

## Assimilation through the language: Situational method and English classes for “new Australians”

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### Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century Australia implemented a unique immigration program to attract European citizens leaving their countries during and after the Second World War. At the time, Australia required extensive population growth to foster the economic expansion of the nation while European countries struggled to restart their devastated economies. The program for the relocation of migrants developed by the Australian government assisted numerous people to start a new life in Australia. One of the main principles, if not the main principle, of the program implemented by the Australian government was complete assimilation of migrants in their new country. According to the Australian perspective, the first step in the assimilation process was the acquisition of the English language and knowledge of the Australian culture. In order to achieve full assimilation of migrants, the Australian government implemented the Adult Migrant English Program to support migrants in the process of learning the English language. Migrants who wanted to relocate to Australia had to attend language classes. The aim of this paper is to investigate the structure of the program implemented by the Australian government in order to comprehend the approach adopted by Australia and the role of language in the assimilation process. Moreover, this paper will investigate the so called Situational Method used in the English classes to teach the language to migrants and the results achieved by the program.

Keywords: Australia, European migration, assimilation, adult migration, English language program

### Introduction

During and after the Second World War, Australia became the favoured destination for many European citizens who had to leave their home countries due to political, economic and social turmoil. At that time, Europe was a devastated continent and people wanted to escape from the atrocity of the war, hoping for better future in a new country. Australia, on the other hand, was a young country with many resources and a very small population. The shortage of manpower and the necessity of the country to build a strong economy to compete at an international level were the two drivers that fostered the implementation of the immigrant program to facilitate the arrival of European migrants. From 1947 to 1971 Australia implemented a unique immigration program with the aim of relocating European migrants to Australia. The program was designed to support the assimilation of the “new Australians” in the culture and way of life of their new home country. This paper investigates the approach adopted by the Australian government to support the assimilation process of migrants through the teaching of the English language. The Australian government invested a large amount of resources in the language program. It was believed that learning the English language had to be the first and most important

step to start the assimilation process. The aim of this paper is to understand the structure of the language program and the theoretical approach used to design the Adult Migrant English Program. Moreover, the research analyses the outcomes of the program and the importance of the English language in migrants’ lives.

### Migration to Australia after the Second World War

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Australian approach towards migrants was guided by the White Australia Policy implemented in 1901. The country adopted a restrictive approach favouring the relocation of people coming from British source countries. Mid-century changing economic and labour market requirements led to a reconsideration and ultimately abandonment of the existing policy by Australian governments (Markus 2001, p. 15).

In the 1940s, the Australian government of the day decided to raise the profile of the country at an international level in order to become an economic power in the international context. While geographically large, the country had a very small population and, for this reason, was not able to support economic growth based on the domestic resources. In 1945, the population of the country was around seven million (Zubrzycki 1994, p.1). In order to stimulate and support industrial growth, the policy “Populate or Perish” was established in 1945. This policy was designed with the aim to increase the work force by allowing migrants from countries of non-English language to settle in Australia.

The Minister of Immigration at that time, Arthur Calwell, widely supported the policy and was committed to promote the new approach in the interest of the nation. In his famous speech delivered in 1947, Calwell highlighted how Australia needed to open its borders to welcome new people for the development of the country and for the wellbeing of future generations (Zubrzycki 1994, p.1). As a consequence of the “Populate or Perish” policy, Australia accepted the settlement of so called “Displaced Persons” thanks to bilateral agreements between Australia and Eastern European countries. The Federal Department of Immigration organised an immigration package to assist 170,000 displaced persons (De Lazzari, Mascitelli 2016, p. 192). Migrants that joined the program had to guarantee two years’ work in Australia as part of the bilateral agreement (NAA 2015). With the immigration package, Australian government hoped for migrants to settle permanently in the new country and for this reason, citizenship was granted to the newcomers after a short period of residency in Australia. The “Displaced Persons” program was Australia’s first

attempt to support the growth of the population. The program was followed by other bilateral agreements signed by Australia and other European nations to facilitate the relocation of European migrants.

