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“Multilingual adolescents in two distinct language environments: Effects of exposure, utility, language policy, identity and attitudes”

This presentation reports on monolingual, bilingual and trilingual adolescents in two distinct linguistic environments, Iceland and Montreal, Quebec, Canada. In Iceland, the number of L2 speakers has risen from almost none to 10-15% of the population within the span of two decades. Available studies have documented that a large proportion of young immigrants do not master Icelandic to age or grade level, suggesting that changes need to be made to the language learning context. Particularities of this context include the low economic value of the Icelandic language on a global scale, the increased visibility and use of English in various linguistic spaces within the country, and an unclear language policy. In Quebec, the official language is French, but within the city of Montreal, both English and French are spoken by people of all ages, and both have majority status. However, schooling is obligatorily in French and strict policies of French protection are enforced. This presentation will report on two parallel studies conducted in these two environments. In Iceland, L1 and L2 speakers of Icelandic were tested in Icelandic, English, and the home language skills of the L2 speakers were measured through self and parent report. In Montreal, skills were assessed in French and English. In both contexts, attitudes towards the languages were assessed through questionnaires and interviews. Comparisons between findings the two contexts will made in an attempt to better understand ways contextual variables that support language learning or make it relatively more difficult.