



# The Role of Language in Preserving Culture in Migrant Communities

Ms. Juveena<sup>1</sup> & Dr. Pavan Kumar Malreddy<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Scholar, Institute of English and American Studies, University of Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany

<sup>2</sup>Professor of Anglophone, Literatures and Cultures, Institute of English and American Studies  
University of Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany



Open Access

Manuscript ID:  
BUJ-SPL6-MAR26-MD-125

Subject: English

Received : 09.02.2026  
Accepted : 10.02.2026  
Published : 31.03.2026

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si6.26.Mar125

Copy Right:



This work is licensed under  
a Creative Commons Attribution-  
ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## Abstract

Humans and birds both migrate, though for different reasons. For people, it's more than just crossing borders; it means moving through new cultures and languages too. Language matters a lot here. It helps people hold onto their cultural identity and stay connected, especially when they're far from home. Most research looks at language policy or how people shift to speaking another language, but it rarely digs into the everyday habits that keep culture alive. Even when studies admit that language and culture go hand in hand, they don't always show what that looks like in real life. This paper flips the focus. It looks at how language actually keeps culture going in migrant communities, right in the middle of family life, community gatherings, and daily chats. Things like grandparents telling old stories, parents teaching kids their mother tongue, or using heritage languages out in public, these all matter. The study pushes past the idea that language is just about talking or making it through migration. It sees language as a living part of culture, a way to keep traditions breathing. But it's not easy. There are real challenges: younger generations sometimes stop speaking their parents' language, there's often stigma around minority languages, and people feel pressure to blend in with the majority. Instead of calling language loss a simple problem, this paper sees preserving language as an ongoing, active process. It's shaped by real people and real situations, not just by rules or policies. By looking at language as the thread that ties generations together, the paper adds something new to conversations on migration and cultural survival. It shows why paying attention to language really matters if we want to keep cultures alive in a world where people are always on the move.

**Keywords:** Migration Studies, Heritage Languages, Cultural Memory, Literary and Cultural Lens, Family, Community Groups, Preserve

## Research Gap

Even with all the research out there in sociolinguistics and migration studies, we still don't really know how language keeps culture alive in migrant communities. Sure, plenty of studies have shown that language, identity, values, and traditions are all tightly connected for people who've moved to new places (Akintayo et al., 2024; Al-khresheh, 2025; Tran, 2022). But most of this work looks at

language through a pretty narrow lens usually focusing on policies, identity issues, or demographics. There's a lot of talk about problems like language shift, pressure to fit in, or how younger generations lose touch with their heritage.

Researchers have looked at how first-generation migrants hold onto their heritage languages and how parents try to pass these languages down (Al-khresheh, 2025; Tran, 2022). Still, there's not much



out there that really digs into the day-to-day stuff like how families talk at home, how people tell stories, keep up traditions, or just interact within their communities and how all this actually helps keep culture going. People keep saying that language carries culture, but they rarely get into the details of how regular, everyday language use holds cultural memory together, especially for migrants.

Another thing: most of the research sticks to Western countries. That leaves a lot of migrant experiences out of the picture, so we're missing how language preservation really works in all sorts of different places. If we want to fill these gaps, we need to look at language as more than just an identity marker or something at risk of disappearing. It's an active tool—a real resource, that helps migrant communities hang on to and share their cultural knowledge, generation after generation.

This paper takes a closer look at how language helps keep culture alive in migrant communities. Instead of treating language as just a problem to solve or a statistic to track, I'm interested in how it shapes the everyday lives of people who've moved far from home.

These days, migration shapes so much of our world. People cross borders, settle in new places, and suddenly have to figure out where they fit in. It's not just about learning a new language or picking up new habits, it's about holding on to pieces of who you are, even when everything around you feels different. Here, language matters a lot. It's not just a tool for talking; it's packed with memories, traditions, and the stories families pass down. Think about it: language carries the taste of home, the words for food your grandma makes, nicknames for relatives, songs, jokes, stuff that doesn't always make sense outside your own community or in a language like English. Some words just don't translate. And when families stop using their heritage language at home or in the neighborhood, these little details start to fade away. Losing the language doesn't just mean people can't speak it anymore, it chips away at shared memories, makes it harder for kids to learn about where they come from, and slowly erases old ways of doing things.

