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Community Languages, Linguistic Isolation, and Social Exclusion in the Australian Context

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Abstract: The detrimental impacts of social exclusion to health and well-being are well-known and are of increasing concern around the world. For many of the population sub-groups who are most at risk of social exclusion, linguistic isolation—the inability to use and understand the majority language—is a major barrier to full participation in the life of the community as well as to full integration into the society in which its members live. This paper, using data obtained from community-based research in Melbourne, Australia, will discuss the problem of linguistic isolation in the context of Australian multicultural policy and use of languages other than English among members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. The experience of members of two specific CALD communities, speakers of Arabic and speakers of Indonesian, will be discussed to illustrate the impacts of linguistic isolation on health and well-being and to elucidate the relationship between CALD status and social exclusion in these communities.

Keywords: Social Exclusion, Linguistic isolation, Well-Being, Arabic, Indonesian

Introduction

The effects of social exclusion, or the inability to participate fully in the institutions of society, are increasingly recognized as exerting a potentially detrimental impact on the health of individuals and communities. In Australia, social inclusion for all members of the community is a matter of policy and is viewed as an integral component of health and well-being on a national scale (see Australian Government, 2013). One of the dimensions of national policy on social inclusion is social connectedness, a measure of the extent to which any individual has access to community networks and meaningful interactions with other people. Social connectedness is recognized to be of special significance among people with limited proficiency in English who may face major obstacles in obtaining needed support and participating outside their immediate language group (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2012).

The Australian community is characterized by the presence of groups of individuals whose first language is not English and whose mastery of the national language varies. The presence of such culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities is viewed in Australia as a facet of a multicultural society. Current policy on multiculturalism holds that cultural, religious and linguistic diversity are beneficial to the whole of society and are integral elements of a commitment to fairness and inclusion (Australian Government, 2011). In practical terms, this understanding of multiculturalism has meant that community languages (the languages spoken by migrant and other ethnic communities) are supported and may be used in the public sphere, especially in the context of provision of health and human services, including education, and as a vehicle for eventual acculturation and inclusion. This commitment is exemplified in the resources made available to speakers of languages other than English, such as the MyLanguage website providing information and resources in more than 60 community languages (see MyLanguage, 2011).

Despite the attention to issues disproportionately affecting individuals who do not speak English well and the support provided to people who need to participate in the public sphere in other languages, linguistic isolation remains a problem for some segments of the larger Australian community and is especially significant for specific demographics based on cultural
and social factors that define their interactions. The experience of two CALD communities, speakers of Arabic originating in Sudan and speakers of Indonesian, are discussed here. While each of these linguistic groups is unique in the combination of social and cultural factors that relate to language use, their situations nonetheless provide broader insight into the experience of Australian CALD groups in general that have limited access to the English-speaking milieu. The data described here were collected through community-based surveys in Melbourne, Australia’s second largest city, whose population includes significant numbers of both Arabic speakers and Indonesian speakers and whose multicultural nature reflects national policy. The information collected from individuals as well as organizations that work with the two communities of interest centered on the experience of community members and their participation in the English-speaking Australian mainstream. The findings discussed here derive from semi-structured interviews with individuals and also survey data obtained from community organizations and government sources.

Linguistic Isolation

Language is central to personal identity because it signifies membership in a social group that includes all the speakers of the language in question wherever they are. Even though every person has a combination of background and proficiencies that reflects his or her personal experience, speakers of any language share a range of cognitive features that determine the ways in which they express their views and perceptions. These include linguistic aspects of language like grammar and syntax and also the metaphorical structure, available lexicon, and interpretative framework within which individual experience is understood. These features are encoded in language and also reflect the culture of speakers (Fanany and Fanany, 2012).

