

**Language Proficiency, Use, and Maintenance among
People with Vietnamese Heritage Living in Australia**

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| Biographical statement (50-75 words) |
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Sharynne McLeod is professor of speech and language acquisition at Charles Sturt University. She is an elected Life Member of Speech Pathology Australia, Fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, founding chair of the International Expert Panel on Multilingual Children's Speech, has held a number of roles in the International Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics Association, International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics, and was editor of the International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology.

Sarah Verdon

Dr Sarah Verdon is a senior lecturer and research fellow at Charles Sturt University, Australia. Her research focuses on the development of a culturally competent workforce and supporting the communication of children from diverse backgrounds. She is co-chair of The International Expert Panel on Multilingual Children's Speech.

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Dr Cen (Audrey) Wang is the project officer of the VietSpeech study at Charles Sturt University and is responsible for quantitative data collection and analyses. With a background in educational psychology, her research focuses on children's academic and social emotional development and the associated factors.

Van H. Tran

Dr Van H. Tran a linguist and a NAATI-accredited translator. She has taught English language and linguistics and translation at University of Wollongong and Western Sydney University. Her research has focussed on discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and recently home language maintenance and children's speech acquisition. She is a PhD candidate on the VietSpeech Australian Research Council Discovery Grant examining Vietnamese language maintenance and Vietnamese-English competence.

Abstract

Multilingualism provides cultural, economic and social benefits to individuals and societies. A large number of people with Vietnamese heritage have migrated to English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, and the US. This study describes language proficiency, use, and maintenance of 271 adults with Vietnamese heritage living across Australia. The majority were first generation immigrants (76.6%), spoke Vietnamese as their first language (94.3%), and indicated Vietnamese was their most proficient language (78.5%). The majority were more likely to use Vietnamese (than English) with their mother, father, older siblings, Vietnamese-speaking grandparents, relatives in Vietnam, and Vietnamese friends. They used English and Vietnamese with their partners, children, younger siblings, and English-speaking grandparents. They were more likely to speak English when working, studying, and watching TV, but used English and Vietnamese equally on social media. The most important reasons for maintaining Vietnamese were: maintaining bonds with relatives, maintaining Vietnamese cultural identity, and building friendships.

Keywords: multilingual, bilingual, Vietnamese, heritage language, language maintenance, language proficiency

Language Proficiency, Use, and Maintenance among People with Vietnamese Heritage Living in Australia

Multilingualism benefits individuals and societies: culturally, economically, and socially. Individuals who are competent in more than one language are at a cognitive, social, and economic advantage over monolingual peers (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010; Bialystok, 2011). Maintaining home language(s) is important for social and cultural cohesion, academic and occupational advantage (Clyne, 2008; McLeod, Harrison, Whiteford, & Walker, 2016; Sims & Ellis, 2014). For example, people who are multilingual are more likely to be employed, have postgraduate qualifications, and a higher salary than people who are monolingual in a study of two Australian censuses (Blake, McLeod, Verdon, & Fuller, 2018). Multilingualism also contributes to society in terms of global economic engagement (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). However, before the advantages of multilingualism can be realised, a level of proficiency in the spoken languages must be achieved (Clarkson, 2007). Learning the dominant language of the country is important for immigrants' success at school and in society (Blake, Bennetts Kneebone, & McLeod, 2017; Goldfeld, O'Connor, Mithen, Sayers, & Brinkman, 2014). Proficiency in more than one language enables linguistic multi-competence, "the overall system of a mind or a community that uses more than one language" (Cook, 2016, p. 2). Supporting linguistic multi-competence (Cook, 2016) within individuals, communities, and nations is key to realising the advantages of multilingualism.

The loss of home languages is a significant problem for individuals, families, and society. Loss of language and cultural identity has been associated with decreased academic performance and poorer social behaviour among young immigrants (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). At the family level, language maintenance is essential for the transmission of cultural values across generations and promoting emotional wellbeing, self-perception and identity (Wong Fillmore, 1991). A strong sense of identity is a key component for maintaining family cohesion among immigrant families (Ho & Birman, 2010). Language maintenance facilitates relationships with family members who may be monolingual speakers of the home language (such as grandparents) (Park & Sarkar, 2007). At the societal level, failure to maintain home languages translates to lost opportunity for participation in a globalised economy (Clyne, 2008). While multiple factors impact on language maintenance and loss (Karidakis & Arunachalam, 2016; Wong Fillmore, 1991), the number of generations since migration has a significant impact (Verdon, McLeod & Winsler, 2014). Among immigrants to English-speaking countries, a shift in language dominance from their home language to English has been documented to occur within three generations (Veltman, 1983; Willoughby, 2018). Research examining language proficiency, use, and maintenance can inform programs and professionals who support multilingual speakers, including teachers of English as a second language (TESOL), speech-language pathologists (SLPs), and others.

Vietnamese diaspora

Vietnamese is the eighteenth most commonly spoken language in the world (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2019). While the majority of Vietnamese speakers reside in Vietnam (General Statistics Office of Viet Nam, 2016), many have migrated to English-speaking countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia, as refugees after the war in Vietnam the 1970s and more recently for education and employment opportunities. Vietnamese is in the fourth most spoken language (after English) in the US (Camarota & Zeigler, 2014; Ryan, 2013), and in Australia is the fifth most spoken language after English (72.7%), Mandarin (2.5%), Arabic (1.4%) and Cantonese (1.2%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2017). A total of 294,798 people living Australia identified as having

