



# Does the language spoken at home matter for the education, wellbeing, and sense of belonging of the children of immigrants?

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# Outline

- Current research project
- Why might continuing to speak the language of parental origin be beneficial for children of immigrants – and why might it not be?
- Current study: research questions, data and methods
- Main results
- Possible policy links
- Conclusions



# Current research project

- Children of immigrants, language and integration across Europe – Can speaking the origin language at home improve integration?
- Research examines language use over the life course and how this is linked with a variety of integration outcomes
- Policy implications: how can we support immigrant parents in their language choices to improve the wellbeing of their children?

# Segmented assimilation (e.g., Portes & Rumbau 2001): three patterns

- Consonant acculturation: parents and children learn 'American ways' at a similar speed – and integrate into the (white) middle class
- Dissonant acculturation: children learn at a significantly higher rate and face the discriminatory and oppositional culture of American inner cities without parental support
- Selective acculturation: preservation of the culture/values of the co-ethnic community and tight solidarity, combined with rapid economic (educational) advancement

# Berry's model of acculturation (e.g., 1997)

		Cultural adaptation (relationship with broader society)	
		Low	High
Maintenance of heritage culture	High	Separation	Integration
	Low	Marginalisation	Assimilation



# Differences between contexts: bright and blurred boundaries (Alba, 2005)

- Boundaries between groups have an effect on possibilities for assimilation
  - Blurred boundaries aid the assimilation of individuals
  - Bright ones keep groups separate
- Boundary construction is dependent on both receiving society context and the characteristics of the immigrant groups
  - Blurring may occur when the mainstream culture and identity are relatively porous
  - Boundaries can be constructed along lines of citizenship, religion, language or race/phenotype



# Research questions

- Are patterns of language use at home (with parents) associated with the educational attainment and wellbeing of children of immigrants?
- Do the results differ across countries?
- *Do the results differ according to how language use is measured?*



# Current study: data and methods (1)

- PISA 2018 results from the 15 year-old children of immigrants across OECD countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland
  - Only countries where we can identify the countries of origin and languages spoken by children of immigrants (and large enough case numbers)
- Distinguish three groups among children of immigrants
  - those who mainly speak the L1 at home with both parents (“keep”)
  - those who speak a mixture of L1 and L2 with their parents (“mix”)
  - those who mainly (or only) speak the L2 at home with their parents (“switch”)



# Data and methods (2)

- Dependent variables
  - Reading scores
  - Educational expectations
  - Sense of belonging to school
  - Subjective wellbeing (positive affect)
  - Additional analyses with maths and science scores, eudaimonia, resilience
- Methods
  - Linear regression models that take into account the data structure, incl. plausible values for reading scores and stratified sampling



# Data and methods (3)

- Control variables
  - Gender
  - Grade (in comparison to modal grade)
  - Age at arrival for first generation students
  - Parental SES (index of economic, social and cultural status)
  - In models not shown here: generation and mixed heritage parents – in models shown here 2.5 generation as its own category but results omitted