For this reason, the loss of opportunities to use one’s native language may result in serious psychological effects, including loneliness, depression, boredom, anxiety, inability to form meaningful relationships, embarrassment, alienation, and disconnection (Treas and Mazumdar, 2003; Rhee, 2009; Yu, 2009; among others). Similarly, stresses associated with the need to speak and interact in a foreign language, even for people who speak it well, may be significant. In many cases, however, it is difficult to master a new language to the level required to interact effectively with native speakers, and newcomers to a language community may experience varying degrees of linguistic isolation. This occurs when a person has limited opportunities to use his or her native language but has difficulty interacting in the majority language of the community. This situation may be especially pronounced among refugees, immigrants with lower levels of education, people displaced due to conflict or disaster, the elderly, and people from very small language communities (Ward and Styles, 2003; Kerswill, 2006).

Linguistic isolation is often contextual. People may use their native language at home but are unable to use the majority language of the community they live in at a comparable level. In other cases, people may have reasonable fluency in the majority language but no contact with speakers of their native language because they use a language with a very small number of speakers or because there are few speakers of their language in the place where they live. Others may have no opportunities to use their native language and low or limited fluency in the language of the community, which represents a double disadvantage with respect to linguistic inclusion. Any of these situations can have a serious impact on the emotional state of the individuals involved and may be detrimental to both their physical and mental well-being (Extra and Verhoeven, 1998).

One of the most serious impacts of linguistic isolation in any degree is the loss of social information native ability in a language normally confers. This relates directly to the ability to speak to and interact with others but also includes the lack of a whole set of contextual social information conveyed by the nuances of language style, word choice, accent, and so forth. If this source of information is absent because people do not speak the majority language or do not speak it well enough to understand social nuances conveyed through language, they may be
socially isolated and experience major psychosocial impacts resulting from an inability to communicate fully. These impacts can include depression and anxiety, frustration, embarrassment, inability to form meaningful relationships, boredom, and isolation from mainstream culture (Miller and Rascoe, 2004). Much of a person’s social experience is mediated by language, such that an understanding of the language in use in an individual’s environment provides a wealth of information about other people and the social context that may be unavailable through other means.

In the Australian context specifically, it has been shown that difficulty in mastering English to a high degree is associated with a range of psychosocial impacts (see, for example, Khawaja, 2007; Milner and Khawaja, 2010; Stanaway et al, 2010). For example, studies of women who migrated from South America indicate that these migrants and their families felt that English language ability was the key to successfully adapting to their new environment (Amezquita et al, 1995; Aizpurua and Fisher, 2008). Nonetheless, it was difficult for them to take advantage of available language services because it was more important to find affordable housing, adequate employment, and enrol children in school. The women studied tended to take low paying jobs that did not involve much interaction with native speakers and also lacked the social and family networks they had relied upon in their countries of origin. It was difficult for them to form new connections in Australia because they could not interact with the English speakers around them. Many reported experiencing feelings of isolation, depression, helplessness, and low levels of well-being as well as pressure to imitate the language use of the larger community as a way of fitting in. In practice, this was very hard to do, and many reported these pressures and problems of acculturation lasted for many years after their arrival in Australia (Amezquita et al, 1995; Aizpurua and Fisher, 2008). Similar experiences are frequently reported by members of other language communities in Australia, including those of interest here.

There are indications that the experience and degree of linguistic isolation experienced by speakers of particular languages depends to some extent on the size of their ethnic community in the location of migration. In Australia, for example, individuals who do not speak English well may have access to higher incomes and better paid work when they speak a language of which there are already many speakers in the community. The effect of co-ethnic employment tends to be much stronger for those with lower levels of English than for those whose skills are better (Evans, 2004). In terms of community size, Arabic speakers and Indonesian speakers in Australia are quite different, with Arabic being one of the ten most commonly spoken languages other than English in the community (ABS, 2007). Indonesian speakers make up a much smaller portion of the population of Melbourne and Australia and generally have different experiences and forms of migration. Nonetheless, both Arabic and Indonesian are among the languages in which services and official translation are available, signalling official recognition of these language communities (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012).

