

The elderly identities of bilingual Dutch-Australians

The concentration of large-scale Dutch migration to Australia in the fifties, and the group's strong language shift to English mean that the Dutch-speaking community in Australia is now an aging one. A number of retirement villages have been established around Australia to address some of the community's needs. Drawing on qualitative life narratives with residents from two retirement villages, this paper focuses on what it means to be an elderly bilingual and bicultural Dutch-Australian. How do age identities intersect with the bilingual, bicultural, and in some cases religious, identities of elderly Dutch-Australians? How are these multiple identities discursively constructed and what role do the Dutch and English languages play in their construction?

Residents of the retirement villages have to negotiate their identities in relation to the 'model' or 'invisible' migrant image, acquired because of the community's strong language shift to English. However, for the residents of a Dutch-specific village, this image is somewhat negated by the overtly ethnic character of the village. And while a village established by the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (with origins in Dutch Calvinism), stresses its Australian and Christian identity, the high concentration of Dutch-born residents gives it a Dutch tinge. Discourse analysis of the interviews facilitates an understanding of how elderly Dutch-Australians resolve these apparent anomalies and negotiate their own sense of their respective collective and individual multiple identities.

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