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Hungarian Heritage Speakers in the Greater Cleveland Area

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Hungarian Heritage Speakers in the Greater Cleveland Area

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the language speakers whose first language has been degraded by continuous exposure to a new, dominant language. The specific goal is to ascertain the cultural elements of the Cleveland Hungarian community and how this culture impacts language ability of the heritage Hungarian speakers. We reveal language preservation processes and the effect of living in a country with a different dominant language, in this case English, on the minority heritage language. We constructed a survey of cultural and linguistic items that include the participants' connection to the community, how they use and practice Hungarian, and linguistic items relating to pronunciation, word order, null subjects, and 'focus' which are all areas especially prone to English influence. We conducted interviews with members of the Cleveland Hungarian community that range from original immigrants to third generation speakers. Our findings revealed that the vibrant heritage culture relating to the Hungarian language, history and traditions, practiced through such outlets as the long-standing scouts program, has allowed the Hungarian language to be preserved after several generations in the United States. Our study also revealed that English has influenced the heritage Hungarian in all categories tested.