



## Maintaining the Standard Ukrainian Language: A Challenge for Teachers in Australia

Halyna Koscharsky

Macquarie University

NSW 2109, Sydney, Australia

Tel: 437-143-576 E-mail: [halyna.koscharsky@humn.mq.edu.au](mailto:halyna.koscharsky@humn.mq.edu.au)

Geoffrey Hull

University of Western Sydney

Locked bag 1797, Sth Penrith DC, NSW 1797, Sydney, Australia

Tel: 438-235-061 E-mail: [auriga5@optusnet.com.au](mailto:auriga5@optusnet.com.au)

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### Abstract

The paper deals with problems of preservation of the Ukrainian language in Australia, based on the 25-year experience of one of the authors, in teaching Ukrainian studies at Macquarie University in Sydney. Against a background of growing assimilation and the dying away of Multiculturalism as a government policy, the authors examine the structure and history of the Ukrainian community in order to explain the characteristics of dialect-influenced spoken Ukrainian, and set up categories for the other main phenomena of linguistic interference in the areas of phonology and morphosyntax.

As a parallel concern, they consider a problem with special relevance in the Ukrainian homeland today, at a time when the direction of language planning is an important issue: the gap between modern standard Ukrainian and the different varieties of Ukrainian found in the diaspora.

**Keywords:** Language preservation, Ukrainian in Australia, Linguistic interference, Dialectal Ukrainian

### 1. External Factors

#### *1.1 Ukrainian in Post-Multicultural Australia*

The preservation of the Ukrainian language in Australia and other countries of the diaspora is unfortunately a little-researched subject. In general, questions of linguistic ecology and multiculturalism, while of increasing concern to Australian scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, have ceased to be of great interest to them in this century because of a widespread feeling within the English-speaking population that certain ethnic groups who had recently settled in Australia had not fully accepted this country's values. These groups have been growing in numbers at a rapid pace, their cultures stand in sharp and conspicuous contrast to that of ordinary Australians, and they show little or no inclination to assimilate to the majority of the population. As a result the multicultural era can be considered to be over, and with it

the preparedness of the government to support and finance strongly the means of preserving ethnic languages. Among the victims of this change in attitude have been ethnic schools, radio programs and even grants for research in this area.

Meanwhile assimilation has taken its toll on the 37,500-strong Ukrainian population of Australia. (Note 1) In community schools, secondary schools and institutes of higher learning the number of students who enroll in Ukrainian-specific subjects has significantly fallen in the past 15 years. At the same time the number of migrants from Ukraine has increased by seven and a half thousand. Of these, a small percentage has joined the local Ukrainian community. However, when these new arrivals encounter local Ukrainian youth at scout camps for young people organized by the Plast and SUM movements or at social functions or the Ukrainian Saturday schools, they notice differences in the way Ukrainian Australians speak the Ukrainian language, even to the extent that members of the two groups can have considerable difficulty understanding each other. Before we look at the kind of language used by Ukrainians in Australia, it will be useful to present a brief historical overview of Ukrainian settlement in this country, and especially the provenance of the people who arrived here in 1948 and 1949, because it was their varieties of Ukrainian that set the linguistic habits of the following generations.

### *1.2 Origins of the Australian Ukrainian Community*

Professor Eugene Seneta, in the English-language paper "Ukrainians in the 1986 Census", which he delivered in Sydney in 1988 at the fourth conference on the History of Ukrainian Settlement in Australia, observed that "the proportion of Orthodox in the Catholic-Orthodox group is 40.5%" (Seneta, 1988; 82). In that year, when Australia was celebrating its bicentenary, Professor Lubomyr Lawriwsky wrote the following about the Ukrainian community in his article for the monumental work *The Australian People*: "In contrast to the situation in Ukraine, about two-thirds of the Ukrainian migrants [to Australia] were Catholics. It had been easier for them to escape to the West because they were geographically closer in Western Ukraine, and it was harder to repatriate them forcibly after the war [to the expanded Soviet Ukraine] because they had been pre-war citizens of Poland" (Lawriwsky, 1988;826). The general figure for Australian residents of Ukrainian origin (i.e. from both pre-war Soviet Ukraine and pre-war Eastern Poland) was 32,000 according to Seneta's detailed calculations based on census responses.