The initial plan of the Ministry of Immigration in 1945 was to absorb 70,000 migrants per year. Despite the openness demonstrated toward migrants other than Britons, the immigration program still favoured mostly British migrants with subsidized fares, free and assisted passages for British former servicemen and their families. The Immigration Department aimed for a ratio of ten new British migrants for every other migrant (Wilton, Bosworth 1984, p. 11). Despite the new approach adopted by the Immigration Department to welcome migrants coming from any part of the Europe, the Australian government wanted to make sure that the English culture remained the dominant cultural identity of the country. Despite the incentive given to Britons, though, the program was not successful as less than 30,000 Britons relocated to Australia per year (Appleyard 2001, p. 62).

In 1946, the Australian government also signed an agreement with the IRO (International Refugee Organisation) to support the settlement of 12,000 displaced European migrants coming from concentration camps (Markus 1984, p. 15). Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians and Ukrainians arrived in Australia thanks to the Displaced Persons program from 1947 to 1953 (Jupp 1966, p. 7).

Realising that the plan to favour the relocation of British people had failed, the Ministry of Immigration was forced to reconsider the plan to populate the country. In 1947, when the Australian government recognised that the approach adopted by the government to preserve the “racial purity” of the country was not achievable and counterproductive, Arthur Calwell explained the new position the Australian government was about to adopt to increase the population thus: «I see no reason why people possessing all the characteristics of Australians except the native English language tongue should be barred from adding their contribution to the bloodstream of a new nation» (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2011).

Consequently, in the same year, the Australian government opened the assisted program to more European countries signing bilateral agreements with Italy and Holland in 1951 and Austria, Belgium, West Germany, Greece and Spain in 1952 (Jordens 2001, p. 67). From 1950s to 1960s thousands of European migrants departed from Europe to relocate to Australia through the assisted passage agreements. As for the Displaced Persons program, migrants had to guarantee two years of work and the jobs were appointed by

the Australian government (Kunz 1988, in Jupp 2002, p. 12). While the Displaced Persons program ended in 1951 with 169,199 people relocating to Australia, the Populate or Perish policy lasted until 1971. By 1971 Australia had welcomed 3,467,844 migrants (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2011). This number includes migrants from the United Kingdom, Malta, Austria, the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Italy and displaced persons.

### Assimilation through language

Despite the new approach adopted by the Australian government to allow non-Britons to permanently relocate to Australia, the country did not want to jeopardise the British cultural and institutional identity of the country (Markus 2001, p. 15). For this reason, Australia aimed for a full assimilation of migrants, wishing for migrants to abandon their cultural background to become “new Australians”. Assimilation was the approach adopted by Australian institutions and migrants were forced to engage with Australian culture and traditions. The goal of the Australian government was to forge a single culture for the country. As stated by the Minister of the Immigration Bill Sneddon in 1967: «I am quite determined we should have a monoculture, with everyone living in the same way, understanding each other, and sharing the same aspirations. We don't want pluralism» (Romaine 1999, p.4).

Despite the steps forward made since the White Australia Policy, the Australian approach did not show any openness towards migrants' cultures. Instead, Australia aimed for a full assimilation of migrants in order to achieve a monoculture, strongly rejecting the idea of a multicultural society. According to the program, assimilation of migrants had to start with language. Since the vast majority of migrants were coming from non-English speaking countries, it was a priority for the government to start the process of assimilation by teaching the newcomers the language of the country. In order to become Australians, migrants had to start constructing a new identity, and the English language was considered the starting point. Indeed, language represents a symbol of identity and not only a communication medium (Clyne 1991, 3-4). However, only learning the language was not considered sufficient, migrants also had to master Australian customs, national history and civic affairs (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2011). This process was defined by the Australian government as “Naturalisation”. Through the “Naturalisation” process, the newcomers were encouraged to abandon their traditions, native cultures and languages to embrace the new customs

and language of their new country. Despite the outcomes of the program, which will be discussed later in the paper, the migration program implemented by Australia remains one of the most far-reaching program ever implemented worldwide to support the assimilation process of foreigners.