There's already a ton of research connecting language, identity, and belonging, especially in the fields of migration and sociolinguistics. But most of it looks at policies, statistics, or how languages die out over time. Not enough folks talk about the small, daily ways people actually keep their culture going: chatting at the dinner table, telling old stories, using inside jokes, or gathering for community events. These are the real lifelines for cultural memory, and they matter just as much, maybe more, than any law or census ever could. This paper takes a different angle on language. Instead of treating it just as a badge of identity or a sign of loss, it looks at language as something living, something that helps South Asian migrant communities hold onto their culture and pass it down. Using a literary and cultural lens, I focus on how the way people talk, day in and day out, keeps traditions, values, and unique ideas alive, even as they're surrounded by a dominant culture that might wash those things out.

First, I dig into how language works inside migrant households, as a way of remembering, of keeping the past close and real. Then, I look at how simple, everyday conversations help everyone in the community stay connected to shared traditions and knowledge. The main point? Language isn't just a symbol of where people come from. It's an active force that keeps culture going, shaping it and carrying it forward. Everyday language shapes how migrant communities keep their culture alive from one generation to the next. Take South Asian families living abroad, for example. When they hold on to their heritage languages, they're not just hanging onto words, they're passing down values, identity, and traditions during ordinary chats at home or in their neighborhoods. Language isn't just a badge you wear to show where you come from. It's more like a living thread, tying people together even when they're scattered across different countries and years. By speaking their native languages, these families hold onto ways of thinking and living that can easily get lost when they move somewhere new and face pressure to blend in.

The family, honestly, sits at the heart of all this. Researchers have seen again and again that parents'



beliefs about language, the rules they set at home, and their daily habits really shape whether kids keep speaking the heritage language. Parents become the main bridge, choosing to speak their language at home so their children don't lose touch with their roots. Studies looking at Chinese, Turkish, and Gagauz families, among others, show that parents juggle a lot, global influences, school requirements, and the push to learn the local language. They end up making all kinds of choices, from when and how to use their language at home to how much they involve their kids in cultural traditions. All of this helps keep their language—and their culture, going strong. Using a heritage language at home does more than just keep people talking, it keeps culture alive in all the little ways that matter. Everyday words, the way people joke, talk about family, or even describe food, carry layers of meaning you just can't translate into English or any other big global language. Think about the words for family relationships, the phrases people use at religious events, or the names of traditional dishes. These aren't just words, they're memories and traditions packed into language, things that don't survive when you swap them out for something else.

When families tell stories, chat at dinner, or take part in ceremonies, they're not just passing time, they're handing down these bits of culture, almost without thinking about it. Kids learn what matters, what's funny, what's sacred, and how to behave, just by being part of it all. This is how younger generations of migrants end up with a real sense of who they are and where they come from. It helps them feel connected to their roots, even if they're growing up far from where their parents or grandparents did. Language isn't just a symbol of culture, it's something people live and feel. For migrants, keeping their heritage language alive builds a stronger sense of community and identity, especially when the world around them pushes them to blend in. Take South Asian or Bangladeshi families, for example. Parents don't just teach the language, they pass on values, beliefs, and a sense of belonging. In places like India, language has always been at the heart of how people see themselves and

their communities. Even after moving across the world, when families keep speaking their heritage language, they keep these connections strong, even if home is now somewhere else. Family language policies show how families don't just pass down culture automatically, they actually work at it, right at home. Parents set rules, like only speaking their native language around the dinner table, signing kids up for classes in that language, or making sure they join in religious and cultural ceremonies. Across all sorts of migrant communities, you see parents pushing back against the idea that their kids need to fully blend in. They want their children to know more than just the local language. For a lot of families, keeping the heritage language alive is about more than words. It's about making sure kids stay close to grandparents, hold onto their roots, and don't lose touch with where they come from. These choices aren't just habits, they're intentional. People do this work to keep their culture alive, even when everything around them is shifting.

But it's not easy. Heritage languages have to survive in places where the mainstream language takes over schools, media, and pretty much every job. That leaves fewer chances for kids to use their family's language outside the house. Over time, especially with the second generation, it's common to see the old language fade as kids get pulled into the dominant culture and start to form their own mix of identities. Research into different immigrant communities shows the outcome depends on a lot of language, social circles, money, and how much pressure there is to fit in. Even when countries say they support language diversity, the reality is people still need to get by in the languages that open doors. So families end up trying to balance holding on to their heritage with fitting in, and it's a constant push-and-pull.