By contrast, over the past 20 years when greater numbers of people from the Soviet Union migrated to Australia, the proportion of Orthodox has slowly increased. According to the 2006 census, about 45.5% per cent of that section of the Australian population who designated their religion as 'Ukrainian Christian' declared themselves Orthodox, and the remainder, predominantly from the single region of Galicia, identified themselves as Ukrainian Catholics. (Note 2) Given the important fact that migrants from formerly Polish Volhynia and Western Polissia are generally Orthodox, not Catholic, in faith, one can therefore conclude that the larger half of the Ukrainian population of Australia is solidly Western Ukrainian in origin. This is obviously mirrored in the speech habits of these people and their children.

## **2. Ukrainian Abroad**

### *2.1 The linguistic character of the Ukrainian Diaspora community*

We mention this proportion because the regional differences in the language of the young (and not so young) Australian Ukrainians who have enrolled in Ukrainian courses at Macquarie University over the past 25 years strongly reflected their parents' places of origin as well as their level of Ukrainian and their English education. It often happens that a highly educated person with a good profession comes from a family in which standard Ukrainian is not spoken, but rather a regional variety. It is easy to imagine the feelings of such individuals when they are called upon to express their thoughts at meetings of the Ukrainian community. Fear of appearing foolish increasingly inhibits their speaking of Ukrainian in public and drives them to express themselves in English instead.

From the sociolinguistic and cultural standpoints this inferiority complex on the part of dialect speakers is unfortunate, because all regional varieties of a language are valid and valuable systems of communication, and standard varieties are, after all, arbitrary conventions. In European countries like Germany and Italy there is a strong tradition of cherishing dialects, many which indeed have their own literatures, sometimes boasting distinguished poets and writers, and this is seen to enrich rather than detract from the national cultural heritage. Ukraine, by contrast, suffers from a degree of linguistic insecurity, given the great effort made to create a literary standard and to assert its right to exist. In such a situation dialects are easily undervalued and stigmatized, though one hopes that as standard Ukrainian gains greater

stability, linguistic confidence of an inclusive kind will increase, and due respect for regional varieties of the language will be restored.

At the 1998 conference, Archpriest Ivan Szewciw remarked that the first Ukrainian settlers in Australia “were common people, formerly members of the peasantry and even then from the poorest socio-economic bracket, with a small percentage of members of the intelligentsia (that is, people with a university education: 1-2%) or petit bourgeois, small business owners and traders from our villages and little towns who, during the war, had willingly or unwillingly found themselves in Germany for compulsory labour or who had fled before the Bolshevik advance after the retreat of the German army from Ukraine” (Szewciw, 1990;72). According to Fr Szewciw the membership of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Australia in 1988 was estimated to be about 23,000. While this figure for Catholics is much higher than the one given in the 1986 census, it is based on the number of faithful registered in Ukrainian Catholic parishes in Australia. This extra data is worth taking into account in order to get a clearer view of the provenance and regional characteristics of the language spoken by the second and third generations.

## 2.2 Teaching Ukrainian in the Diaspora

In spite of the preponderance of people from Western Ukraine, Ukrainian schools and language publications in Australia have adhered to the standard literary language which had been brought from Europe and have avoided dialectal forms. Hence the challenge for teachers has always been not only to teach standard Ukrainian to the young but also to correct the regionalisms in the speech of those who have grown up hearing and using a regional variant. It suffices to read an English-language article by Dr Olga Dudinski, entitled “Ukrainian Schools in Victoria: Perspectives, Needs and Planning” to see that the struggle to preserve the hereditary language, in the face of the everyday and official pressures of English, is a longstanding phenomenon (Dudinski, 1988;24).

The Ukrainian school system was established in the 1950s, not long after the arrival in Australia of the most numerous wave of Ukrainian immigrants. However, she reports on a student survey conducted between 1987 and 1988, which revealed that although they viewed the maintenance of their identity as an important or very important task, the majority of young Ukrainian Australians were using English in their relations with their parents, siblings and Ukrainian friends. Only with their grandparents did they speak their hereditary language, of course for the reason that the older generation had a poor command of English. The situation has obviously worsened since these students have grown up and become parents themselves. An analogous situation exists in the other Ukrainian diasporas, although the number of migrants in Canada and the United States is evidently greater.