### Adult Migrant English Program

Learning the English language was considered by Australian institutions the most crucial step for the assimilation of migrants. For this reason, the Australian government implemented the Adult Migrant English Program. This program was designed to guide migrants in their assimilation journey. The program was implemented in 1948 and was structured as four different levels: before leaving their country of origin, on the ships during their trip to Australia, in Reception and Training Centres and after placement in Australia (Martin 1998, p. 108).

During these four points in time migrants had to learn the English language but also Australian traditions and customs to become “good Australian citizens”. The “Australianisation” process included learning typical Australian songs, reading Australian poetry and learning about Australian history and traditions (De Lazzari, Mascitelli 2016, p. 104). Despite the clear goal formulated by the Australian government in its unique and ambitious plan, the implementation of the Adult Migrant English Program was more difficult than expected with lots of resources invested by the Department of Immigration (Galbally 1978, p. 15). Even though the Immigration Department had a clear idea on how to implement the program, the four segments were not implemented following the order listed above. Due to lack of resources and difficulties in the implementation of the program, the government decided to focus firstly on the steps of the program that could be implemented in Australia before starting the further steps abroad.

### English classes in the Reception and Training Centres and Holding Centres

The Adult Migrant English Program started in the Reception and Training Centres in 1947. These centres were former military camps located in remote Australian locations. These camps became welcoming centres for migrants and displaced persons coming from Europe. Bonegilla, a country location between Sydney and Melbourne, was the most famous centre that welcomed the largest number of migrants between 1947 and 1971, the year in which the centre closed. As Calwell stated in 1952: «Camp accommodation [...] had to be arranged and staff engaged to manage the

camps, to teach the newcomers our language, to arrange their trade and occupational classifications and secure employment for them, generally to take the first important steps toward a happy assimilation of our new fellow citizens into Australian community» (Calwell 1952, p. 10).

Migrants were located in camps to learn the English language and Australian traditions while the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) was looking for jobs. While the recruitment system was quick in the first few years, the employment services started to experience difficulties with the increasing number of arrivals (Sgro' 2000, p. 26). In theory, migrants were supposed to stay in Reception and Training Centres up to six weeks but the shortage of jobs left many migrants in the centres for many months.

In the Reception and Training Centres, English classes were held for a month, four hours per day. Language classes were divided into four different units that included: language instruction, application of the language, reading and word games, the Australian culture and visual education (De Lazzari, Mascitelli 2016, p. 195). The Immigration Department provided text books “English for Newcomers”. The first edition of the book was printed in 1948 and by 1952 the Department had distributed 42,000 copies (Martin 1998, p. 72). Despite the support of the book, teachers and instructors did not receive any guidelines for the implementation of the plan by the Government and, for this reason, teaching in the centres became a challenging task for many teachers. Moreover, migrants were coming from different cultural and linguistic background creating communication problems in class.

While Reception and Training Centres were created mostly for male migrants, in 1949 the government decided to open “Holding centres” for women. In Holding centres, women attended English classes while their children were in school. The language classes were designed to meet women’s needs. For instance, in class women were learning English while learning to cook traditional Australian meals. Moreover, in light of the fast learning skills of their children, women were encouraged to study the language. The recurrent “mantra” at that time was: “Learn English, or in four months you won’t be able to understand your children” (Carrington 1997, p. 72).

### “English on the way”: English classes on the voyage to Australia

Another segment of the Adult English Migrant Program was implemented in 1948 when English language classes started to be held on board during the voyage to Australia. Due to a breach of the agreement

with the IRO (International Refugee Organisation), the program stopped for four years (1951-1955) and started again in 1956 thanks to a new agreement signed by the Commonwealth and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM).

