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FAMILY IN DISPLACEMENT AND ITS ROLE IN CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND NATIVE LANGUAGE PRESERVATION

Abstract

This paper analyzes the challenges and opportunities faced by families in a diaspora regarding cultural adaptation and native language preservation. In the modern world, where migration becomes more frequent, families that move into new cultural environments often face a dilemma between integrating into the host country and preserving their own cultural identity through nurturing the native language and tradition of the countries from which they originate. In the context of globalization, the family proves to be a critical unit that not only transmits language and cultural values but also forms the identity of each of its members, providing him/her with the possibility to develop multiculturally in all personality aspects. Through the review of relevant literature and published studies, this paper examines factors that affect the success of the adaptation of new generations, including the role of social support, educational institutions, and intergenerational relations. The paper also explores the strategies families use to preserve their native language, which is critical in maintaining cultural identity. Daily communication in the native language, cultural events, manifestations, and participation in educational programs ensure that younger generations remain connected to their roots. Families often take an active role in creating communities that support language and culture preservation, thus contributing to the richness of

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multicultural societies. This paper contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of identity in the diaspora and emphasizes the educational role of family structures in the process of cultural adaptation and openness in accepting other cultures. The paper's conclusions suggest that language and culture preservation is possible through a combination of individual efforts, community support, and adapted educational programs. The paper provides guidelines for future research and practice, emphasizing the need to develop effective diaspora family support models to preserve linguistic and cultural heritage.

Keywords: the expatriate family, cultural adaptation, native language

INTRODUCTION

The family plays a vital role in the process of all forms of adaptation of the child, including the cultural one, but also in the process of the native language preservation, both for children who live outside their home country and for their members in the multicultural environments in which they exist. In a time of increasingly frequent migrations, the family is responsible for preserving its members' linguistic and cultural identity. As migration is associated with the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment, the fear of cultural assimilation and the potential loss of linguistic and cultural identity complicates this critical task of the family. In these circumstances, the family becomes the primary source of support, providing emotional security and preserving cultural values, traditions, customs, and language as the central aspect of cultural identity. This adaptation (integration) process often implies a two-way dynamic of multiple significance because migrant families simultaneously adopt elements of the host culture but also strive to keep the original culture, leaving it as a legacy to the next generation. The specificity of this dynamic is reflected in the transmission of elements of one's own culture to the members of the multicultural society in which individuals and families are currently located, resulting in the interaction of cultures and traditions, as well as the enrichment of the cultural landscape of the host country communities. Seen in this way, adaptation places particular emphasis on the native language, which, as one of the most important

aspects of a nation's cultural identity, plays a central role in this process. The family, as the primary cell of society, and family education in the group of the population living outside the home country thereby gain in complexity and significance in the formation of a young individual with all the qualities of the ethnic group from which they originate, but also in the skill of interaction, they enter into with members of other ethnic groups in the country where they live. In this way, the family contributes to preserving its own cultural values and active participation in constructing a new, multicultural society in terms of understanding, tolerance, and cultural wealth. The function of the family presented in this way in the process of adaptation indicates its increasing importance in creating a connection between the past and the future, preserving the cultural heritage, and adapting to the circumstances in which it finds itself, with the aim of the successful functioning of its members in the (multicultural) community.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In the paper, we defined vital concepts such as diaspora, migrants, cultural adaptation, and native language and dealt with the issues of preserving the identity of migrant families from the aspect of native language preservation and cultural adaptation in the host country. The available literature and research conducted with the same or similar topics were reviewed, and the strategies used by families to preserve their identity in foreign countries were pointed out. The paper also points out the factors that affect the level of successful integration of younger generations, emphasizing the importance and role of the social environment in which that integration takes place, educational institutions, and intergenerational relations. Given that the lives of individuals take place primarily in families, its older members often take on the role of organizers in creating associations that support language and culture preservation. In a separate part of the paper, more will be said about the support of the social community of the host country and of the home country of migrant families in the form of organized programs to preserve their own culture, tradition, and language.

DEFINING TERMS

Although the terms diaspora, migrants, adaptation, and native language are more or less known and frequently used in everyday speech, we should not forget that their definition is often different from the meaning and context in which these terms are used. Therefore, we also decided to provide an overview of some definitions in this paper.