## 3. Internal Variation

### 3.1 Dialect as a pedagogical challenge

Scholars have for a long time been researching the regional differences within the Ukrainian language. One of the most significant products of this discipline is surely the three-volume *Atlas of the Ukrainian Language* edited by I. H. Matvijas (1984-1992). This work follows the generally-accepted division of Ukrainian into three principal groups of dialects: the northern, the south-eastern and the south-western, all subdivided further into numerous local subdialects. The group most relevant to our interest is the south-western, because a majority of Australian Ukrainians are from Galicia, Volhynia and Bukovina, and because the south-western dialects also happen to be those that diverge most from the standard language. The speech of immigrants from the eastern and northern regions is distinctive but, apart from Russian influence, typically diverges far less from Standard Ukrainian (based as this is on a south-eastern dialect) than do the dialects of the south-west, which were additionally influenced by Polish and (in Bukovina) by Romanian in the period when migration to Australia began.

It is worth mentioning that the questions and problems relating to the preservation of ethnic languages are now being analysed within the framework of a research project at the Language and Society Centre at Monash University. Researchers have been monitoring the loss of the family languages over three generations of the Italian migrant community in the locality of Myrtleford, in the Victorian High Country north-east of Melbourne. The aim of the researchers is to make a quantitative and qualitative comparison between the Italian community and other ethnic groups who live outside the big cities. For this project they will use data from the last census in order to draw a map illustrating the multilingualism that exists in the small towns of Victoria. (Note 3)

As for Ukrainian, generally speaking two kinds of problem are encountered by teachers of the standard language in this country: the student's home dialect and pressures from English. As educators and researchers, we have attempted to identify those elements in the structure of standard Ukrainian which are most susceptible to these two erosive influences and to find the best way to remedy them. These are predominantly problems of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and syntax since we have found that Australian Ukrainian students almost without exception quickly learn to read and write the Cyrillic alphabet. In our previous research project (Hull & Koscharsky, 2006) we concentrated on the lexical differences between eastern and western varieties of Ukrainian. In our current research we are endeavoring to set up categories for the other main phenomena of linguistic interference in the areas of phonology and morphosyntax.

### 3.2 *Characteristics of dialect-influenced spoken Ukrainian*

Some typical examples of the structural divergences from the standard include the following. These are taken from the Linguistic Atlas; one of our objectives is to assess the occurrence of the same or similar dialectalisms in the vernacular varieties of south-western Ukrainian used in Australia.

#### 3.2.1 Vocalism

In the vowel system there is the tendency to substitute both tonic and atonic vowels:

вечери (standard вечори) 'evenings', вогень, огень (вогонь) 'fire', багато леду (багато льоду) 'a lot of ice', залізо (залізо) 'iron', дри́ва́ (дрова) 'firewood', брива́ (бровá) 'eyebrow', слеза (сльоза) 'tear', пір'є (пір'я) 'feathers', зазу́ля (зозу́ля) 'cuckoo', відро (відро) 'bucket', цьвох, цьвих (цвях) 'nail', життє́ (життя) 'life', щесть, щість (щастя) 'happiness' or 'good luck', іконо́міка (економіка) 'economics', глі́бокий, глобокий (глибокий) 'deep', і́дєн, є́дєн (один) 'one', дев'і́ть (дев'ять) 'nine', шестий (шостий) 'sixth', сперше (спершу) 'at first'.

#### 3.2.2 Consonantism

Phonemic substitutions and additions also affect consonantism:

рі́мний (рі́вний) 'even, level', да́мно (да́вно) 'long ago', м'ясо́ (м'ясо) 'meat', па́мня́ть (па́м'ять) 'memory', на́дгоро́да (на́горо́да) 'reward', та́чалка (ка́чалка) 'rolling pin', го́йданка (го́йда́лка) 'swing', по́зивати (по́зіхати) 'to yawn'; ки́рниця (кри́ниця) 'well, spring' (here, a typical case of metathesis).

Apart from the above random examples, there are phonetic divergences from literary Ukrainian following a more regular pattern, such as

Ф- instead of кв, х(в)-, in imitation of Polish, a characteristic of uneducated speech:

фа́соля (квасо́ля) 'beans', фа́лити (хва́лити) 'to praise', фу́тро (ху́тро) 'fur', фі́ст (хві́ст) 'tail', фи́ля (хви́ля) 'wave'.