Vietnamese heritage, according to the most recent Australian census, accounting for 1.26% of the total population in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2016). More than half (56.4%) of the Vietnamese people living in Australia arrived between 1976 and 1995 (ABS, 2016) meaning that many are either second or third generation immigrants. Considering a shift in language dominance among immigrants has been documented to occur within three generations (Veltman, 1983; Willoughby, 2018), the Vietnamese-Australian community is at a key point in time in terms of the maintenance of their home language. While Australia does not have an official language, English is the language of government, economy, education, and daily life. The “monolingual mindset” (Clyne, 2008, p. 348) of the Australian population has been described frequently (e.g., Blake, Verdon, & McLeod, 2019). This is in contrast to the fact more than one quarter of Australia’s population is born overseas, and linguistic diversity is increasing because the source countries for migration are changing from Europe to Asia (ABS, 2017). It is estimated that by 2050, migration will contribute \$1,625 billion to Australia’s Gross Domestic Product and increase workforce participation by 15.7% (Migration Council Australia, 2015). Viet Nam is set to become a key player in the global economy in coming decades, with a population of 94 million and an annual GDP increase of 6.81% in 2017 (compared with Australia 1.96% and US 2.27%, World Bank, 2019).

There is limited knowledge about the Vietnamese-Australian community’s language proficiency, use, and maintenance. Literature addressing Vietnamese speakers’ language practices and beliefs primarily has arisen from the US. Vietnamese-US speakers with a longer period of US residence demonstrated higher levels of competence in English and lower competence in Vietnamese (Nguyen, Shin, & Krashen, 2001). Grandchildren of Vietnamese immigrants to the US were found to be monolingual English speakers, and no longer spoke their home language (Tang, 2007). Vietnamese-US children were more proficient in English but believed it was important to maintain their Vietnamese language and culture (Nguyen et al., 2001). Young and Tran (1999) found that as time since migration increased, parental desire for their children to maintain Vietnamese increased. Vietnamese-Australian parents viewed speaking Vietnamese as essential to acquisition of English and supported multilingualism to enhance career opportunities (Bernat, 2004). Understanding the Vietnamese-Australian community’s language proficiency, use, and maintenance is informed by the Theory of Language Policy (Spolsky, 2004, 2007). Spolsky indicated that language policy accounts for language choices of an individual and a speech community, with “three interrelated but independently describable components: practices, beliefs, and management” (Spolsky, 2007, p. 3). Supporting home language maintenance (management) of the diasporic Vietnamese community will be facilitated by understanding their language proficiency and use (practices) and perceptions (beliefs) of home language maintenance.

Aims

This is the first large-scale study to describe the international Vietnamese community’s language practices, beliefs and management and will provide invaluable information to support the maintenance of other minority languages in countries where a dominant language is spoken. The aim of this study was to provide a profile of Vietnamese speakers living in Australia in terms of language proficiency, use, and maintenance via a self-report questionnaire, specifically, to describe:

- (1) proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading and writing Vietnamese and English.
- (2) language use (of Vietnamese and English) across communicative contexts: with different people, in different places, and across different media.
- (3) perceptions of the importance of Vietnamese language maintenance, and Vietnamese language maintenance practices.

Method

Context

This research is a part of a larger study titled *VietSpeech: Vietnamese-Australian children's speech and language competence*, exploring Vietnamese language maintenance in Australia. The study received approval from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: H18084).

Participants

A total of 315 participants commenced answering the questionnaire: 212 participants commenced the English questionnaire (online: $n = 212$; paper: $n = 0$) and 103 commenced the Vietnamese questionnaire (online: $n = 75$; paper: $n = 28$). Among the total participants, three did not consent to the study; 29 did not meet the eligibility criteria (living in Australia, having Vietnamese heritage, and being 18 years or older), and another 12 did not proceed with the survey after consenting to the study, leaving 271 as the total eligible participants.

The 271 participants were from all six states in Australia (i.e., New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania) and from one of the two territories (i.e., Australian Capital Territory). The mean age of the participants was 40.01 years ($SD = 12.74$), ranging from 18 years to 78 years. Among the participants, 75.7% were female, 84.2% obtained a bachelor's degree and above, and 56.7% were professionals (see Table 1). The majority (77.1%) were married and the mean household size was 4.1 people ($SD = 1.42$, range 1-8).

Table 1.
Demographic information (n = 271)

| | | <i>n</i> | % | Valid data |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 63 | 23.6% | 267 |
| | Female | 202 | 75.7% | |
| | Prefer not to say | 2 | 0.7% | |
| Education | Postgraduate degree | 105 | 46.3% | 227 |
| | Graduate diploma or Certificate | 12 | 5.3% | |
| | Bachelor degree | 74 | 32.6% | |
| | Advanced Diploma or Diploma | 15 | 6.6% | |
| | Certificate | 2 | 0.9% | |
| | Year 12 or equivalent | 16 | 7.0% | |
| | Year 10 or equivalent | 1 | 0.4% | |
| | Below Year 10 or equivalent | 2 | 0.9% | |
| Occupation^a | Manager | 24 | 10.7% | 224 |
| | Professional | 127 | 56.7% | |
| | Technician or trade worker | 9 | 4.0% | |
| | Community and personal service worker | 15 | 6.7% | |
| | Clerical and administrative worker | 8 | 3.6% | |
| | Sales worker | 6 | 2.7% | |
| | Machinery operator and/or driver | 0 | 0.0% | |
| | Labourer | 6 | 2.7% | |
| Weekly income^a | Other | 29 | 12.9% | 216 |
| | Nil income | 37 | 17.1% | |
| | \$1-\$399 (\$1-\$20,799 annual) | 22 | 10.2% | |
| | \$400-\$799 (\$20,800-\$41,599) | 30 | 13.9% | |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|-----|-------|-----|
| | \$800-\$1,499 (\$41,600-\$77,999) | 61 | 28.2% | |
| | \$1,500-\$1,999 (\$78,000-\$103,999) | 34 | 15.7% | |
| | \$2,000-\$2,999 (\$104,000-\$155,999) | 23 | 10.6% | |
| | \$3,000 or more (\$156,000 or more) | 9 | 4.2% | |
| Marital status | Married | 175 | 77.1% | 227 |
| | Defacto | 11 | 4.8% | |
| | Divorced | 9 | 4.0% | |
| | Separated | 0 | 0.0% | |
| | Widowed | 4 | 1.8% | |
| Postcode | Never married | 28 | 12.3% | |
| | New South Wales | 117 | 57.4% | 204 |
| | Australian Capital Territory | 3 | 1.5% | |
| | Victoria | 60 | 29.4% | |
| | Queensland | 5 | 2.5% | |
| | South Australia | 11 | 5.4% | |
| | Western Australia | 5 | 2.5% | |
| | Tasmania | 3 | 1.5% | |