A Diaspora (scattered seeds) is a word of Greek origin and denotes members of a nation who live apart from their home country (Wikipedia 2024a). According to Princeton University (n.d.), the diaspora consists of “groups of persons of the same ethnonational origin who themselves, or their ancestors, voluntarily or under compulsion, migrated from one place to another, or several other places, settled in those other places, and maintain their identity and different types of contacts with their place of origin”.

Historically speaking, this term primarily meant the forced displacement of Jews from Israel and their settlement around the world (Cohen 1997). Sociologists define diaspora as a transnational community that, despite the spatial distance from the home country, retains a sense of shared identity and belonging (Safran 1991). Contemporary definitions provide an overview of globalization, emphasizing that diaspora is a significant factor in international relations, economy, and cultural exchanges (Castles and Miller 2009). From the above definitions, the diaspora is clearly seen as a newly formed and dynamic community of members of the same ethnic group outside the homeland.

A migrant is usually defined as someone who moves from one place to another for economic, educational, and/or political reasons and due to natural disasters, regardless of international borders (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2020). Migrants can be permanent or temporary, returning or seasonal. The International Organization for Migration again considers that the critical aspect of migrant status is crossing geographical borders (International Organization for Migration [IOM] 2020). According to Milan Mesić (2002, 425), a migrant is a person who moves and changes the political area of his habitual residence. This definition includes both border crossing and change of residence. According to Wikipedia (2024b), people who are in migration are called migrants, and depending

on the context of the observer, they can be expatriates or emigrants, i.e., incomers or immigrants. Depending on the context, therefore, any movement of persons can be classified into emigration (leaving one's country), immigration (arriving in another country to settle), and internal migration, i.e., relocation within the home country.

The concept of *family* can be defined and viewed from several aspects, so the sociological, psychological, and cultural elements interest us here. From a sociological point of view, the family is defined as the primary cell of society. It is a basic social unit comprised of people living together and in a blood, marriage, or partnership relationship (Giddens and Sutton 2017).

Our well-known sociologist Marko Mladenović (1995) defines the family as a historically changing social group, i.e., the bond between a man and a woman that ensures the reproduction of society in a biological sense, contributes to the moral and psychological development of personality, establishes kinship relationships and performs certain economic activities. Seen through the eyes of a psychologist, the family is the basic emotional unit in which children develop social and emotional skills that later serve as a foundation for building interpersonal relationships (Bowlby 1969). Pedagogy, similar to psychology, puts the role of parents in the foreground in the development of values, norms, and skills that shape the child's later life. With this, we see the role of parents and family upbringing in preserving the cultural identity of the ethnic group from which it originates, which is also a cultural aspect of defining the family.

Adaptation means any form of adjustment, and different authors (depending on the field and context) define this word differently. In this paper, we will examine cultural adaptation as one of the segments of informal integration. Cultural adaptation refers to the process of adapting new migrants to the cultural norms and values of the society in which they live. Berry's model of acculturation implies that migrant families go through certain adaptation stages (Berry 1997). In this context, the family has a significant role because all its members must decide how they will relate to the new culture they are integrating into and develop strategies for preserving their identity in the new culture. The family's strategy and its actions in the adjustment process depend on the age of the family members. Thus, families with younger children will definitely

try to secure a place in preschool institutions for their offspring, therefore providing them with equal chances for success in further development (Trifunović 2023). How children will fit into the new life system is one of the most critical questions of every parent. The dilemma of how much migrants should adapt and how much they should keep their own identity is always current. One study of Vietnamese families in Australia shows that traditional values are preserved through generations despite the integration of Vietnamese families into the new society (Nguyen and Minh 2023). Individuals can manage their cultural identity in interaction with individuals of different origins, which constitutes the richness of interculturality, thus forming multiculturalism. According to Young Yun Kim (2008), cultural identity is not static and monolithic, as is prevalent in the literature of social sciences, but is complex and evolving. Therefore, the identity has a dynamic character.