**The Arabic Speaking Community in Melbourne**

The Arabic speaking community in Melbourne is made up of individuals who came to Australia from 22 countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Victorian Arabic Social Services, 2010). Many of the recent migrants arrived in Melbourne as refugees or displaced persons. However, there are also long established communities of Arabic speakers from Lebanon, Egypt, and other locations, and there is a large number of Australian-born speakers of the language in the city. The majority of Arabic speakers are Muslim, but there are also significant numbers of Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Copts, Chaldeans, and Maronites in the community (Migrant Information Centre, 2010). This reflects the diversity of the Arabic speaking community worldwide as well as the cultural and geographic origin of groups and individuals living in Australia.
While migrants from across the Arabic-speaking world are placed into the same linguistic category in Australia, there are, in fact, significant dialectical differences in language use in different locations. These distinctions are socially significant to speakers and serve as markers of geographic and cultural origin (see Rouchdy, 2002). Arabic language, as used in Melbourne, is actually a collection of dialects, rather than a single standard entity, that represents the language customs and usage of speakers from diverse locations, of varied educational background, and also contributes to personal and group identity. While it is accurate to label all these speakers as part of the Arabic community, in practice their differences in language use have the potential to affect interaction within and between dialect communities as well as English mastery among different segments of the population.

Mastery of English among speakers of Arabic also varies considerably, depending on region of origin and length of time a dialect community has existed in Australia. For example, there are 11,580 people of Egyptian birth in Victoria. Of these 49.5% report speaking Arabic at home, while 22.2% speak English. Of those who speak English at home, 87.1% report speaking the language well, while 12.0% say they speak it poorly or not at all (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011a). Similarly, there are 14,950 people in Victoria who were born in Lebanon. Eighty nine per cent speak Arabic at home; 7.4% speak English. Of those who speak English at home, 76.5% report that they speak the language well, while 22.8% speak the language poorly or not at all (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011b). By contrast, 6,210 people born in Sudan live in Victoria. About 51% of them speak Arabic at home, 23.6% speak Dinka, and 5.5% speak other African languages. Of the members of this community who speak English, 67% report speaking it well, while 37% speak the language poorly or not at all (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011c). These differences in the proportion of specific groups that uses Arabic at home and the proportion that does not speak English well is a direct reflection of the length of time the migrant community has been established in Australia as well as the circumstances by which its members came to migrate. Many Egyptian migrants arrived in Australia following their country's independence in 1953 and were well educated individuals seeking better economic opportunities than were available in their home country (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011a). Many members of the Lebanese community migrated to Australia in the mid-1970s to escape war and political instability in their native land (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011b). Most members of the Sudanese community entered Australia after 2001 as refugees or asylum seekers, and this community is one of the fasting growing in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011c).

Not surprisingly, some of the most serious instances of linguistic isolation exist among members of the Sudanese community because they are new to Australia and because there is no established cultural community for them to join (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2008). Further, since its independence from the British-Egyptian administration in 1956, Sudan has experienced a succession of droughts, famines, and wars. A series of governments, most of which were military regimes, have added to social instability, and the nation has experienced two periods of civil war resulting from conflict between ethnic groups over power and access to resources. The first of these clashes began after independence and lasted until 1972. Following a period of relative calm, a second civil war erupted in 1983 and lasted until 2005 (Jok, 2011).

In January 2006, the two sides signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement which ended the fighting and granted autonomy to the southern part of the country. As a result of the long period of civil war, nearly 5.5 million refugees have been forced to flee their homes and have either become internally displaced within the country's borders or are living in refugee camps in nearby countries. Most of these refugees ended up in neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, some settling permanently while others applied to be resettled elsewhere as refugees (Schweizer et al, 2007). Australia has played a role in the resettlement of some of the individuals who were worst affected, and there are now
approximately 20,000 Sudanese living in Australia who have arrived in the last 10 years (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011c).

The Sudanese community is on average significantly younger than the average for the Australian population overall (24.6 years as compared to 46.8 years). About 55% of the community is male, and median income is considerably lower than for the population as a whole (A$231 per week compared to $431 per week). Participation in the labor force is only 40.3% with an unemployment rate of 28.5%. The comparable rates for the Australian population are 64.6% and 5.2% respectively (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011c). These figures illustrate some of the difficulties facing this community, which, as a whole, has experienced multiple disadvantages which continue to pose significant challenges in adapting to life in Australia. Language is central in the ability to obtain employment and participate in education, but the need to shift to English has proven to be a challenge for this community in light of the other challenges of acculturation faced by many of its members. While it is likely that language accommodation will emerge in time, this community faces other, equally pressing issues (Milner and Khawaja, 2010).