^a Classifications from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016)

The majority of participants were born in Vietnam (87.3%) and were first generation immigrants (76.6%) (see Table 2). That is, they were born outside of Australia and arrived in Australia as an adult or late teen. Half of the participants had lived in Australia for 10 years or less (see Table 2). Vietnamese was identified as the first language of 94.3% of the participants (see Table 3). Most of the participants spoke Vietnamese with Northern (44.8%) or Southern (28.7%) accents/dialects. Vietnamese was the first language of most of the participants' mothers (98.3%) and fathers (97.5%). More details regarding participants' demographics, migration status, and language background are presented in Tables 1-3.

Table 2.
Migration status (n = 271)

| | | <i>n</i> | % | Valid data |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| Birth country | Vietnam | 213 | 87.3% | 244 |
| | Australia | 23 | 9.4% | |
| | Other | 8 | 3.3% | |
| Generation of immigration^a | First generation | 187 | 76.6% | 244 |
| | 1.5 generation | 22 | 9.0% | |
| | Second generation | 26 | 10.7% | |
| | Third generation | 1 | 0.4% | |
| | Other | 8 | 3.3% | |
| Years living in Australia | Whole life | 17 | 7.1% | 240 |
| | 5 years and below | 73 | 30.4% | |
| | 6-10 years | 47 | 19.6% | |
| | 11-15 years | 28 | 11.7% | |
| | 16-20 years | 24 | 10.0% | |

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------|----|-------|-----|
| | 21-30 years | 19 | 7.9% | |
| | More than 30 | 32 | 13.3% | |
| Years living in English-speaking countries | Whole life | 21 | 9.3% | 226 |
| | 5 years and below | 63 | 27.9% | |
| | 6-10 years | 42 | 18.6% | |
| | 11-15 years | 28 | 12.0% | |
| | 16-20 years | 26 | 12.0% | |
| | 21-30 years | 16 | 7.0% | |
| | More than 30 | 30 | 13.3% | |

Note. ^aFirst generation (born outside of Australia and arrived in Australia as an adult or late teen), 1.5 generation (born outside of Australia but immigrated to Australia as a child or teenager), second generation (born in Australia to parents who immigrated to Australia), third generation (born in Australia and your grandparents immigrated to Australia) (Lam, 2011).

Table 3.
Language background (n = 271)

| | | <i>n</i> | % | Valid data |
|--|-----------------|----------|-------|------------|
| First language | English | 10 | 3.8% | 264 |
| | Vietnamese | 249 | 94.3% | |
| | Other | 5 | 1.9% | |
| Most proficient language | English | 55 | 21.2% | 260 |
| | Vietnamese | 204 | 78.5% | |
| | Cantonese | 1 | 0.4% | |
| Vietnamese accent/dialect^a | Southern | 75 | 28.7% | 261 |
| | Central | 20 | 7.7% | |
| | Northern | 117 | 44.8% | |
| | Standard | 30 | 11.5% | |
| | Not sure | 6 | 2.3% | |
| | Other | 10 | 3.8% | |
| | Not applicable | 3 | 1.1% | |
| Mother's first language | English | 2 | 0.8% | 242 |
| | Vietnamese | 238 | 98.3% | |
| | Other | 2 | 0.8% | |
| Mother's most proficient language | English | 4 | 1.7% | 240 |
| | Vietnamese | 236 | 98.3% | |
| Father's first language | English | 2 | 0.8% | 239 |
| | Vietnamese | 233 | 97.5% | |
| | Other | 4 | 1.7% | |
| Father's most proficient language | English | 5 | 2.1% | 240 |
| | Vietnamese | 232 | 96.7% | |
| | Cantonese | 1 | 0.4% | |
| | Chinese (other) | 2 | 0.8% | |

^aVietnamese accents/dialects are defined in Pham & McLeod (2016)

Development of the survey instrument

The questionnaire (available by contacting the authors) was developed by the research team who have expertise in speech and language, as well as in Vietnamese culture and linguistics, after an extensive review of the literature (e.g., Cavallaro, 2005; Kang, 2015; Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Tannenbaum, 2003). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part 1 contained questions about the participants' demographics, migration status, language proficiency, language use, home language maintenance, family language background, and connections with Vietnamese culture. Part 1 contained approximately 42 questions but the actual number of questions for each participant was adjusted based on participants' individual responses due to the skip logic embedded within the survey design. Part 1 was designed to be answered by anyone living in Australia who had Vietnamese heritage and was 18 years and older.

Part 2 was structured to obtain a deeper understanding of family language practices, and was designed to be answered by people living in Australia with Vietnamese heritage who were parents and/or legal guardians of children under 18 years. It contained questions about family language policies and rules, language use with children in various contexts, family cohesion, and thoughts and beliefs about children's language maintenance. Part 2 had approximately 32 questions; however, the actual number of questions answered differed among individuals due to the skip logic (e.g., if participants did not live with a partner/spouse, all questions about partner/spouse were skipped).