The term *native language* is a term that defines itself, so in this paper, we treated it as a language used in a family, provided that all members of that family belong to the same ethnic group. It is “the first language a person encounters as a means of spoken communication in life” (*Veliki rečnik manje poznatih reči i izraza* 2024). Most often, it is the language spoken by the mother in the family, and in connection with that, its terminological definition is like this. Linguistically speaking, the native language enables the child to develop phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (De Houwer 2009). Psychologically, the native language provides the child with emotional security because parents use it to express love, attention, and emotional support, which are the basis of healthy emotional relationships and social skills (Bowlby 1969). Preserving the native language and identity proved to be the most critical factor in cultural adaptation, especially in maintaining communication between different generations (Nguyen and Hoang Bao 2020). Research shows that families who actively use their native language in everyday life more successfully pass that language on to their descendants, thereby contributing not only to preserving the language but also to preserving their cultural identity (Fishman 2001). The native language is not only a means of communication but also one of the essential elements of an individual’s socialization. Through its constant application, values, behavioral norms, culture, and traditions are adopted and transmitted within the family and the wider community (Baker 2021). Therefore,

language preservation is closely related to the cultural values and identity parents pass on to their children in daily communication and through social activities within the community.

IDENTITY PRESERVATION STRATEGIES

Identity preservation in an environment where a second language is used is primarily carried out by preserving the native language. Some of the strategies used by families and the social environment, as well as the home country of the ethnic group, can be classified as follows:

Family communication and intergenerational language transmission as a strategy for preserving identity and language are among the most important links. As we have said before, the native language is the first language an individual encounters, the first means of spoken communication. This is why the constant use of language in the family environment is essential. Parents are the most important factor in this strategy because they play a crucial role in passing on the language to their offspring in everyday communication, in the oral transmission of folk tales and storytelling, through reading and singing songs of the community from which they originate (De Houwer 2009). In this way, parents create a rich language environment for their children and contribute to maintaining tradition through the native language. One study on the use and preservation of the Lithuanian language in Sweden illustrates the very challenges that families face. It emphasizes the need to encourage children to identify with the native language and involve them in the decision-making process related to problems arising from reducing its daily use (Bissinger 2021). Similarly, Fishman (2001) states that language transmission is a critical factor in preserving the ethnic identity of people outside the motherland, while Cummins (2000) links the positive attitude of parents towards the native language with the cognitive and emotional development of children. Migration often leads to linguistic pressure on younger generations to accept the dominant language of the new environment, while older family members usually remain tied to their native language (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). We have witnessed that with some migrant children, the native language is used passively, so they understand what is said to them in the native language, but they answer in the language of the host country because

it is easier for them. The fact that most children still actively use their native language at home, especially when communicating with older family members, is encouraging.

Education in the native language is one of the strategies used in the function of identity and language preservation, as well as gathering an ethnic group around the motherland. Through education in their native language, children develop linguistic and cultural competencies, enabling them to preserve the language and pass on traditions, customs, and values to the next generations. In addition, research has shown that children who learn in their native language achieve better academic results and have higher self-confidence (Cummins 2000). This strategy is most often organized by one of the Ministries and managed through the consular institutions of the home country in the diaspora. One such example is supplementary schools organized by Serbian communities in the diaspora. This form of teaching contributes to language learning and promotes cultural activities, such as folk dances and learning about national history (Ministarstvo spoljnjih poslova Republike Srbije [MSPRS] n.d.). The organization of Serbian supplementary schools in the diaspora is governed by the Rulebook on the realization of educational work abroad (Pravilnik o ostvarivanju obrazovno-vaspitnog rada u inostranstvu 2023) which precisely specifies the way of realization of educational work, a unique program with a framework plan for teaching and learning in primary education and upbringing abroad, the textbooks in use, the selection and conditions for the engagement of teachers-professional staff, their duties, and the evaluation of students and the way of keeping records of educational work. From the above, it can be seen that the implementation of Serbian supplementary schools abroad is not left to chance and is under the watchful eye of the home country. In the school year 2023/2024, supplementary schools in the Serbian language were organized in 22 countries with more than 8,000 participants aged from the first to the eighth grade of primary school (Ministarstvo prosvete Republike Srbije [MPRS], n.d.). A study by Bissinger (2021) on the preservation of the Lithuanian language in Sweden indicates that supplementary schools in the native language significantly contribute to the preservation of the linguistic and cultural identity of the community. Parents who actively support such programs influence social cohesion within the community with their attitude. Research by Nguyen and Minh (2023) on the Vietnamese community in Australia,