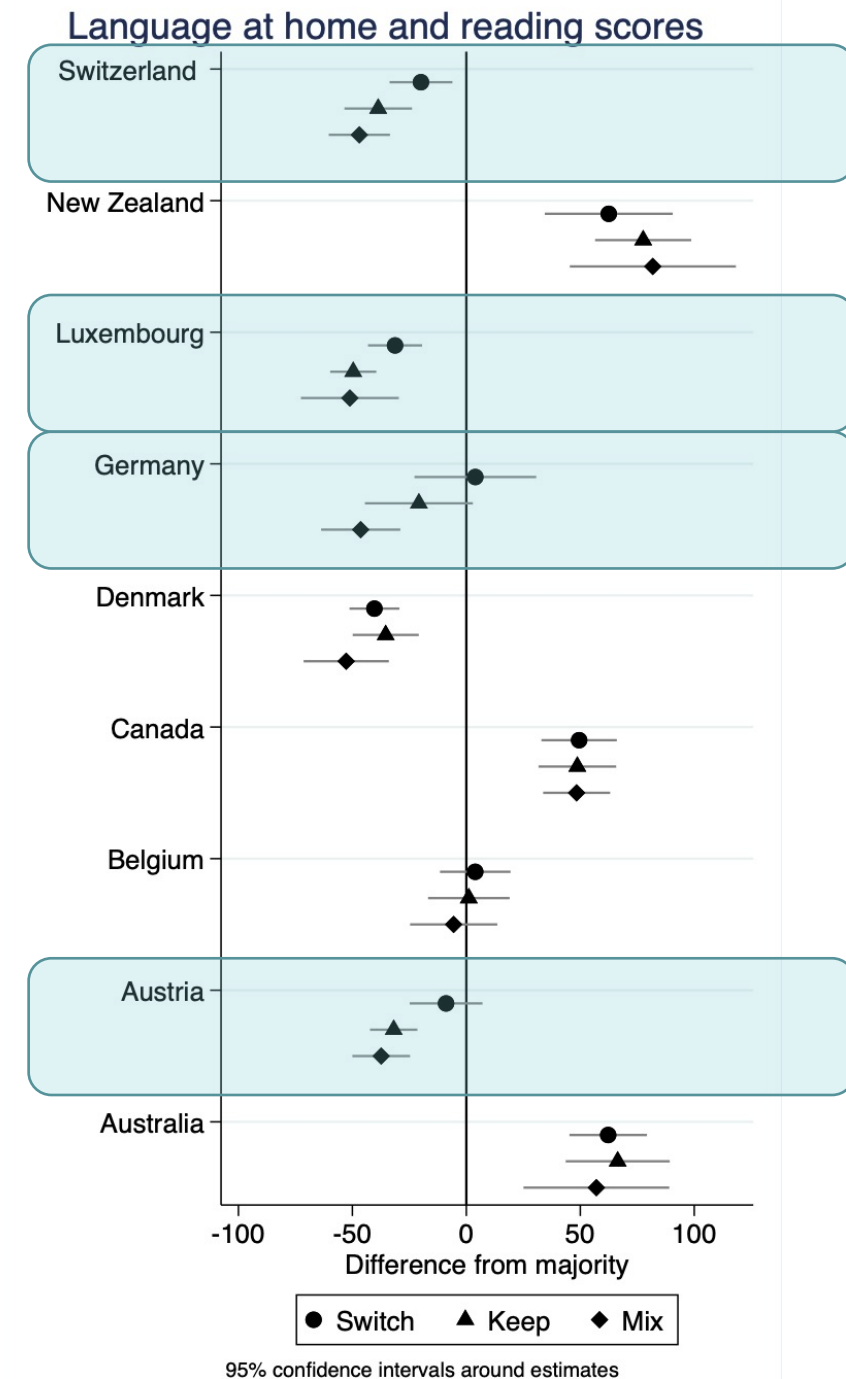


# Results

1. No systematic association between language spoken at home and educational expectations or positive affect
2. For reading scores, mix of no association and switching languages being beneficial
3. For sense of belonging to school, no association in most countries, but switching beneficial in a few countries

# Reading scores

- Mainly speaking the language of parental origin (or mixing languages) associated with lower reading scores than switching to a national language in Austria, Luxembourg, and Switzerland
- The difference is similar in size in Finland, Germany and Greece, but not statistically significant
- No association between language use and reading scores in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, and New Zealand



Country	Score	Country	Score
 Sweden	93	 Denmark	45
 Finland	88	 Ireland	45
 Canada	86	 Iceland	45
 USA	83	 Lithuania	43
 Australia	79	 Spain	43
 New Zealand	76	 Italy	43
 Belgium	74	 Serbia	43
 Korea	72	 Romania	41
 Norway	71	 Malta	40
 Portugal	69	 Cyprus	40
 Estonia	69	 United Kingdom	40
 Luxembourg	64	 France	36
 Czechia	60	 Greece	36
 Netherlands	57	 Japan	33
 Germany	55	 Poland	33
 Turkey	52	 Slovenia	33
 Austria	52	 Croatia	33
 Switzerland	48	 Israel	31