In 1956 the Australian government took full responsibility for the organisation of language classes on the ships. The Department of Education was involved in the preparation of materials to be used to support the learning. Materials included the book "English on the way" and kits for teachers that they could use during the 40-day voyage. Teachers, also called State Education Officers (SEOs), were appointed by the State Education Departments to make two trips on a tour.

English classes on the ships did not only focus on the English grammar. Migrants had to read short stories and watch films and documentaries to learn about Australian history and culture. This part of the Adult Migrant English Program ended with the arrival of the last ship from Europe in 1977 (Martin 1998, pp. 74-76). Assessment of the value and quality of the shipboard language instruction has been divided: According to Carrington (1997, p. 106), materials and the structure of the classes were not appropriate for the learning of basic English for migrants. According to others, starting the learning of the language on the ships motivated migrants to continue studying English after their arrival in Australia (Martin 1998, p. 74)

### Pre-Embarkation and continuation classes

In 1949 the last two segments of the Adult Migrant English Program were implemented: the pre-embarkation classes and the continuation classes for migrants after they had left the Reception and Training centres.

The pre-embarkation classes had the aim of supporting migrants in the learning of the English language before starting their journey to Australia. The first pre-embarkation camps were implemented in Italy but a year later similar camps commenced in Germany and Greece. Area instructors and Education Officers were appointed and sent by the Australian government to run camps in European countries. More than 5,000 students attended pre-embarkation camps from June to September 1950 (Carrington 1997, p. 72). Since 1967 pre-departure language classes in Italy were held in person for those who lived in cities, and via correspondence for those who lived non-metropolitan areas. Despite the success of the pre-embarkation classes with a great number of migrants involved, the program was described as disorganised due to a lack of teachers in sending countries (De Lazzari, Mascitelli 2016, p. 197). Even so, pre-em-

barkation language training continued for many years with more instruction centres opened in the many European countries.

In 1949, the Australian government also implemented language classes for migrants who had left the Reception and Training centres. The aim of these classes was to offer language classes for migrants while they were settling into their new life. In one year, more than 800 classes were run. These classes were held in the evening in State Education Department buildings and teachers involved used to work in primary and secondary schools (Martin 1998, p. 80). By 1952, more than 1,254 classes were run in all Australia major cities (Martin 1998, p. 80). In order to reach as much of the migrant spread across Australia, the Australian government also decided to implement English language classes by correspondence. These lessons were designed to help migrants with their written and colloquial language skills. Tutors were hired by the Australian governments, such as former teachers, to support the correspondence lessons and to do the marking of the exercises that migrants were sending back. By December 1953, more than 5,500 migrants had enrolled in the program (Carrington 1997, p. 128).

### Radio Lessons and other Programs

Since the beginning of the Adult Migrant English Program in 1947, the Australian government invested an increasing number of resources to facilitate the development of new methods to reach as many migrants as possible. Due to the geography of Australia and the spread of new Australians across the entire country, the government decided to also use radio broadcasts to support migrant acquisition of the English language. The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) was involved in the project, offering morning slots on Saturday and Sunday to broadcast English language courses (Office of Education 1949). Migrants could listen to the radio lessons from their homes. The Department of Education had also produced booklets called "For New Australians" that were sent to people's houses so migrants could follow lessons with the support of the booklet. These lessons were focused on pronunciation, grammar and listening skills. The first cycle of radio lessons concluded in 1950 but the government decided to broadcast the course again due to numerous new arrivals. In the following years, other radio programs and, later, TV programs were broadcasted, like "Making Friends" to support the acquisition of the language skills required for the assimilation of migrants.

But government wasn't the only agency to run classes supporting the acquisition of language skill by mi-

grants. In the 1950s private companies implemented language courses to support their new workers. General Motors Holden, for instance, started to run English language classes for their employees in Victoria. Ten years later, in 1960, Victoria Government Railways started its own language classes. Moreover, religious and non-governmental institution started their language program such as the Greek Church, the Spanish Club and the YMCA (Carrington 1997, p. 128).