Compared to other segments of the Arabic-speaking population, people of Sudanese origin already lacked access to basic services and educational opportunities before arriving in Australia. Many younger members of the community never experienced a period of normalcy in their homeland and spent their formative years as refugees in other parts of Africa or elsewhere before settling in Australia. This situation has meant that many members of the Sudanese community have longstanding health conditions that significantly impact on their well-being that include emotional problems, nutritional deficits, parasitic illness, dental conditions, and the effects of trauma (see, for example, Martin and Mak, 2006; Milner and Khawaja, 2010). For this reason, many members of the community have had occasion to interact with the health care system which has highlighted serious problems associated with language and cultural appropriateness. Language problems may affect individuals at any stage of the process of seeking health care and often have a detrimental effect on satisfaction even before a person sees a doctor. For the Sudanese community, for example, it may be difficult to make an appointment (which usually must be done by phone), determine what kind of service they need, and figure out where to get it (see Murray and Skull, 2005; Sheikh-Mohammad et al, 2006).

The effects of linguistic isolation in the context of health are well-known, but Sudanese migrants to Australia face a range of similar concerns that impact other areas of their experience as well. One of these is access to education. Many members of the community report that the opportunity to participate in education before coming to Australia was much greater for boys than for girls, although both sexes experienced significant disruption and discontinuity in their homeland because of political circumstances. Many members of the Sudanese community did not feel education was as important for girls, and there were social and safety reasons to keep girls at home. For this reason, it has often been easier for boys to adapt to the educational system because formal schooling is more culturally consonant for them. Many Sudanese parents, however, are anxious for their daughters as well as their sons to attend school in Australia, but the change in cultural outlook that is required is not always easily achieved.

A similar shift in values is demanded from members of this community to adapt to the Australian conceptualization of the nuclear family and the respective roles of parents and children. Traditional patterns of family interaction that are based on the extended family and clan relationships are often not effective in a Western context where a household generally consists of parents and their children, and many parents feel pressure to maintain their authority. This may lead to intergenerational conflict, especially when children take to Australian culture more readily than adults, and parents wish to maintain traditional values that are in conflict with the views of the broader society (Renzaho et al. 2011).

This experience is not unique to the Sudanese community in Melbourne and has been recognized among many groups in different parts of the world. However, the seriousness of the
underlying stresses on this community should not be underestimated. The need to master English in order to gain employment, participate in education, and become a part of the Australian mainstream must also be accompanied by a significant culture shift affecting attitudes, views, and values. This requires time in any case but has been hindered in the Sudanese community in Melbourne by the continuing impact of individual and collective experience before arriving in Australia. At present, this community remains a separate subset of the Arabic speaking population because the same experiences that set it apart from the Australian mainstream also distance it from other Arabic speaking groups whose culture and experience of migration are different.

Like other Arabic speaking groups in Melbourne, the Sudanese community is beginning to form self-help organizations that center around providing assistance in interacting with the English speaking environment. Many of these groups have focused on developing the skills and knowledge community members will need as permanent members of the Australian community. Nonetheless, a recently released study of members of the Sudanese community in several Australian locations found that 90% wish to return home to Sudan (see STATT, 2012, for the complete report on this issue). This is a direct reflection of the difficulties the community as a whole has had in adapting to the English speaking environment, achieving social inclusion, and overcoming other challenges that often include perceptions of racism and feeling unwelcome.

The Indonesian Speaking Community in Melbourne

As of the 2006 national census, there were 12,600 people of Indonesian birth in the state of Victoria. Most of these individuals live in the Melbourne metropolitan region and are fairly recent arrivals. Only 39.6% of the community arrived before 1996, compared to 68% of the total overseas born population (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012). This population of permanent migrants is supplemented by a large number of temporary migrants, most of whom are enrolled in tertiary courses of various kinds offered by Australia universities and colleges. In 2011, there were some 16,000 Indonesians studying in Australia, with 5,503 individuals at Victorian educational institutions, almost entirely in the higher education sector (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, 2011).