The questionnaire was initially designed in English; but was available in both English and Vietnamese so the participants could choose to respond using the language they preferred. The English version of the questionnaire was translated to Vietnamese by the fourth author who is a native Vietnamese speaker, holds a doctoral degree in Linguistics, and is a National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accredited English to Vietnamese translator. As such, the translator was proficient in both languages and the intersect between Vietnamese and Australian culture, with expertise in the domain of research interest (Hambleton & Kanjee, 1995). Another team member, who is a native Vietnamese speaker, is proficient in English and holds a Master's degree in Linguistics and Literature, was invited to check the translation. Differences were discussed and resolved. Beta versions of the questionnaire were piloted with multilingual people living in Australia and adaptations were made before distribution.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. The research team advertised the questionnaire via the university website, personal and professional networks, email communications with Vietnamese organisations in Australia, and social media campaigns (Facebook, Twitter). The first page of the questionnaire contained information about the study and participants were asked to provide consent before they proceeded with the questions.

Participants had a choice of completing the anonymous self-report questionnaire either in English or Vietnamese and online or using the paper version. Participants who completed the paper version were provided a return paid envelope to ensure anonymity. Data collected via the paper version were manually entered by two trained research assistants (proficient in English and Vietnamese). The English version of the questionnaire was available for nine weeks; the Vietnamese version of the questionnaire was made available three weeks after the English questionnaire becoming live and was open for a total of six weeks. The current paper draws upon data from Part 1 of the questionnaire.

Measures

Language proficiency. Language proficiency refers to how well a person speaks, understands, reads, and writes in a language. Researchers have measured language proficiency either by using direct assessment in each of these domains or via self-report by asking speakers to rate their own abilities. In the current study, participants were asked to rate how well they speak, understand, read, and write Vietnamese and English in their daily life (4 items for each language), on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *not well*, 3 = *average*, 4 = *well*, 5 = *very well*) (cf. Blake et al., 2017). Mean scores of Vietnamese and English language proficiencies (out of a total of 5) were created with a higher score indicating higher Vietnamese and English language proficiency.

Language use. Language use refers to the frequency of using a language in different contexts, and with different communicative partners. Items reflecting participants' language use were informed by Park (2007), other literature, and the researchers' discussions with

multilingual speakers. The items captured language use with different people (e.g., What language/s do you use with your mother? What language/s do you use with your older siblings?), in different places or situations (e.g., What language/s do you use at work? What language/s do you use when in Vietnamese stores/restaurants?), and across different media (e.g., What language/s do you use in social media? What language/s do you use when reading the news?). Participants self-reported their language use on a 7-point scale (1 = *English always*, 2 = *mostly English sometimes Vietnamese*, 3 = *English and Vietnamese equally*, 4 = *mostly Vietnamese sometimes English*, 5 = *Vietnamese always*, 6 = *another language*, 7 = *not applicable*). A mean score of language use (out of a total of 5) was created with a higher score indicating more usage of Vietnamese relative to English and a lower score indicating more usage of English relative to Vietnamese. Responses of 6 and 7 were reported but were not included in the calculation of mean scores of language use.

Language maintenance. Language maintenance refers to the use and transmission of a home language from one generation to another. Language maintenance was examined three ways in the current study: connection with Vietnamese culture, reasons for maintaining Vietnamese language, and maintenance practices. First, connection with Vietnamese culture was explored via four yes/no questions and a question regarding frequency of attendance at Vietnamese community events. Second, items explored participants' perceptions of the importance of reasons for maintaining Vietnamese language, including: maintaining bonds with relatives, maintaining Vietnamese cultural identity, helping build friendships, improving academic study, helping communicate in English, and having wider career options. Participants self-reported their perceptions of importance on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all important*, 2 = *somewhat important*, 3 = *important*, 4 = *very important*, 5 = *extremely important*). Third, Vietnamese language maintenance practices were explored via responses to an open-ended question "What do you do to maintain your Vietnamese language? (e.g., watch Vietnamese movies)". Participants could provide information in unrestricted formats such as word/s, phrases or sentences.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means and standard deviations were calculated to understand participants' language proficiency, use, and maintenance. There were missing data from some participants; as such, valid data were indicated for all reported items and the reported percentages were based on valid data. Inferential statistics including one-way repeated measures ANOVA and dependent sample *t*-test were conducted to compare participants' proficiency in Vietnamese and English and to compare participants' perceived importance of different reasons for language maintenance.

Content analyses were conducted to explore participants' answers to the open-ended question regarding Vietnamese language maintenance practices. Content analysis was undertaken by the second author reading each response to the open-ended question "What do you do to maintain your Vietnamese language? (e.g., watch Vietnamese movies)". Responses in Vietnamese were translated into English by a research assistant who was proficient in Vietnamese and English. Responses were then assigned open codes at the phrase level in NVivo. In total, 206 participants responded to this question and 367 phrases were coded, as participants could provide multiple answers. Each phrase was assigned to a code that captured the meaning of the response. Codes were discussed with the authors and like codes were grouped together to identify the key language maintenance practices identified by the participants. At the completion of open coding, 13 key language maintenance practices were identified.

Results

Language proficiency

Vietnamese was reported to be the most proficient language by the majority of participants ($n = 204$; 78.5%), English was the most proficient language for 55 (21.2%) participants, and Cantonese was the most proficient language for one participant (0.4%) (see Table 3). Participants' Vietnamese and English language proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing are presented in Table 4. In terms of Vietnamese language proficiency, between 84.1% and 94.6% of the participants rated their language proficiency as either *well* or *very well* across the four domains, with mean scores ranging from 4.38 to 4.61 (of a total of 5). A slightly lower percentage of participants (between 68.6% and 74.0%) rated their English proficiency as *well* or *very well* across the four domains, with mean scores ranging from 3.86 to 4.00 (of a total of 5).