### Teaching English to migrants: the theoretical approach

The Australian government had to face many challenges in the implementation of the Adult Migrant English Program. As above mentioned, the government did not have sufficient resources to welcome the large number of migrants coming from Europe. Moreover, the Adult Migrant English Program was a unique program never implemented before and, for this reason, the Department of Education had to design a brand-new program without recourse to previous experiences, or experiences in other countries.

The program was developed following the “oral approach” studied by Charles G. Fries, an American professor who studied the benefit of focusing on conversation skills as well as on reading skills for successful language acquisition. According to the scholar, conversation skills are crucial for the acquisition of the language. However, the reading component in the acquisition of the language can contribute to master language skills. Moreover, Fries focused his research on the teaching methodology. He believed that students had to learn *about* the language and not just learn the language. According to Fries, the main purpose of learning a foreign language is understanding. Words need to be learned in a coherent framework. In his work, Fries believed that understanding means entering sympathetically into the experiences of people. In the 1950s, Fries became concerned about the need to learn English to communicate around the world, especially after the mass migrations to the English speaking countries that characterised the first half of the century (Fries 1947, pp. 6-7). For this reason, the “oral approach” developed by Fries became the main pillar in the development of the English teaching program for migrants.

During the following years modern linguistics theories insisted on the oral approach and the theoretical beliefs were confirmed when those techniques were put into practice. The “natural” or “functional method”, putting conversation skills first, as supported by Fries crystallised as the most effective approach to learning a new language. Australia decided to design the language program based on the theoretical approach

developed by Fries. The main goal of the program was offering migrants language tools to express their personal thoughts adequately and not only understand the general context (Office of Education 1948). However, the theoretical approach developed by Fries was not the only one followed by the Commonwealth Office of Education. The second important researcher used by the Office of Education to design the language classes was Harold E. Palmer. Palmer was a leader of English language teaching in the twentieth century and a pioneer in the development of applied English linguistics. The new teaching approach created by Palmer changed the modern language teaching approach. In his studies, Palmer discussed the “direct method” used to teach a foreign language. The “direct method” was the technique used in class that exposed students to the written language and prohibited the use of students’ mother tongue. Palmer completely rejected this approach supporting what he defined as the “oral approach”. He believed that the teaching approach had to move from a vocabulary structure to a sentence structure, in order to help migrants to become as fluent as possible. Fluency, for Palmer, was not a matter of learning the vocabulary. According to him, fluency depends upon sentence structures which exist in the students’ mind. Because of the importance of speech and conversation, the teaching method implemented in class after these discoveries in the early twentieth century was changed, giving students the opportunity to talk more in class (Smith 1999, pp. 13-14).

Despite the studies conducted by Fries and Palmer that guided the design of the Adult Migrant English Program, some adjustment had to be made due to the composition of the classes. Dr Crossley, Head of the Department of German studies at the University of Sydney at that time, was hired by the Department of Education as the director of the program. Crucial decisions had to be made to support the program and its efficiency. Since migrants were coming for many countries and did not have common language that could be used in class to support the acquisition of English, Crossley decided that the oral method had to be the only possible option in class, despite the rejection of this method in the literature (Office of Education 1948). For this reasons, translation in class became a taboo. However, some teachers used translation as a supporting tool to support and motivate students (Crossley 1948). Eventually, those students who could learn English faster supported teachers in the translation of words and concepts, making translation an essential part of the learning process. Without the support of translation, teachers were forced to put words into sentenced and miming words and

concepts to help students to extrapolate the meaning.

It should also be remembered that, before the immigration waves occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, Australia had never faced the issue of teaching English as a second language. For this reason, the Department of Education did not have enough knowledge or resources, to design a program that focussed on the acquisition of English as a second language. Despite the governments' clear goal of assimilation through implementation of the Adult Migrant English Program, not all decisions made by the government had been considered thoroughly enough in the context of supporting the assimilation of migrants. For instance, the government decided to teach migrants the variety of English called Queen's English and not the Australian variety of English called "Strine". In Australia, until 1960, Queen's English was the only variety of English used in schools. For this reason, the Department of Education decided Queen's English had to be the variety of English that migrants had to learn in class. However, this choice created many difficulties for migrants in the comprehension of English since the English spoken in Australia was a different variety. This was definitely not a very efficient choice made by government to facilitate the assimilation of migrants and it affected the outcomes of the program adversely.