Of the Indonesian-born migrant population in Melbourne, approximately half are of Chinese ethnic background and half are native Indonesians (prihumi). Both groups speak Indonesian and/or a local language of Indonesia. Approximately 28% of this group is Catholic, 17% are Muslim, and the remainder are other religions. Two thirds of this population is female, reflecting a significant number of marriages where, typically, the husband is an English-speaking Australian and the wife is Indonesian. Sixty seven per cent of the migrant population reports speaking Indonesian at home. Of the remaining 33% who speak English at home, 89% report that they speak the language well. However, 9.3% evaluate their English ability as poor or non-existent (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011d).

The statistics above reflect various aspects of the historical relationship between Australia and Indonesia. For example, Australia is geographically close to the eastern part of Indonesia, and Australians are very familiar with the Indonesian island of Bali, which is a favourite tourist destination. Eastern Indonesia has a higher proportion of non-Muslims than the west of the country due to historical contact with the Spanish and Portuguese before the Dutch gained control of the whole nation in 1800 (Ricklefs, 2002). This familiarity and comparatively higher level of interaction between Australians and Indonesians in the eastern part of the country has led to a situation where more of the non-Chinese, Indonesian-born in Australia come from this part of the country. In cases of marriage between Australians and Indonesians, it is quite common for the Indonesian partner to come from this part of the nation as well.

These marriages are especially significant in the context of linguistic isolation. In many cases, the Australian spouse speaks little or no Indonesian, and the Indonesian partner speaks
little or no English. English language ability in Indonesia is closely associated with higher levels of education, and it is the main foreign taught at all levels. However, many of the Indonesian migrants to Australia are not well educated, but mastery of English tends to be low even among those who have completed higher education. Similarly, while Indonesian is widely taught as a foreign language in Australian schools, mastery is generally low. The linguistic situation is further complicated by the fact that a majority of Indonesians do not speak Indonesian as a first language but begin to study it formally when they enter school. Similar to English, mastery of Indonesian is closely associated with increasing levels of education, and, in practice, many Indonesians do not speak the national language well. However, the ability to speak Indonesian at a native level is required for employment in the formal sector in Indonesia. Individuals who cannot master the language are generally confined to work in the informal sector or to long-term unemployment or underemployment. This is a driving force in urbanization and temporary as well as permanent migration in the nation today (Resosudarmo et al, 2009). In Australia, it is not uncommon for individuals with low levels of formal education in Indonesia to have great difficulty mastering English, despite living among English speakers. While Australian born children in these situations usually speak English like natives, their command of Indonesian or the Indonesian parent’s local language is often poor or non-existent. As children grow up and have more interests outside the family, the Indonesian parent is frequently experiences increasing isolation, both linguistic and social.

The nature of Indonesian society is highly communal, and people are not accustomed to being alone. There are always people at home to talk to and to help with household chores. It is considered socially desirable and appropriate for children of both sexes to interact in groups, and the level of privacy most individuals desire is low by western standards. These social customs may add to the difficulties experienced by Indonesian migrants to Australia who do not speak English well, and, not surprisingly, most build a social network composed of other Indonesians, often of the same ethnic origin. Where this is not possible, such as for individuals living in small towns where they may be the only Indonesian speaker, isolation may be very severe, especially in those situations where the person involved is not able to communicate fully in English. For Indonesians who migrate to Australia with family members, the situation is typically slightly different. These individuals often have no difficulty communicating in Indonesian or their local language because they live with relatives who come from the same linguistic background. This mirrors findings in Indonesia itself that show that domestic migrants whose families are with them in the new location do better than those who migrate alone (Lu, 2010). However, individuals in this situation experience many difficulties mastering English as those who live among English speakers. This may be related to the extremely different nature of English and Indonesian, to cultural factors that may work against acculturation, to a perceived lack of need to speak English well, or to a combination of these and other factors.

