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Migration, Multiculturalism and Language Maintenance in Australia

Polish Migration to Melbourne
in the 1980s



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This work analyses the changes made to the Australian immigration policies between 1901 and 2005 and their effect upon migration movements in Australia, particularly on Polish migrants. The study also focuses on the introduction of multiculturalism and the relationship between this policy and language maintenance among first generation Polish migrants and their children (the second generation, aged 15–24 at the time of the research). Within this framework the major topics include:

- successive waves of migration (particularly after WWII) and their influence on multicultural Australia
- policies introduced by Australian governments and their impact on multiculturalism
- the initial settlement pattern of Polish migrants in Melbourne during the 1980s and their life experiences
- the degree to which the policy of multiculturalism has influenced language maintenance, especially among first generation Polish migrants arriving in Melbourne during the 1980s and their children born in Poland or Australia (second generation)
- the extent of Polish language maintenance by first generation Polish migrants arriving in Melbourne during the 1980s and the second generation (children born in Poland or Australia), considering endogamous and exogamous marriages.

The work consists of three parts. The first two are historical and theoretical and derived from existing research, while the third part is based on my empirical research conducted in Melbourne in 2004–2005 with first gen-

1 VOMA, [<http://www.voma.vic.gov.au>], accessed September 2005.

eration Polish migrants from the 1980s and their children of endogamous and exogamous parentage, aged 15–24. The latter part constitutes the main focus of this study.

The first part analyses migration movements to Australia, from early European colonisation until the present day, with a special emphasis on the post-WWII migration program which introduced large scale immigration to Australia. This part starts with a short history of the Aborigines who, with Torres Strait Islanders, are the Indigenous people of Australia and thus not migrants. It also takes into consideration five major ethnic groups in Australia (British, Southern European, German, Vietnamese and Chinese) in terms of their experiences during the assimilation and integration periods. The general impact of migrants on Australian society is also discussed and analysed.

The second part examines policies relating to migrants in Australia, starting with the White Australia Policy, followed by assimilation, integration and multicultural policies up to the present day. The impact of the multicultural policy will be examined closely not only because it is current, but because it enables migrants to maintain their own language and other cultural features. Attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism will also be analysed.

The third part (based on empirical research) is divided into three major sections:

1. language maintenance theories and factors influencing language maintenance
2. Polish migration to Australia: phases and motives for migration in years 1947–1955, 1956–1966, 1980–1989; as well as demographic and socio-economic characteristics of migrants, derived from the 2001 census
3. an empirical study of migration and language maintenance among first generation Polish migrants (1980–1989) and the second generation of endogamous and exogamous parentage in Melbourne. This part consists of an analysis of the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors for migration from Poland to Australia, particularly for Melbournian migrants. It includes an examination of the costs of migration; Polish migrants’ experiences of Australia’s multicultural policy; an evaluation of parents’ migration by their children; re-migration to Poland; and the interaction between Polish migrants and Australian-born people.

A significant portion of the empirical part focuses on the maintenance of the Polish language among first generation Polish migrants from the 1980s and their second generation children from endogamous and exogamous marriages. It considers the influence of domains such as the home, institutions of learning, the Polish Catholic Church, the media and other organisations and spheres of Polish cultural activity. As language maintenance influences the experience of identity, this section will also examine the identity of first generation Polish migrants and their children participating in the study. The last chapter of this section considers Australian federal and Victorian state government policies and the effect of these upon Polish migrants. It also examines support provided by the Polish government. The chapter includes an analysis of Polish migrants' opinions of multiculturalism in Australia and the support of Victorian and Polish governments for the Polish community – as evidence of multiculturalism policy working in practice.