

Language maintenance among German and Italian immigrants in Brazil and Argentina

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This presentation compares the language maintenance (Pauwels 2016; Riehl 2014) of Italian- and German-speaking immigrant in Argentina and Brazil. While the first group assimilated more quickly in both countries (Born 1998; Pertile 2009; Fontanella de Weinberg 1978), the German-speaking immigrant have partially preserved their native varieties to this day (Altenhofen/Morello 2018; Savedra/Rosenberg 2019; Hipperdinger 2005; Ladilova 2013). In order to identify possible reasons for the differences in language maintenance, the similarities and differences between the two immigrant groups will be compared based on their sociolinguistic characteristics (Fontanella de Weinberg 1978) as well as to the sociopolitical conditions of the respective countries of settlement (Born 1992). The connection between language maintenance and language policies becomes particularly evident in the current coofficialization of German and Italian varieties in Brazil and in the interest in the heritage languages in Brazil and Argentina (Ladilova/Müller 2021; Ladilova 2015; Oliveira 2018). Also, classes in minority languages (especially of the German varieties) are becoming more and more frequent, and in some parts of Brazil, they are even included into school curricula (Foerste et al. 2019). In Argentina, the teaching of German is sometimes part of other cultural activities such as folk-dance classes (Ladilova 2013).

Although there are studies on immigrant languages in Brazil and Argentina, a comparative analysis of the Germanic and the Romance immigrant languages and between the two neighboring countries is still missing. We will discuss data collected during the field studies of the authors in Argentina and Brazil, including questionnaires, interviews and linguistic landscapes pictures as well as the central results of other prominent individual studies on immigrant languages in Brazil and Argentina. We will show how linguistic and extralinguistic factors and also language policies can be possible cornerstones for explaining the differences in language maintenance, which become particularly clear given the differences between German and Italian immigrants as well as between the sociopolitical contexts of Brazil and Argentina. While language policies, teaching of immigrant languages, structural similarity to the majority language as well as language attitudes are evidently central for language maintenance, there are also other factors that play a role. One of them is the presence of the immigrant languages in different areas of daily life, such as literature or linguistic landscapes. The written use of the immigrant languages in the public sphere and in prestigious domains such as literary texts can give these languages more visibility and value, and thus improve their status and contribute to their preservation (Müller 2022; Müller/Radünz/Streb submitted).

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