Heritage language really matters when it comes to keeping second-generation migrants from feeling split between worlds. Studies show that sticking with your ancestral language helps you build a steadier sense of self and lets you move more easily between your family's culture and the one you live in now. When kids stop speaking the language, they often



lose touch with old traditions and start to feel disconnected from their roots. So, keeping the language alive isn't just about hanging onto culture, it actually helps people feel stronger and more at home in new places. It's not just families doing this work. Community groups, language schools, and religious centers all pitch in, making space for people to use and hear their heritage language together. Local radio shows, group chats, even social media, they all keep the language going, no matter how far people move. People get creative, using messaging apps and blending scripts so they can talk every day, even if they're spread across the globe. Tech doesn't have to replace the old language, it can help keep it alive.

Really, heritage language preservation isn't just one thing. It's a mix of what individuals do, what families teach, how communities organize, and what's happening in the wider world. Keeping the language isn't about rejecting the new culture. It's more about finding a way to belong in both places, holding onto old traditions while building something new. Language carries stories, values, and history, it's how communities pass these down, shaping memory and identity. Through everyday conversations and shared routines, migrants keep their cultures real and relevant, not just something remembered from the past.

### **Conclusion**

This paper looks at how everyday language keeps cultural ties alive in South Asian migrant communities. It's not just about language as a badge or a label language actually keeps culture running. When people move, they face a lot: new places, pressure to fit in, the risk of losing touch with their roots. In all that, heritage language becomes the lifeline. It's how families pass down values, stories, and memories, making sure traditions stick around even as everything else changes. Instead of focusing on official institutions or government policies, this study pays attention to what happens in daily life at home, around the dinner table, during family gatherings. That's where culture really survives. The way parents talk to their kids, the words they use, the

stories they tell, and the rituals they carry out aren't just habits; they're acts of cultural preservation. Even when kids grow up surrounded by a different, often dominant language, these small, everyday moments help them stay connected to where they come from. Language becomes a bridge, linking past and present, helping families hold onto their identity in a world that keeps pulling them in new directions.

Still, keeping a heritage language alive isn't easy. Schools, jobs, and the global pull of English all chip away at it, especially for kids born or raised in new countries. When people lose their language, it's not just words that disappear, it's memories, a sense of belonging, family ties. The paper argues that holding onto a heritage language isn't just about communication; it's about keeping a community emotionally and culturally whole. The study also pushes back against the idea that language maintenance is simply resisting change. Migrant families aren't just clinging to the past, they're adapting, mixing languages, and finding new ways to belong in more than one world. Community groups, social media, and connections across countries help keep cultural practices alive and let people reinvent what

those practices mean. It's not as simple as either "assimilate" or "preserve" real life is messier, and more creative. By focusing on how people actually use language day to day, this paper shifts the conversation. Language isn't just something you lose or something governments need to protect. It's a living practice that shapes identity and helps people find their place in new worlds. There's still a lot to explore different countries, generations, online communities all change how this plays out. But if we really pay attention to what happens in everyday conversations, we get a much richer sense of how migrant communities keep their cultures alive, adapt them, and share them with the next generation.



## References

1. Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. *Multilingual Matters*.
2. Fishman, J. A. (1991). Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages. *Multilingual Matters*.
3. Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and reality*. Harvard University Press.
4. Hornberger, N. H., & Wang, S. C. (2008). Who are our heritage language learners? Identity and biliteracy in heritage language education. *Heritage Language Journal*, 6(2), 3–35.
5. King, K. A., Fogle, L., & Logan-Terry, A. (2008). Family language policy. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(5), 907–922. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2008.00076.x>
6. Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). *Multilingual Matters*.
7. Pavlenko, A. (2004). ‘Stop doing that, ia komu skazala!’: Language choice and emotions in parent–child communication. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25(2–3), 179–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630408666528>
8. Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Extra, G., & Yağmur, K. (2004). Urban multilingualism in Europe: Immigrant minority languages at home and school. *Multilingual Matters*.
10. Guardado, M. (2002). Loss and maintenance of first language skills: Case studies of Hispanic families in Canada. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58(3), 341–363. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.58.3.341>