part of Australia, other languages can co-exist within a framework of shared values (Smolicz, 1994). Language is the only core values that members of different groups in society can share without jeopardising their own language. Different languages can co-exist within a society as they are not competing with each other unlike religion or family (Smolicz, 1994). Both the minority and majority groups need to adjust to the commonly shared and accepted values of Australia's multicultural society, thus improving Australia's cultural development. (Smolicz, 1992).

It has been shown that ethnic groups do differ with respect to the emphasis they give their native tongue, as shown by the examples given in this essay. It has also been shown that the English language constitutes a core value of Anglo-Australian culture as well as other English speaking cultures. Furthermore, for the prosperity and survival of ethnic languages in Australia, ethnic languages and culture must be accepted into the education system and become part of a multicultural Australian system of shared belief and values.