Results from one-way repeated measures ANOVA indicated that the differences in participants' reported proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing were statistically significant. For Vietnamese, the participants were most proficient in understanding, followed by, speaking, reading and writing (in the order of proficiency), $F(1.69, 429.88) = 35.71, p < .001$. For English, the participants were most proficient in reading and understanding, followed by speaking and writing, $F(2.56, 656.69) = 15.62, p < .001$. Furthermore, dependent sample-test results showed that participants' speaking, understanding, reading and writing in Vietnamese was significantly more proficient compared to speaking, understanding, reading and writing in English, $p_s < .007$.

Language use

Participants' language use with different people, in different places, and in different communication/media situations are reported in Table 5. In terms of participants' language use with different people, the majority of participants (more than 50%) reported more use of Vietnamese relative to English with their mother, father, older siblings, Vietnamese-speaking grandparents, other relatives in Vietnam, and Vietnamese friends. In contrast, the vast majority of participants (90.3%) reported always using English with their non-Vietnamese friends. For the remaining communicative partners, there were more variations in participants' responses. For example, there were more variations in the language used when participants spoke to their younger siblings, compared to their older siblings. With their children, 33.1% of the participants reported speaking mostly Vietnamese but sometimes English, compared to 18.7% reporting always speaking Vietnamese. With their partner, 44.4% reported always speaking Vietnamese and 23.2% reported always speaking English. Most participants did not have English-speaking grandparents (68.3%); however, interestingly, 13.4% of the participants reported always speaking Vietnamese with their English-speaking grandparents while 11.6% reported always speaking English with them.

Table 4.

Language proficiency in Vietnamese and English (n = 271)

| Language | Proficiency | Not at all n (%) | Not well n (%) | Average n (%) | Well n (%) | Very well n (%) | Mean (SD) | Valid data |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | /5 | |
| Vietnamese | Speak | 1 (0.4%) | 10 (3.9%) | 12 (4.6%) | 44 (17.0%) | 192 (74.1%) | 4.61 (0.78) | 259 |
| | Understand | 1 (0.4%) | 4 (1.6%) | 9 (3.5%) | 44 (17.3%) | 197 (77.3%) | 4.69 (0.65) | 255 |
| | Read | 5 (1.9%) | 19 (7.4%) | 10 (3.9%) | 30 (11.6%) | 194 (75.2%) | 4.51 (1.00) | 258 |
| | Write | 10 (3.9%) | 18 (7.0%) | 13 (5.1%) | 40 (15.6%) | 176 (68.5%) | 4.38 (1.11) | 257 |
| English | Speak | 8 (3.1%) | 11 (4.2%) | 57 (22.1%) | 110 (42.5%) | 73 (28.2%) | 3.88 (0.97) | 259 |
| | Understand | 8 (3.1%) | 5 (1.9%) | 54 (20.9%) | 106 (41.1%) | 85 (32.9%) | 3.99 (0.95) | 258 |
| | Read | 8 (3.1%) | 7 (2.7%) | 53 (20.5%) | 100 (38.6%) | 91 (35.1%) | 4.00 (0.97) | 259 |
| | Write | 8 (3.1%) | 16 (6.2%) | 57 (22.1%) | 101 (39.1%) | 76 (29.5%) | 3.86 (1.01) | 258 |

VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, USE, AND MAINTENANCE

Table 5.

Language use with different people, places, and media (n = 271)