Use of the sound/letter *r*, corresponding to Polish norms in words in which *г* was substituted in Soviet Ukrainian; this feature tends still to be normal in the educated pronunciation of many diaspora Ukrainians, as a measure of overcompensation for its long absence in Ukraine :

га́з (га́з) 'gas', гі́пс (гі́пс) 'plaster', гві́нт (гві́нт) 'screw', аге́нт (аге́нт) 'agent', ене́ргія́ (ене́ргія́) 'energy', Бе́льгія́ (Бе́льгія́) 'Belgium', А́нґлія́ (А́нґлія́) 'England', а́нґлі́йський (а́нґлі́йський) 'English'.

Alternations in sibilant and assibilant consonants often characterize Western Ukrainian, cf. цкло́ (шкло́) 'glass', скі́ра, ско́ра (шкі́ра, шу́кура) 'skin' or 'hide', ку́куруза́ (ку́куру́дза) 'maize', дзе́лений (зеле́ний) 'green', дзе́рно (зе́рно) 'grain'.

In the extreme western Galician dialects bordering on Polish one finds a spontaneous unvoicing of final voiced consonants, as in Polish (and also Russian): го́род 'garden' > го́рот, бе́з 'without' > бес, му́ж 'male; husband' > муш, що́б 'so that' > щоп.

Widespread in the western dialects is the addition of initial *в-* to words beginning in a back vowel, and conversely the opposite phenomenon, e.g. во́гірок (о́гірок) 'cucumber', во́зеро (о́зеро) 'lake', во́вес (о́вес) 'oats', во́сінь (о́сінь) 'autumn'; у́зький (ву́зький) 'narrow'. A related phenomenon is the dropping, or replacement by *в-*, of words beginning in *го-*, e.g. о́робець, во́робець (го́робець) 'sparrow'.

Very typical of Galician pronunciation is advanced palatalization (again, often on the model of Polish phonology) not usual in standard Ukrainian, e.g. *сь* > *ш*: *сьогодні* > *шогодні* 'today', *сім* > *шім* 'seven'; *свя* > *сьв*: *святий* > *сьватий* 'holy'; *в'я* > *вля*: *здоров'я* > *здоровля* 'health'.

Conversely the absence of palatalization normal in standard Ukrainian can be a Galician feature, cf. *хлопец* (хлопець) 'boy', *мелник* (мельник) 'miller', *пам'ят* (пам'ять) 'memory'; *ходить* (ходить) 'he/she goes', *будут* (будуть) 'they will be'; *сине* (синє) 'blue', *теперішнє* (теперішнє) 'present, current', *господнє* (господнє) 'of the Lord'.

The cardinal numerals 11-19 have a range of phonetic variants in the Western dialects: *одинасцять* 'eleven', may be pronounced: *одинайцять*, *одинадсіть*, *одинадцеть*, or *одинансіть*. Standard *двісті* 'two hundred' often occurs as *двіста*.

### 3.2.3 General Polish influences in word formation

As examples of sporadic phonetic changes and phonemic substitutions caused by the Polish superstratum in this region one can cite:

*злото* = *P. zloto* (золото) 'gold', *япко* = *jabko* (яблуко) 'apple', *бласк* = *blask* (блиск) 'lightning', *дюр(к)а* = *dziur(k)a* (дір(к)а) 'hole', *пчолá* = *pszczola* (бджола) 'bee', *вуль* = *ul* (вулик) 'beehive', *цьотка* = *ciotka* (тітка) 'aunt', *тєсля* = *cieśla* (тєсляр) 'carpenter', *дєнтист(а)* = *dentysta* (дантист) 'dentist', *Андрей* = *Andrzej* (Андрій) 'Andrew', *Ева* = *Ewa* (Єва) 'Eve', *лижка* = *łyżka* (ложка) 'spoon', *трүмна* = *trumna* (труна) 'coffin', *бубен* = *bęben* (бубон) 'drum', *пєц* = *piec* (піч) 'oven', *копєрта* = *koperta* (конверт) 'envelope', (i)гłá = *igła* (голка) 'needle', *шампон(ь)* = *szampon* (шампунь) 'shampoo', *пчта* = *poczta* (пошта) 'mail', *богатий* = *bogaty* (багатий) 'rich', *хорий* = *chory* (хворий) 'sick', *горячий* = *gorący* (гарячий) 'hot'.

