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Heritage Language and Culture: The Cleveland Slovenian Experience

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Heritage Language and Culture: The Cleveland Slovenian Experience

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

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Abstract

Slovenians have played an important role in the history of Cleveland. From their origins being centered around St. Clair Avenue to their more dispersed state today, Cleveland is home to the largest population of Slovenians outside of Slovenia itself. Our study sought to explore the differences and similarities between native and heritage Slovenians. For data collection we used the picture word recognition test, sentence acceptability judgements test, and the cultural questionnaire. We designed these tests to study the Slovenian Clevelander community and shed on the understudied subjects of “heritage linguistics” and “language attrition”. Heritage speakers, or speakers that learned a language from family and outside of the country that it is spoken, are a unique group of people who have traits of both first and second language ability levels. Language attrition is a phenomena in which a language is definitively a first language but one begins to commit errors which they would not if they had stayed in an environment of only their own native language. These phenomena are fascinating and our data reflects the effects American English language and culture have caused on the language and culture of Cleveland Slovenians, previously unknown in the field of Linguistics.