which highlights the importance of educational initiatives to connect children with the linguistic and cultural heritage of their country of origin, showed a similar result. In addition to the organization and attendance of supplementary schools in the native language, native language courses and weekend schools for children and adults are also present in the practice of the diaspora as a particular form of preserving identity and language. Bilingual schools or weekend schools offering courses in the native language can significantly contribute to language preservation among the younger generations (Cummins 2000). In this strategy category, we also include reading books, newspapers, and magazines in the native language, as well as watching movies and listening to “local” music. It is a strategy that parents can develop and nurture, which contributes to the enrichment of passive and active vocabulary and keeps the native language alive. In the same category of strategies, we can add encouraging writing and creating content in the native language. Such activities include writing blogs, poetry, and prose and making videos and content in the native language.

Cultural manifestations, the organization of festivals, and joint events are also considered part of the strategy of preserving cultural identity and native language. These strategies are supported by the social community of the host country and the motherland, which creates the possibility of cultural adaptation without the feeling of losing one’s origin. The development of multiculturalism also depends on the openness of the host countries’ culture, so one of the constant tasks of the host country is to facilitate the organization of cultural manifestations and festivals of ethnic groups within it. This strategy enables community members to nurture language, culture, and tradition. Traditional festivals and celebrations of important dates, such as National Day, religious holidays, Flag and Unity Days, etc., allow members of an ethnic group to connect with their mother culture. Such events include traditional music with the participation of folklore groups, various handicraft workshops, gastronomic festivals of traditional foods and drinks, but also other segments of cultural identity, which are closely related to the native language – theater performances and concerts, celebrations of important dates of significance for ethnic groups. This approach to cultural identity affects the creation of a “collective cultural memory” that protects cultural heritage from oblivion and preserves it for new generations (Zujić 2023). Given that older family members often feel

nostalgic and more pressured to preserve traditions, their influence on younger members increases, leading to a balance between their identity and integration into a multicultural society among new generations. Such manifestations enrich both communities, both ethnic and the host community, and thus contribute to multicultural dialogue and exchange of values within the various communities of the host country.

Visits to the country of origin also represent a significant strategy in preserving the native language and cultural identity in the diaspora, as it enables concrete use of the native language and direct interaction with the culture. At the same time, the native language is continuously used with relatives, in shopping, and everyday activities (Fishman 2001). When these visits are regular, which is most often the case with emigrants, connecting with relatives, community, and culture gains importance even among the younger generations because they strengthen the feeling of belonging to the ethnic group. Homeland visits can also be organized by institutions that work to preserve the language and culture of the home country, which we consider a targeted visit, such as, for example, visits to language camps for children. The visits organized in this way include several segments of language and tradition preservation – language, music, and folklore workshops, as well as handicraft workshops and sports activities that strengthen the spirit of the collective and belonging to the ethnic group. One example of such a language camp is the Project *The Summer in the Homeland – Tršić*, organized by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia for several years following the Strategy for the Development of Education and Training until 2030. The language camp is held in the Scientific-Educational Cultural Center “Vuk Karadžić” in Tršić, in three groups for 7 days each during the summer vacation. *The Summer in the Homeland* program achieves a particular goal –improving attitudes towards the Serbian language and literature as essential elements of national and cultural identity and improving education in the Serbian language in the diaspora. In the framework of the activities, students are enabled to learn the Serbian language in the context of national culture through speech and game activities, art, culture and tradition, and other cultural and sports activities and contents (MPRS, n.d.). Participation in this program is adapted to the students’ summer vacation in the countries they come from. Each group includes students from different countries, so it is possible to use the