The placement of stress particularly distinguishes these dialects, and students whose parents come from Western Ukraine will regularly pronounce words which are oxytones or proparoxytones in the standard language as paroxytones, in the Polish manner: *зокрєма* (зокремá) 'specifically', *зоря* (зоря́) 'star', *блòха* (блòхá) 'flea', *парубок* (парубок) 'bachelor', *доляри* (доляри́) 'dollars'. Less commonly the opposite occurs, cf. *воротá* (воротá) 'gate'.

This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the first person singular of many verbs: *я говорю́* 'I speak' > *я говорю́*, *я скажу́* 'I will say' > *я скажу́*, *я пробу́ю* 'I try' > *я пробу́ю*, *я люблю́* 'I love; I like' > *я люблю́*. However, this Galician trait does not generally affect adjectives stressed on the last syllable like *мали́й* 'small', *сма́чний* 'tasty', *стра́шний* 'terrible'.

### 3.2.4 Morphosyntactic features

One grammatical difference between the Ukrainian of the diaspora and that of the home country is the distinctive genitive singular ending of feminine nouns ending in a consonant, that is, *-и* instead of *-і*, e.g. *радо́сти* = *радос́ті* 'of joy', *со́ли* = *солі́* 'of salt', *во́гкості* = *вогкості́* 'of wetness'. In these cases the standard language accepts both variants, as do teachers of Ukrainian abroad.

By contrast, numerous other morphological variants typical of Western Ukrainian are not accepted in the standard, even in the polonized literary language of the diaspora. Such non-standard forms, which teachers need to correct, include:

*мо́його*, *тво́його* (мого́, твого́) 'of my' 'of your', *брато́ви* (брато́ві) 'to the brother', *до́шом* (до́шем) 'by the rain', *серцо́м* (серце́м) 'with the heart', *со́леу* (сі́ллю) 'with salt', *не́у* (не́ю) 'with her', *зі́ мноу* (зо́ мною) 'with me', *лю́дий* (лю́дей) 'of people', *гро́ший* (гро́шей) 'of money', *на ко́ньох* (на ко́нях) 'on horses', *у землі* (у землі́) 'in the earth'.

It is noteworthy that students whose parents come from Western Ukraine do not often use the vocative case (a feature also typical of colloquial Polish). The same students characteristically simplify the feminine singular locative ending *ій* to *і*, e.g. *о перші́* (о перші́й) 'at one o'clock', *о шості́* (о шості́й) 'at six o'clock'. Related to this appears to be the substitution of the genitive form *ї́* for the dative feminine form *ї́й* in the third person singular pronoun *вона́* 'she'. Dialectal influence is also responsible for frequent errors in the pronunciation of unstressed vowels, e.g. *в ліка́рну* (в ліка́рню) 'to hospital', *пречена́* (причина́) 'cause', *добри́* (добре́) 'well' or 'good'.

Dialectal speech habits affect morphosyntactic sequences and idioms to the extent that students who already speak a variety of Ukrainian fluently have to be taught which are standard/literary and which are non-standard/colloquial.

Typical examples are наші гості (наші гості) 'our guests', дві руці (дві руки) 'two hands', дві жінці (дві жінки) 'two women', ся жінка (ця жінка) 'this woman', тамта жінка (та жінка) 'that woman', він ся/сі миє (він миється) 'he washes himself', вона сі бавить (собі бавиться) 'she amuses herself', ти дась, ти їсь (даси, їси) 'you give; you eat' (sg.), ми ходілисмо (ми ходили) 'we went', ходьме (ходімо, ходім) 'let's go', буду брав (буду брати) 'I'll be taking', я дав бим, ти даш бис(ь) (я дав би, ти дав би) 'I would give; you would give'; називаюся Іван (мене звуть/звати Іван) 'my name is Ivan', and so forth.