| Language Use | English always n (%) | Mostly English sometimes Vietnamese n (%) | English and Vietnamese equally n (%) | Mostly Vietnamese sometimes English n (%) | Vietnamese always n (%) | Another Language n (%) | Not Applicable n (%) | Valid data | Mean (SD) |
|--|----------------------------|---|--|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| <i>Language Use with Different People</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | /5 |
| At home (overall) | 17 (6.7%) | 44 (17.4%) | 41 (16.2%) | 96 (37.9%) | 53 (20.9%) | 2 (0.8%) | - | 253 | 3.49 (1.20) |
| At home (children) | 15 (6.0%) | 38 (15.1%) | 39 (15.5%) | 83 (33.1%) | 47 (18.7%) | - | 29 (11.6%) | 251 | 3.49 (1.19) |
| At home (partner) | 58 (23.2%) | 9 (3.6%) | 9 (3.6%) | 41 (16.4%) | 111 (44.4%) | - | 22 (8.8%) | 250 | 3.61 (1.68) |
| With your mother | 2 (0.8%) | 8 (3.3%) | 5 (2.1%) | 14 (5.8%) | 180 (75%) | - | 31 (12.9%) | 240 | 4.73 (0.77) |
| With your father | 2 (0.8%) | 6 (2.5%) | 7 (2.9%) | 18 (7.6%) | 158 (66.4%) | 2 (0.8%) | 45 (18.9%) | 238 | 4.69 (0.78) |
| With Vietnamese-speaking grandparents | - | 2 (0.8%) | - | 7 (3.0%) | 152 (64.4%) | - | 75 (31.8%) | 236 | 4.92 (0.39) |
| With English-speaking grandparents | 26 (11.6%) | 4 (1.8%) | 4 (1.8%) | 7 (3.1%) | 30 (13.4%) | - | 153 (68.3%) | 224 | 3.15 (1.83) |
| With older siblings | 16 (6.8%) | 18 (7.6%) | 5 (2.1%) | 19 (8.1%) | 121 (51.1%) | - | 58 (24.5%) | 237 | 4.18 (1.37) |
| With younger siblings | 26 (10.9%) | 13 (5.5%) | 9 (3.8%) | 24 (10.1%) | 104 (43.7%) | - | 62 (26.1%) | 238 | 3.95 (1.51) |
| With other relatives (Vietnam) | 1 (0.4%) | 5 (2.0%) | 2 (0.8%) | 20 (7.9%) | 210 (83.0%) | 2 (0.8) | 13 (5.1%) | 253 | 4.82 (0.59) |
| With other relatives (English-speaking countries) | 30 (12.3%) | 14 (5.7%) | 34 (13.9%) | 38 (15.6%) | 66 (27.0%) | 1 (0.4%) | 61 (25.0%) | 244 | 3.52 (1.46) |
| With Vietnamese friends | 19 (7.5%) | 17 (6.7%) | 17 (6.7%) | 63 (25.0%) | 131 (52.2%) | - | 5 (2.0%) | 252 | 4.10 (1.25) |
| With non-Vietnamese friends | 223 (90.3%) | 4 (1.6%) | 3 (1.2%) | 6 (2.4%) | 3 (1.2%) | 1 (0.4%) | 7 (2.8%) | 247 | 1.17 (0.69) |
| <i>Language Use in Different Places</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| At work | 150 (62.5%) | 35 (14.6%) | 19 (7.9%) | 10 (4.2%) | 10 (4.2%) | - | 16 (6.7%) | 240 | 1.64 (1.10) |
| When studying (school/university/TAFE) | 168 (70.0%) | 24 (10.0%) | 6 (2.5%) | 2 (0.8%) | 6 (2.5%) | - | 34 (14.2%) | 240 | 1.32 (0.83) |
| When in Vietnamese stores/restaurants | 13 (5.2%) | 40 (16.1%) | 56 (22.6%) | 80 (32.3%) | 58 (23.4%) | 1 (0.4%) | - | 248 | 3.53 (1.17) |
| When in non-Vietnamese stores/restaurants | 206 (83.7%) | 19 (7.7%) | 4 (1.6%) | 9 (3.7%) | 4 (1.6%) | - | 4 (1.6%) | 246 | 1.29 (0.81) |
| At religious gatherings (temple/church) | 54 (22.3%) | 21 (8.7%) | 23 (9.5%) | 37 (15.3%) | 47 (19.4%) | - | 60 (24.8%) | 242 | 3.01 (1.60) |
| During leisure activities (e.g., sport/music) | 104 (43.2%) | 38 (15.8%) | 38 (15.8%) | 21 (8.7%) | 25 (10.4%) | - | 15 (6.2%) | 241 | 2.23 (1.40) |

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| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|---|-----------|-----|-------------|
| During cultural festivals (e.g., Tet/Vietnamese new year) | 14 (5.6%) | 28 (11.3%) | 55 (22.2%) | 67 (27.0%) | 80 (32.3%) | - | 4 (1.6%) | 248 | 3.70 (1.20) |
| During holidays in Vietnam | 6 (2.4%) | 1 (0.4%) | 14 (5.7%) | 40 (16.2%) | 170 (68.8%) | - | 16 (6.5%) | 247 | 4.59 (0.84) |
| <i>Language Use across Different Media</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| Social media (Facebook, Instagram) | 42 (17.1%) | 27 (11.0%) | 73 (29.7%) | 71 (28.9%) | 25 (10.2%) | - | 8 (3.3%) | 246 | 3.04 (1.24) |
| Reading the news (print or online) | 52 (21.3%) | 30 (12.3%) | 105 (43.0%) | 33 (13.5%) | 21 (8.6%) | - | 3 (1.2%) | 244 | 2.76 (1.19) |
| Reading magazines | 74 (30.2%) | 30 (12.2%) | 74 (30.2%) | 32 (13.1%) | 24 (9.8%) | - | 11 (4.5%) | 245 | 2.58 (1.33) |
| Reading books | 61 (24.8%) | 58 (23.6%) | 62 (25.2%) | 34 (13.8%) | 28 (11.4%) | - | 3 (1.2%) | 246 | 2.63 (1.31) |
| Listening to the radio | 105 (43.0%) | 41 (16.8%) | 44 (18.0%) | 21 (8.6%) | 24 (9.8%) | - | 9 (3.7%) | 244 | 2.23 (1.37) |
| Listening to music | 52 (21.3%) | 35 (14.3%) | 90 (36.9%) | 38 (15.6%) | 24 (9.8%) | - | 5 (2.0%) | 244 | 2.78 (1.24) |
| Watching television | 112 (46.1%) | 47 (19.3%) | 47 (19.3%) | 15 (6.2%) | 15 (6.2%) | - | 7 (2.9%) | 243 | 2.04 (1.23) |
| Watching movies, videos, DVDs, YouTube, etc. | 70 (28.6%) | 48 (19.6%) | 82 (33.5%) | 25 (10.2%) | 17 (6.9%) | - | 3 (1.2%) | 245 | 2.47 (1.21) |

Note. Responses for *Another Language* and *Not Applicable* were not included in the calculation of mean.

For language use in different places, the majority of participants (68.8%) reported always speaking Vietnamese when having holidays in Vietnam. In contrast, the majority of participants (more than 60%) always spoke English at work, when studying, and when visiting non-Vietnamese stores or restaurants. A relatively large number of participants (43.2%) also reported always speaking English during leisure activities. There were, however, more variations in participants' language choices when they visited Vietnamese stores or restaurants, when they were at religious gatherings, and when they attended cultural festivals.

With regards to language use related to media, in general, English consistently played a role in participants' responses across various media. Notably, more than 50% of participants reported listening to radio and watching TV in English, either always or predominantly. The majority of the participants (more than 50%) reported using English and Vietnamese equally or using predominantly Vietnamese on social media, when reading the news (print or online) and when listening to music. There were more variations in participants' responses for reading magazines, reading books, and watching movies and videos but the majority (more than 70%) reported using English predominantly or at least using English and Vietnamese equally in these situations.