Even among the population of temporary migrants from Indonesia, evidence of linguistic isolation is easily visible, especially among the spouses of the individuals who are studying at Australian universities. The situation tends to be somewhat different depending on whether the non-student spouse is male or female. Increasingly, women who work as university lecturers or in other professional capacities in Indonesia are bringing their husbands with them to Australia when they enrol in a higher degree as an international student, usually with a scholarship from the Indonesian government or other institution. This phenomenon reflects the rising standard of living in Indonesia (such that this option is affordable) as well as the increasing number of Indonesian women who choose a foreign, rather than a domestic, degree but who do not wish to leave children in the care of relatives. In many cases, the husbands of these women take menial jobs in Australia to supplement the income the family has from the wife’s scholarship. Despite often having professional employment in Indonesia, these men generally work in factories, car washes, and similar low interaction jobs for minimum wage because they lack basic even English ability. It is very difficult for them to socialize or even communicate with their co-workers, some
of whom may be migrants who speak other languages. Their social networks tend to consist only of their wife and children as well as any other Indonesians in a similar position that they happen to know. When the non-student spouse is the woman, the family usually relies on the husband’s scholarship and any additional income he may be able to generate. While many of these wives have professional employment in Indonesia, they often do not work for the duration of the time their husband is studying in Australia. Their social network, too, tends to consist of their husband and children along with other Indonesians they happen to know, usually those who are also associated with the university. While not part of the Australian population as permanent migrants are, these temporary migrants often have great difficulty interacting with Australian institutions, such as the health care system or the schools their children attend while in the country, and, in many cases, experience considerable feelings of loneliness, isolation, depression, and boredom resulting from their lack of access to much of the social environment around them.

The majority of members of the Indonesian speaking community in Melbourne are relatively new arrivals. For this reason, the kind of well-developed, language-specific social services and mutual support organizations that characterize some of the more established ethnic communities are absent. There are, however, a number of social organizations that serve as forum in which speakers of Indonesian or a specific local language can socialize. These tend to be ethnically based and give people who otherwise might have few opportunities to do so a chance to interact with others in their native or the national language. While these forums are no doubt important in ameliorating some of the isolation members might feel in the larger English-speaking community, they may also discourage some individuals from making an effort to use English in social situations by providing a more comfortable alternative where it is not necessary to learn new customs and norms. Similarly, the Consulate General in Melbourne occasionally holds events which any Indonesian in Melbourne may attend. These gatherings, such as communal fast breaking during the Islamic month of Ramadan or on Indonesian independence day, are open to anyone who identifies him or herself with Indonesia, regardless of citizenship, and serve to maintain individual connection to Indonesia, no matter of how long a person has lived in Melbourne or whether he or she is an Australian citizen.

Discussion

For speakers of Arabic originating in Sudan and speakers of Indonesian, adaptation to the English speaking environment in Melbourne is often difficult and unsatisfactory. The reasons for this are complex and relate to linguistic characteristics of individuals’ first language but also involve personal factors such as attitude, personality, resilience, and openness to new attitudes and values. Current Australian multicultural policy supports the maintenance of community languages which, in an official context, are seen as enriching Australian society and supporting cultural diversity, and both Arabic and Indonesian are among recognized community languages and whose speakers can access support in their native tongue. In one sense this can be seen as a support for those people who cannot (or will not) speak English, but it may also lessen the potential for full integration into Australian society and severely limit ability to interact with the wider population. Allowing people to maintain their culture of origin and use their native language is often seen as an aspect of human rights, but the other side of this approach is that cultural and linguistic maintenance of this kind (which is often easier for the individuals involved) may also impede the people involved in adopting Australian culture to the degree necessary for them to feel they are full members of society. In fact, identification with culture of origin is very high in Australia, even among communities that have been established in this country for generations and are no longer experiencing high levels of migration. This is not to suggest that an approach focusing on assimilation would be more beneficial; rather it is an indication that the success of linguistic and cultural adaptation is complex and unpredictable at the individual level.
This differential in the ability of individuals and groups to master the majority language is directly related to the problem of social exclusion, where structural and cultural environment does not permit certain groups to take part in public life and society level interaction. Because language and culture are interrelated, with language providing the means for the expression of culture and culture supplying contexts in which language develops, inability to use the majority language of the community has far-reaching consequences for the individuals and groups involved that extend beyond easily observable difficulties using the health care system, for example, or participating in formal education. The psychosocial impacts that arise from an inability to understand much of the language use in one’s environment are significant and may occur even when opportunities exist to interact with members of one’s own linguistic or cultural community. This is the case with both Indonesian speakers and Arabic speakers of Sudanese origin and is an aspect of the migrant experience that multicultural policy does not address.