### 3.2.5 Impact of the English superstratum

Naturally all Australian-born students of Ukrainian are constantly tempted to translate literally from English when they speak and write their ancestral language. Hence teachers have to contend with such expressions as зранку суботу (зранку в суботу) 'Saturday morning' and більшість австралійці (більшість австралійців) 'most Australians'. Many of these linguistic interferences occur in a regular fashion, for example the tendency to include incorrectly the preposition 'з' in instrumental constructions such as Я пишу з олівцем 'I write with a pencil', Я їм з ложкою 'I eat with a spoon'; the periphrastic expression of the dative: мені > до мене 'to me', собі > до себе 'to you', своїй мамі > до своєї мамі 'to his mother'; and the incorrect use of the accusative instead of the genitive case in negative sentences, e.g. Я не маю цибулю (цибулі), плащ (плаща), гроші (грошей) 'I don't have an onion/a coat/money'.

## 4. Conclusions

Having highlighted some of the main obstacles to the teaching of standard Ukrainian in Australia, it seems appropriate to end this paper by considering a problem with special relevance in the Ukrainian homeland today, at a time when the direction of language planning is an important issue. The gap between modern standard Ukrainian and the different varieties of Ukrainian found in the diaspora is not simply a pedagogical question of dialect and/or anglicism versus 'correct' language.

The reality that most writers of Ukrainian abroad and overseas Ukrainian organizations have remained attached to the polonized variety of literary Ukrainian established in Galicia before 1944 means that the teachers of Ukrainian in the diaspora have to contend with two often conflicting models as they strive to teach a standard form of the language to speakers of dialectal and/or anglicized Ukrainian. In the meantime Literary Western Ukrainian has become largely obsolete in its home territories of Galicia and Volhynia, replaced by the standard variety from Kyiv after these regions were incorporated into Soviet Ukraine during the Second World War. Of this literary medium Jurko Proxas'ko (2008;22) recently wrote that "There is no longer a Galician Ukrainian language. [...] What is left of it? Several hundred words (it would appear, but perhaps I exaggerate), several dozen characteristic traces, a few aspects of syntax, and a few dozen other particulars apart from accent and intonation, features too obvious to mention."

This may be the perception in Ukraine today, but the reality abroad is that Western Literary Ukrainian remains as vital as ever. Indeed the longstanding preponderance of Western Ukrainians in the diaspora has created a situation in which, overseas at least, the old Galician standard cannot simply be dismissed as a minority or peripheral phenomenon or as an anachronism. On the contrary, after the former Polish Ukraine was annexed by the Soviets, the high profile of Western Literary Ukrainian in the diaspora was strengthened by its close association with anti-Soviet and anti-Russian movements and its being the medium of a vibrant literature.

The independence of Ukraine has set in motion the process of dissolving this enforced division. Yet although the two standards have been coming together to some extent since 1991, both in Ukraine and abroad, the synthesis is still far from complete. If diaspora Ukrainians remain reluctant to be converted to what many of them dislike as 'russified Ukrainian', Ukrainians at home need to come to terms with the 'polonized' linguistic tradition of a diaspora which has made an important contribution to Ukrainian literature for over a century.

It is our view that this incomplete synthesis, far from being a weakness of Ukrainian today, rather offers a unique opportunity for its development in the post-Soviet era. Since it has been the historical fate of Ukraine to be wedged between two powerful neighbours, the Polish and Russian languages have inevitably played formative roles in the evolution of the Ukrainian language, and the proportions and depth of their respective influences is a question of the highest importance.

It has long been the genius of Ukrainian to bow at times—even for long periods—to these influences without sacrificing the essence of its distinct identity. During the long period of Soviet domination of the country the pendulum swung in the direction of Russian. Perhaps in the interest of restoring what is in essence a delicate balance, the time has come for the pendulum to swing westwards again. If this were to happen in the context of a carefully planned strategy of language planners, the Galician literary language which still flourishes in the diaspora could provide domestic Ukrainian with a template of Western European and international vocabulary transmitted through Polish, as an antidote to the recent overdose of Russian influence. In this sense the contribution of diaspora Ukrainianists and writers can be useful, providing new perspectives and concrete models for a language justly determined to assert itself in a new climate of freedom.

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### Notes

Note 1. This figure includes other ethnic groups, members of which were born in Ukraine and also the descendents of those who settled in Australia and regard themselves as Ukrainians.

Note 2. [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) accessed 24/5/2008.

Note 3. The Foundation Director for the Centre, Emeritus Professor Michael Clyne, is one of the most eminent Australian scholars in this field.