


Chapter 3

Generational Language Loss: A Study of Linguistic Landscape in Vancouver

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the change in proportion between first- and second-generation Vancouverites who consider English as their mother tongue. A subset of the 2021 Canadian Census was retrieved with data from 50,219 respondents and their reported mother language. A two-sample proportion test concluded that there was a 50.17% difference between the percentage of first- and second-generation Vancouverites reporting English as their mother tongue ($z = 111.84, p < 0.01$). This means that there are more second-generation immigrants considering English as mother tongue, not the language spoken by their parents. These findings suggest the impacts of socio-cultural influences on immigrants, as parents consciously prioritize English language proficiency for their child's success in a new country. This inadvertently leads to a gradual loss of language, and consequently, culture, over time. Policymakers and community leaders should consider intergenerational language loss when advocating for cultural diversity, recognizing the complex, intertwining relationship between language and culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism in Vancouver – A Historical Perspective

Vancouver, home to many diverse cultures, naturally has a rich linguistic landscape. This unique linguistic landscape owes much to its long history of immigration, beginning with Indigenous peoples and later shaped by waves of settlers from around the globe. Research on intergenerational language loss can show how multicultural Vancouver truly is and examine if Canada's official languages are becoming more dominant. More specifically, by examining the disparity in the proportion of first- and second-generation Vancouverites who classify English as their mother tongue, intergenerational language loss and its implications for multiculturalism and linguistic diversity can be analyzed.

Located along the Pacific Rim, Vancouver is an ideal location for immigration. Named after Captain George Vancouver, who arrived in the late 18th century (Francis, 2021), the city has a long history of immigration. European colonization caused Vancouver to become a prominent exporter of lumber. Historically, Vancouver has had a notable influx of East Asian immigration. The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880's resulted in 7,000 Chinese immigrants into British Columbia. Many Japanese people also immigrated in the late 19th century, creating prominent fishing communities along the coastline. However, many of these East Asian immigrants faced discrimination. One prominent example of this is the Chinese Immigration Act in 1885. The Chinese Immigration Act imposed a \$50 head tax and heavily restricted Chinese immigration across Canada. While the increase in the labour force due to the construction of the railway was desirable, these workers were not wanted as citizens because of their country of origin (Government of Canada, 2024). This was such a large act of discrimination by the government, the Chinese Immigration Act is now commonly referred to as the Chinese Exclusion Act. Also, since the act was passed on Dominion Day, many Chinese-Canadian communities referred to that day as 'Humiliation Day' as it was such a degrading act (Government of Canada, 2024).

Another example of anti-Asian racism in Canada is the Japanese Internment Camps that occurred during the Second World War. In 1942, under the War Measures Act, the Government of Canada forcibly removed people of Japanese origin from their homes on the coastline, and relocated them inland. All belongings, including houses and fishing boats, that were not brought to the camps were taken into government custody, and liquidated in 1943. Hastings Park, where the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) currently sits, is where nearly 8000 people were detained (Marsh, 2020). The living conditions in these camps were poor and overcrowded as women and children were housed in small buildings intended for livestock, while the men

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