Language maintenance

Connection with Vietnamese culture. Participants' reported connections with Vietnamese culture and communities are presented in Table 6. Approximately half of the participants (52.3%) indicated that they lived near a large number of Vietnamese people, and 54.2% indicated that they had access to a place where Vietnamese people meet in their community. Approximately half of the participants (54.6%) attended Vietnamese community events annually, with most of the remainder attending more frequently. Approximately half of the participants (57.3%) regularly visited Vietnam, and 16.4% intended to live in Vietnam in the future.

Importance of language maintenance. Participants' perceptions of the importance of six reasons for maintaining Vietnamese language are presented in Table 7. Results from one-way repeated measures ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences in participants' perceived importance in the six reasons. Reasons such as maintaining bonds with relatives and maintaining Vietnamese cultural identity were perceived as most important reasons for maintaining Vietnamese, followed by helping build friendships, having wider career options, improving academic study, and helping communicate in English in order of perceived importance, $F(3.37, 748.85) = 153.47, p < .001$.

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 Table 6.
Connection with Vietnamese culture (n = 271)

| | | <i>n</i> | % | Valid data |
|--|-------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| Vicinity to Vietnamese community | Yes | 104 | 42.8% | 243 |
| | No | 127 | 52.3% | |
| | Unsure | 12 | 5.0% | |
| Availability of community meeting place | Yes | 130 | 54.2% | 240 |
| | No | 82 | 34.2% | |
| | Unsure | 28 | 11.7% | |
| Attendance at community events | Weekly | 23 | 9.7% | 238 |
| | Fortnightly | 6 | 2.5% | |
| | Monthly | 57 | 23.9% | |
| | Yearly | 130 | 54.6% | |
| | Never | 22 | 9.2% | |
| Regularly visits Vietnam | Yes | 138 | 57.3% | 241 |
| | No | 103 | 42.7% | |
| Intention to live in Vietnam | Yes | 39 | 16.4% | 238 |
| | No | 105 | 44.1% | |
| | Unsure | 94 | 39.5% | |

 Table 7.
Perceptions of the importance of language maintenance (n = 271).

| | <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>Range</i> | Valid data |
|---|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Maintain bonds with relatives | 3.83 (1.03) | 1-5 | 239 |
| Maintain your Vietnamese cultural identity | 3.83 (1.01) | 1-5 | 237 |
| Help build friendships | 3.07 (1.20) | 1-5 | 238 |
| Improve your academic study (school, university) | 2.33 (1.22) | 1-5 | 231 |
| Help you communicate in English | 2.17 (1.25) | 1-5 | 232 |
| Have wider career options | 2.62 (1.30) | 1-5 | 232 |

Note. 1 = Not at all important, 2 = Somewhat important, 3 = Important, 4 = Very important, 5 = Extremely important

Language maintenance practices. Thirteen practices for maintaining home language arose from the content analysis of 367 responses to the open-ended question (see Table 8). The most frequent (34.1%) language maintenance practice was to talk and use Vietnamese in conversation. The next most frequent practices (more than 10%) were individual activities requiring access to Vietnamese resources: read Vietnamese, watch Vietnamese programs (videos and movies), and listen to Vietnamese radio or music. Less frequently reported language maintenance practices were: attending Vietnam-related events or visiting Vietnamese places (e.g., participating in Tết - the lunar new year festival, travelling to Vietnam), teaching Vietnamese to others, social media, technology, singing, and formal study. A few participants indicated that because they were already fluent they did not need to use any maintenance practices, and a few additional comments were classified under the heading of other.

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Table 8.

Language maintenance practices (n = 206)

| Theme | n | %^a | Examples |
|---|----------|----------------------|--|
| 1. Talking and using Vietnamese in conversation | 125 | 34.1% | <i>“I communicate in Vietnamese at home everyday with my families both in VN [Vietnam] and Australia”</i> <i>“Only speak Vietnamese at home”</i> |
| 2. Reading in Vietnamese | 80 | 21.8% | <i>“I still read Vietnamese online newspapers every day”</i> |
| 3. Watching Vietnamese programs | 52 | 14.2% | <i>“watch YouTube videos that are in Vietnamese”</i> <i>“watch Netflix with Vietnamese subtitles”</i> |
| 4. Listening to Vietnamese radio or music | 43 | 11.7% | <i>“listening to Vietnamese radio and music”</i> <i>“listen to music, SBS radio”</i> |
| 5. Attending Vietnamese places or events | 27 | 7.6% | <i>“participating in community activities. Although the community activities are limited, I always desire to participate”</i> <i>“participating traditional and cultural events”</i> <i>“travel to Vietnam as often as possible”</i> |
| 6. Teaching Vietnamese to others | 9 | 2.5% | <i>“teaching Vietnamese on Saturday every week”</i> <i>“teach my children Vietnamese (requires my research for materials, teaching methods and make me aware of making Vietnamese alive)”</i> |
| 7. Social media | 8 | 2.2% | <i>“write both English and Vietnamese statuses on my Facebook, but mainly Vietnamese”</i> <i>“chatting on Facebook”</i> |
| 8. Writing in Vietnamese | 8 | 2.2% | <i>“write in Vietnamese”</i> |
| 9. No maintenance practices – Already fluent | 5 | 1.4% | <i>“I came to Australia as an adult, so no problem for me to maintain Vietnamese, because I will never forget it”</i> <i>“I arrived to Australia when I was 28. My Vietnamese skills are excellent”</i> |
| 10. Technology | 2 | 0.5% | <i>“using Google Translate to learn words I don’t know”</i> |
| 11. Singing | 2 | 0.5% | <i>“sing Vietnamese songs”</i> |
| 12. Formal study | 1 | 0.3% | <i>“I took Vietnamese lessons for three years during uni[versity], and for a few weeks out of uni”</i> |
| 13. Other | 5 | 1.4% | <i>“I’ve been trying to speak it for years on and off from programs and copying my parents and grandparents. But I struggle a lot with the tones. I can fully understand it...just can't speak”</i> <i>“do whatever [I] can do”</i> |

^a Participants were able to provide more than one response, percentage reported is of the total responses.