# Relating the results to policy contexts



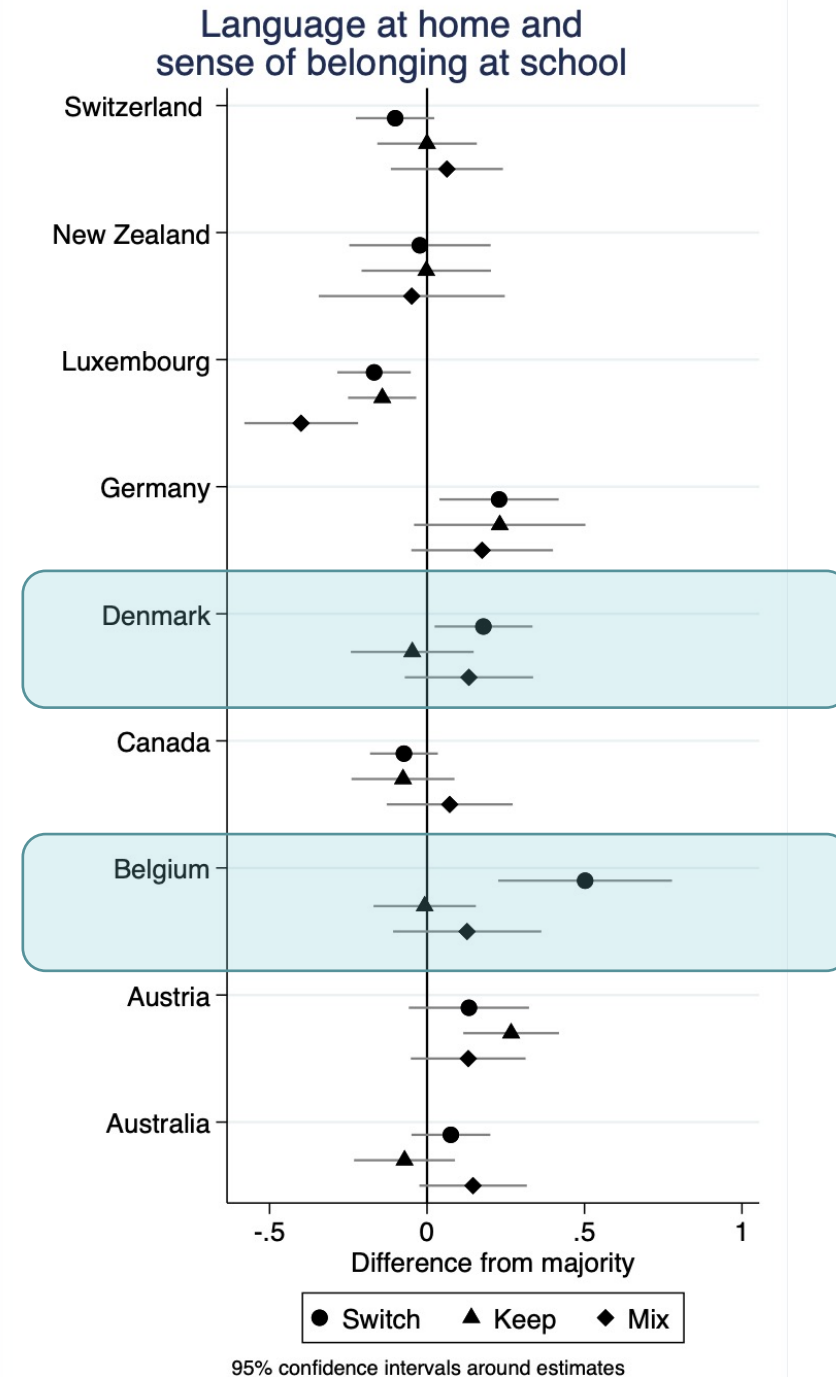
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MIPEX education policy indicators

# Sense of belonging

- Switching to a national language associated with a higher sense of belonging in Belgium and Finland
- A similar pattern can be seen in Denmark but the difference is not statistically significant

Is the way in which national languages are mainly kept separated from one another in Belgium and Finland reflected in how new languages are perceived and tolerated at schools?





# Conclusions (1)

- The more classical (Anglophone) countries of immigration provide contexts where speaking different languages does not constitute a major barrier for incorporation, in contrast to the newer (European) countries of immigration
- In these contexts, families who choose (and are able) to switch to the language of the destination country seem to provide their children with better opportunities
- We cannot say whether the associations are causal



# Conclusions (2)

- The challenge in many countries seems to be the gap in learning outcomes between students who maintain their languages of origin and those who switch to using the language of instruction at home
  - Different orientations towards first languages and whether they are seen as a resource or a barrier for learning within schools?
  - Also to note that it is the students who mix languages at home who have the lowest reading scores in a number of countries
- Policies and practices that appreciate cultural and linguistic diversity should not only be set at the national level, they should also be negotiated by school staff and students to promote belonging and participation in the school community



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**Thank you!**

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