### The Situational Method and activities in class

The teaching method designed for the Adult Migrant English program was called *Situational Method* by the Department of Education. This method focused on real life situations migrants might encounter in their new everyday lives in Australia. While based on Fries' and Palmer's direct method, the Situational Method, had significant differences. While the direct method is based on the idea that teachers continue talking in class assuming that students were assimilating the language by listening to teachers, the Situational Method was based on predetermined structures and progression of the conversation to create a specific situation that could meet the need of teachers in class. Moreover, students had to respond to question in chorus and not one by one as supported by the direct method. This choice was made to allow students to constantly participate in class activities (Office of Education 1956, p. 7).

The Situational Method had four specific goals: it had to enable students to a) understand simple spoken English; b) speak English with a limited range of vocabulary and constructions; c) read simple English; d) write simple English. However, in class teachers focused on the first two components. More-

over, teachers helped migrants to learn the vocabulary by putting words into context. According to Crossley, reading skills had to be developed in a second stage (Crossley 1948). "Speech aims" soon became the most important element in the application of the Situational Method. Communication skills had to be learned by migrants as soon as possible to facilitate the assimilation process. However, teachers encountered many difficulties in class because students were adults. Adults were thinking in their mother tongue and thus, the learning process was very slow (Office of Education 1956, p. 7). For this reason, success with the Situational Method was slow and plagued with many difficulties.

One of the major concerns of teachers was the approach towards grammar in class. Because of the specific purpose of the classes, students had to learn only the most important features of the English grammar to allow them to become familiar with the construction of sentences such as *X is Y* (i.e. John is a mechanic; She is a nurse) (Crossley 1948; Office of Education 1956, p. 7). The decision to avoid the explanation of grammatical features in class was supported by the supervisor of migrant Education at that time, G. Pittman. According to Pittman, learning grammar and grammar terminology was not a primary need for migrants they had to learn only the functions of words in a sentence (Pittman 1949, p. 8).

The second issue the Office of Education faced in designing the Situational Method was the choice of vocabulary to teach migrants. According to the method, teachers had to use the vocabulary that migrants might need in real life in class. As the same time, words had to be easy to picture. For this reasons words like *soul*, *honour* and *hope* were not considered in class. In class, migrants were learning words that could help them to express themselves, to talk about their background and their family. Because of the importance of family in the lives of most migrants, words like *husband*, *wife*, *son*, *daughter* were included in the Basic Dictionary for migrants (Office of Education 1957).

The third and last important aspect about the Situational Method was pronunciation. As above mentioned, the Australian government decided to teach migrants the Queen's English variety based on the standard English variety taught in Australian schools. Pronunciation was covered in every single class starting with some compulsory drill to get the lesson into swing as the first step. Pronunciation classes also included other methods such learning to speak from a text or reader and singing, acting or some other forms of relaxation (Crossley 1948)

## Books and materials in class for teachers and students

Materials provided in class to support teachers became crucial for the efficiency of the Situational Method. A collection of objects was installed in classes: old billboards and snooker balls of different colours, sticks and stones, size and shapes, nails, rings, bottles, boards, ropes, string, wire, plates, cups, saucers, fruits, etc. In order to teach measures and weights, classrooms had scales, measuring jugs, rules and tape measures to learn and put into practice what would have been taught orally. There were also posters, maps, vocabulary pictures and large pictures of Australian scenery. Moreover, students learnt songs to speed the learning of pronunciation and enrich the vocabulary. Films were shown during the voyage to Australia and in Reception and Training centres.