For members of these two groups who live with family members who speak the same language and are part of a larger group of native speakers, it is often possible to retain certain aspects of their native culture. They also have the means for full expression of their thoughts and feelings (in their native language) but may still lack the means to interact in a similar way outside this limited group. This serves to isolate them within a cultural community that does not use the majority language. Even if individuals gain facility in the language of the larger community, they may continue to view their experience through the lens of their original language and culture, which represents a barrier to social inclusion in a true sense, even if they are living and working among other people. This situation may result in members of such a group continuing to view themselves as separate and separated from the rest of the community. This is frequently the case among African migrants, for example, even as they become more acculturated over time and begin to adopt the Australian way of thinking (see, for example, Polonsky et al, 2011).

For individuals who do not speak the majority language but also have no opportunity to interact with other speakers of their native tongue, the situation may be even more severe. While it is generally accepted by both experts and lay people that people in this situation will learn the language of their environment through exposure, in practice this is not always the case. Language mastery does require exposure but also includes a difficult to quantify element of innate ability. In the case of Indonesian speakers in Australia, for example, many never master English to a high degree and cannot fully integrate into Australian society despite years of immersion in the linguistic and cultural milieu. While people in this position may interact with others who do not speak their language, these interactions are typically superficial and may be emotionally unsatisfactory because the non-native speaker misses a great deal of social information and never really understands the full range of discourse content. Further, in many cases, circumstances permit migrants from the CALD communities of interest here to develop some facility in varieties of Australian English associated with lower income, lower education demographics, such that interaction in other contexts may be awkward or viewed as inappropriate by native speakers.

For Arabic and Indonesian speaking individuals in both of the situations described above, linguistic isolation and the associated condition of social exclusion tends to be aggravated as children become more acculturated and begin to demonstrate values and attitudes that seem foreign to the non-majority language speaking parent. In fact, the views of these children are often an intermediate conceptualization that combines the values of the culture of origin learned at home and the values of the culture of residence learned from the larger social environment. To the parent, however, children may seem like the people of the culture of residence but still do not fit in well in that culture from the point of view of native speakers of English. In other words, children who grow up in contexts where parents are linguistically isolated may seem to be well-acculturated in overt senses that can be easily observed (clothing, food tastes, interests, and so forth) but may still lack native understanding. It is this phenomenon that may lead to psychosocial problems in this generation as well as intergenerational conflict between parents.
and children. This has been observed to be of significance among the Arabic-speaking migrant communities in Melbourne in particular (see, for example, Renzaho et al, 2011; Renzaho, McCabe and Sainsbury, 2011).

Returning to the question of social exclusion, it should be noted that linguistic and cultural deficits relative to the mainstream population may be most severe among recent migrants but are not limited to this original immigrant generation. Individuals’ self-perception as a member of a specific linguistic or cultural community may persist, even at a point when mastery of the majority language has exceeded ability in the ancestral language. Interestingly, this is often a matter of subjective perception, and the person involved may or may not be seen as “foreign” by members of the larger community. In the case of the Arabic-speaking community of Sudanese origin, a collective experience marked by social disruption is an integral part of individuals’ self-perception and, at present, acts as a defining element of community membership. For Indonesian speakers, a complex linguistic background in the country of origin complicates mastery of English and acculturation into Australian society. The result is significant linguistic isolation and social exclusion in both cases. These two CALD communities in Melbourne are of fairly recent establishment, however, and it remains to be seen how they develop in the future. At present, the Sudanese community is much better studied than the Indonesian community. While their experiences are different, they both provide insight into the nature of linguistic isolation, social exclusion, and the Australian multicultural context.
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