native language in everyday use, considering that these students can communicate with each other only in the Serbian language. The goal of such camps or programs is precisely the preservation and improvement of the language skills of the native language, the promotion of cultural identity through language and cultural activities, and the connection of language camp participants with cultural heritage and tradition. Studies show that children who participate in such camps and/or regularly visit their homeland are more motivated to preserve their language and develop a more profound sense of belonging to their home community. De Houwer (2009) points out that such activities increase intergenerational language transmission. In its very structure, such a program includes intensive classes in the native language with a focus on grammar, vocabulary, and literature, then workshops on folk customs, historical content, music, traditional dance, and art, all the way to practical skills that involve the participation of children in workshops of traditional crafts of the region in which language camp is organized, about cooking and other cultural skills. In addition to these regular activities, we should not forget the possibility of organizing excursions and visits to historical and cultural places and objects in the environment, such as religious buildings, museums, libraries, squares, etc. All of the above indicates that these types of programs develop skills that help young generations preserve their identity in multicultural societies, which suggests the importance of this strategy. As we live in the era of technology and witness digital expansion, this segment of strategic action in preserving language and identity is gaining importance every day.

Thus, *social networks and online communities* are also included in the strategies, which enable contact with the community and constant use of the native language through daily use. Online forums imply oral and written communication, contributing to using letters in practical and informal situations. Paola Katić (2023) indicates that social networks enable young people to connect with peers who speak the same language, which contributes to the preservation of linguistic identity. Young people create their own “online identities” on social network platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and similar applications. In this way, they exchange language structures in the form of written and spoken words and cultural content. Using media such as radio and television, social networks, and language learning apps can help

preserve the language. At the same time, we must not forget the creation and sharing of multimedia content and blogs, which can preserve the language through entertaining and contemporary educational content. By creating your own or downloading existing content in your native language with the support of digital media, the spread and use of the language are enabled. In the role of creators, local communities often contribute to the preservation of cultural identity through the presence of their native language in the digital space. This strategy is undoubtedly closer to new generations, and additional attention should be paid.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

In the modern world, where globalization and migration inevitably lead to cultural exchange, language, and cultural identity preservation is a challenge. The process of cultural adaptation, through which individuals and communities go, is often perceived as a balancing act between integrating into a new environment and preserving one's linguistic and cultural roots. This paper emphasizes that language and identity preservation strategies are essential for preserving cultural diversity and strengthening individual and collective identities within communities. Although cultural adaptation can lead to changes in language use and cultural habits, language preservation plays a crucial role in identity preservation. Language is both a means of communication and a carrier of cultural values, tradition, and collective memory. Strategies that include intergenerational language transmission in the family, formal education in the native language, cultural manifestations, digital media, and institutional support have proven to be effective in language preservation in various social contexts, both in the motherland itself and even more in the diaspora.

The success of these strategies is not guaranteed by itself and depends on several important factors. The first and perhaps the most important factor is recognizing the value of language preservation by communities and active work on its transmission to younger generations. Family communication, supported by the educational systems, provides a solid foundation for developing language skills and cultural awareness of the ethnic group to which the family belongs. Another critical factor without whose support there would be no institutional assistance in organizing and implementing native language and culture preservation is the role of governments and international organizations in creating policies that support the values of linguistic diversity. Without institutional support, the communities' efforts would be limited and ineffective. The third factor is technology and the media, without which the new generations could not imagine their everyday life. Thus, they play a significant role in language preservation, especially among young people. We must see digital tools and platforms as a bridge between tradition and a new way of life, enabling us to use language continuously in everyday life. Finally, this paper highlights the need for an integrative approach to the

problem of language preservation as a factor in identity preservation. An integrative approach should combine individual, family, educational, cultural, and institutional efforts to preserve language and identity. Only through coordinated and comprehensive strategies is it possible to nurture linguistic diversity and preserve cultural identity in a time that brings with it the challenges of multiculturalism and our adaptability to it. Writer and Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić said the following about the language: “Language is a living force with which not only culture but also the existence of a nation is connected” (Institut za moderno obrazovanje, n.d.).

These considerations also provide broader implications for researchers, current decision-makers, and communities dealing with the issue of language preservation in multicultural societies. Future research should focus on the long-term effects of the strategies presented in this paper and on developing new integrative approaches and procedures that would enable the maintenance and constant revitalization of the language in the light of continuous social changes. This will ensure the linguistic and cultural legacy survives without merging into cultural adaptation with new cultures, putting their own stamp on the global mosaic of cultures.

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