The use of these tools helped migrants and teachers in class. However, teachers also requested a text book so students could study and do exercises while they were not in class. The textbook created by the Government was titled "English for Newcomers to Australia". It was prepared by the Commonwealth Office of Education for the Department of Immigration. The book was reviewed several times and the last edition was published on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1958 (Crossley 1948). Moreover, another book was written specifically for the voyage to Australia: this text book was called "English on the Way".

The Commonwealth Office of Education not only wrote the text-book but also created a bulletin called "English a New Language". The bulletin was published every two months and included teaching materials and suggestions for instructors in continuation classes. Inside these bulletins teachers could find a detailed syllabus about grammar, Australian studies, model lessons, classroom techniques, activities in the class, guide to treatment of topics such as the Australian way of life and matters concerning vocabulary. The syllabus on Australia included information on the historical background of the country and its place in the British Empire, the main geographic features of Australia, duties of the citizens to the country, the privileges of Australian citizens, Australian social customs and the system of money, weight and measurements. Over the years, bulletins became more detailed on the linguistic subject, adding articles written by professors and linguistic researchers like those written by Fries.

Another communication format between the Education Office and teachers was the newsletter called "Education news" written by Crossley. In the newsletter Crossley discussed teaching methods, suggestions

and common concerns raised by teachers. "Education news" was published every two months and sent to Education authorities in Australia and abroad.

## Results of the program

The ambitious and challenging program implemented by the Australian government went through many changes over the years. Since no country before Australia had ever implemented a similar program, Australian institutions had to reconsider and adjust many aspects to support the needs of teachers, migrants and ultimately institutions. The Situational Method, for instance, was revised many times over the 24 years of its implementation, introducing new components and tools to support the acquisition of the language. The results reached by the program only partially paid off the extraordinary effort put by the Australian institutions. The program definitely helped migrants to become familiar with the English language and migrants could learn basic vocabulary to survive in the new country. However, the process of assimilation through the language hoped for by the government could not be fully achieved.

In 1971 the Adult Migrant English Program ended with the closure of the last Reception and Training centre. In 1977 the last ship coming from Europe arrived, signalling the end of the "Populate or Perish" policy. The Australian government achieved the goal to populate the country and migrants largely contributed to the economic development of the country. However, the large presence of migrants coming from the same nations became an obstacle for the assimilation of newcomers. The Australian government, in drafting the program, did not consider the implication of relocating large numbers of people coming from the same country of origin. Most migrants, instead of taking part in the assimilation process, became culturally and linguistically resilient, maintaining their traditions and language (De Lazzari, Mascitelli 2016, p. 204). This was true especially for people coming from Italy and Greece. In realising the failure of the program, in 1970s the assimilation framework was discarded in favour of a new approach that supported multiculturalism.

In regard to the Situational Method, the Australian program remains the most complex, challenging, and unique program that supported assimilation through the language in history. The techniques used in class were only partially successful due to the composition of the classes. Results could only be seen if migrants individually decided to learn and master the language. Learning the language became a personal choice that could not be imposed. It should be noted, however, that the best results in learning the language within

the Adult Migrant English Program framework were achieved by adult males. Adult males were the most exposed to the language due to their employment in Australian firms and institutions. Women, instead, were staying at home so they learned the language more slowly than men and with poorer results despite the resources put into place by the government specifically for women.

## Conclusions

The assimilation of migrants through the learning of the language represents a unique experiment implemented by Australia. Host country language proficiency is still considered one of the most important elements for a successful integration today. Despite the commendable efforts of the Australian government of the day, assimilation became an unachievable goal. The Australian experience was the last structured attempt made by a Western country to support assimilation. Since the 1970s Australia has become one of the nations that supports multiculturalism, especially in light of the composition of the country's population. Almost 40 years since the end of the immigration program, Australia's population is characterised by a multi-eth population. However, as desired by governments since the early twentieth century, Australia has maintained a dominant British cultural and institutional identity and the acquisition of the English language still represents a crucial element for allowing migrants to enter and live in the country.

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