Discussion

Successful communication is essential in modern society (Ruben, 2000). In a multilingual society, an individual's communicative competence is dependent on the level of language of proficiency, degree of language use, as well as home language maintenance practices and perceptions of the importance of home language maintenance. In the current study, 271 adults with Vietnamese heritage living in Australia provided insights into their communication in Vietnamese and English. The majority were first generation immigrants (76.6%), spoke Vietnamese as their first language (94.3%), and indicated Vietnamese was their most proficient language (78.5%). Participants were significantly more proficient in Vietnamese than in English. This finding is in keeping with existing research which suggests that more recent immigrants are more likely to maintain their home language (Veltman, 1983; Verdon et al., 2014). Participants were significantly more proficient in oral modes of communication (i.e., understanding and speaking) than written modes (i.e., reading and writing) in Vietnamese. In contrast, participants were significantly more proficient in receptive modes of communication in English (i.e., reading and understanding) than expressive modes (i.e., speaking and writing). These findings are likely reflective of the ways that participants learnt each language. That is, given the high proportion of first generation immigrants in the sample participants most likely learnt Vietnamese through immersion in oral language in their home environment, resulting in strong oral language proficiency; whereas, learners of English as a second language are more likely to learn from textbooks or coursework with less opportunity to practice language in conversational contexts (Blake, Verdon & McLeod, 2019; Munro & Derwing, 2015), resulting in stronger capabilities in receptive modalities than expressive modalities.

Vietnamese-Australian adults in the current study were more likely to use Vietnamese (than English) with their mother, father, older siblings, Vietnamese-speaking grandparents, relatives in Vietnam, and Vietnamese friends. However, they used both English and Vietnamese with their partners, children, younger siblings, and English-speaking grandparents. They used English and Vietnamese equally on social media, but were more likely to speak English when working, studying, and watching TV, which is unsurprising since English is the only official language of Australia. The most important reasons for maintaining Vietnamese were: maintaining bonds with relatives, and maintaining Vietnamese cultural identity. Language maintenance practices included conversing in Vietnamese and individual activities requiring access to Vietnamese books, magazines, news, movies, radio, and music.

Competent multilingual speakers have stronger community relationships, greater understanding of cultural values and practices, and act as cultural brokers between their home community and broader society (Cho, 2000). Multilingualism enhances social cohesion by strengthening cultural identity, which facilitates resilience, self-esteem and belonging (Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004). The participants indicated that familial and community networks were important for supporting multilingualism and home language maintenance, corroborating with previous research (Verdon, Wong, & McLeod, 2016). The availability of resources (e.g., books, movies) in the home language was also reported to facilitate home language maintenance. Time and financial support for the development and access to multilingual resources will nurture home language maintenance (McLeod, Verdon, Bowen, & International Expert Panel on Multilingual Children's Speech, 2013).

Supporting multilingualism has many benefits to society in an increasingly globalised world. Having competent speakers of both English and Vietnamese will be essential for engaging with Viet Nam as a global partner and strengthening participating nations' economies. The level of proficiency and use of Vietnamese in the current study bodes well for language maintenance amongst the participants and their families; however, the majority

were first generation migrants. This research can inform programs that support multilingualism amongst people with Vietnamese heritage living outside of Vietnam.

Practical implications

There are a number of practical implications of this research that can inform programs to support multilingual speakers run by TESOL teachers, SLPs, and others. For example, by understanding that Vietnamese-Australian adults are more proficient in oral rather than written Vietnamese, additional support can be provided to maintain written Vietnamese. In the current study, written Vietnamese was accessed via social media (rarely considered in previous research) and but less so when reading news (print or online), magazines, or books. The use of social media in Vietnamese language maintenance programs is recommended from the current study. Speaking and listening to Vietnamese was more likely to occur during interactions within families and was supported by Vietnamese community events and locations (restaurants, stores), again providing indications for language maintenance activities and foci. Finally, the questionnaire developed for this research may be used in future studies to consider other languages in similar contexts.

Theoretical implications

The current study provides support for the Theory of Language Policy (Spolsky, 2004, 2007) in that the inter-related components of language policy (practices, beliefs, and management) can be used to account for language choices of an individual and a speech community. It also contributes to the understanding of home language maintenance, providing insights into the linguistic profiles of Vietnamese speakers abroad and their motivations for maintaining Vietnamese. The study may also be a platform for future research to contrast different immigrant speech communities.

Limitations

This research draws on data from a self-report questionnaire. As such, the data reflect the participants' perceptions. Objective analyses of the participants' language proficiency, use, and maintenance would enhance the findings (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997). Every effort was made to obtain data from a wide cross-section of people with Vietnamese heritage living in Australia by providing the questionnaire in English and Vietnamese, online and in paper form, and distributed using a wide range of strategies. While the data were obtained from participants in every state and all but one territory of Australia, the sample was skewed towards first generation immigrants born in Vietnam who were females with higher education levels, and whose first language was Vietnamese. Future research should more specifically target second and third generation immigrants.

Conclusion

Home language maintenance is important at an individual and societal level. In the current study, most participants with Vietnamese heritage living in Australia were proficient in Vietnamese and English, with a higher level of proficiency in understanding and speaking Vietnamese than English. Both Vietnamese and English were used with different people, in different places and across different media. Language maintenance practices relied on connections between family and community, as well as the availability of Vietnamese resources.

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