

Latvian language maintenance in Melbourne: a "core value" approach

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This paper reports on selected findings from research carried out in 1996, and focuses on the language attitudes and practices of those involved with the Latvian Saturday School in Melbourne. The framework for the analysis is based on Smolicz's "cultural core value" theory. Findings revealed the Latvian language to clearly be the core value amongst participants, thereby supporting findings of previous studies. Language maintenance was found overall to be of lesser importance in reality, based on findings concerning language use practices in participants' homes. Findings suggest that both imagination and sensitivity will be required to ensure the survival of Latvian in the future, given the changing profile of ethnic communities in Australia.

1. Australia's multiculturalism

The processes of immigration and refugee resettlement have brought to Australia a great diversity of peoples, and with them many cultures and languages. While the nature of the cultures from which migrants come varies enormously, so too do the circumstances under which they leave their homes to seek a new life. There are those for whom life has always been lived as a member of a minority group, with the associated struggles being all too familiar. In this process, some develop a degree of resilience and determination to preserve and maintain their culture at all costs. One such community is the Latvian community.

1.1. Latvians in Australia

Australia is host to the third largest community of Latvians living outside of Latvia. According to 1996 Census figures, Latvian is used at home by 6,208 Australian residents. While the Latvian community in Melbourne is very small, it has the greatest concentration of Latvian speakers - currently numbering 1,842. This number has dropped from around 2,200 since the 1991 Census, and is likely to keep decreasing for two reasons. Firstly, the community is an aging one, being made up primarily of immediate post-World War II displaced persons and their descendants. Secondly, the rate of

exogamy is continuing to rise, confirming the findings of Price (1988) that migrants are increasingly marrying outside their ethnic group. While the Latvian community is geographically spread out within Melbourne, it is still a close, cohesive community, with the focal point of social, cultural and educational activities being the Latvian community centre, *Latviešu Nams* 'Latvian House'. According to Jupp, despite the absence of visible linguistic enclaves, Baltic communities formed upon arrival "an elaborate network of social, cultural and educational clubs, all designed to preserve language and ethnic variety and to pass it on to their children. Most of the eastern European communities in Australia are still highly organised around such activities" (1991:99). One such activity is the ethnic school.

1.1.2. *Daugavas Skola* and *Melburnas Latviešu Vidusskola*

The Latvian ethnic school, or "Saturday School"¹, is situated at *Latviešu Nams*, and consists of classes at primary and secondary level. *Daugavas Skola*, the primary school (Prep - Year 8), was established in the early 1950s, and is an official "ethnic school", receiving government subsidies per enrolment. The secondary school (Years 9-12), *Melburnas Latviešu Vidusskola*, was established in 1972, and is part of the Victorian School of Languages (VSL)², a government school which provides programs in

Languages Other Than English (LOTEs) for students in Years 1 to 12 (Victorian Certificate of Education) who are unable to study those languages in their own schools.

Latvian is unique among the VSL languages offered in that the classes are held at a meeting place of the community - at *Latviešu Nams* - whereas Lithuanian, for example, is one of six languages taught at Princes Hill Secondary College. *Daugavas Skola* and *Melburnas Latviešu Vidusskola* have continued to decline over the years, although recent interest in the adult beginners' classes has been significant.

1.1.3. Focus of this study

This paper reports on selected findings from research carried out in 1996 into the role of the Saturday School in Latvian language maintenance in Melbourne (Lloyd-Smith 1996). Among the issues investigated at that time were the perceived role and success of the School, and the importance which those involved with the School attached to language maintenance; the latter issue is the focus of this paper.

2. Language maintenance theories

Linguists have long been seeking to identify a method of predicting language maintenance and language shift, a model in which to place both individual and group factors to enable the prediction of the future of a particular community language. The theories of Kloss and Giles, for example, have been greatly discussed in language maintenance literature. Kloss (1966) provided a list of factors which he sees as being either "clear-cut", in that they clearly promote maintenance, or "ambivalent", in that they may promote either maintenance or shift. In 1977 Giles introduced a slightly different list of factors which are said to influence what he calls "ethnolinguistic vitality". One factor viewed by both frameworks as positively contributing to language maintenance is *pre-emigration experience with language maintenance*.

Research has shown, however, that historically-acquired ability to cope with minority status does not ensure language maintenance in the immigrant context for all communities. Clyne (1991:87) gives Frisian-Dutch bilinguals as one example of a community who "abandoned" their languages after migration, despite previous success at maintenance.

Yet this sociohistorical factor is particularly significant in the case of the Latvian community. The history of the Baltic Republics has revealed the tenacity of the people in maintaining their mother tongues. As Clyne (1991:89) points out, Latvians in their own country have acquired through history the ability to cope with minority status, keeping their language alive through many periods of foreign rule. Throughout Latvia's period of enforced incorporation into the Soviet Union, for example, Russian was used widely as the official language, "forcing Latvians to abandon their national language in favour of Russian as a means of gaining advancement in their occupations" (Stockdale 1992:63-4). Yet Latvian survived, its people exhibiting "a strong attachment to, and desire to maintain preservation of, their native language" (Stockdale 1992:53). The strength of this attachment among *exiled* Latvians has also been observed. Miežitis states that "for half a century [since the communist takeover in June 1940] Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, separated from their homeland and their people, have continued to maintain their language and contributed to the ongoing evolution of their culture in exile throughout the four corners of the world" (1990:191). In the Australian Latvian community, this has been translated into a level of language *shift* which is only moderate.

2.1. Smolicz - cultural core values

Smolicz's "core value theory" looks in greater depth at these sociological and sociohistorical factors and is particularly important as it examines their realization in an *Australian* context. Smolicz, an Adelaide linguist of Polish background, introduced the term "core value" to refer to "those values that are regarded as forming the most fundamental components or heartland of a group's culture" and which "act as identifying values which are symbolic of the group and its membership" (Smolicz and Secombe 1985:11; see also Smolicz 1981). Smolicz's core value theory further postulates that community members who reject these values are endangering their group membership and that unanimous rejection will result ultimately in its "disintegration as a community that can perpetuate itself as an authentic entity across generations" (Smolicz and Secombe 1989:479). In situations in which the life of the culture is under threat, such as the minority situation, the unifying role of a core value is even more greatly accentuated.

In devising his theory, Smolicz was particularly interested in the importance attached to *language* in the context of

the cultural identity of communities. Smolicz argues that groups who are "language-centered", that is, for whom language is a core value, are more likely to maintain their language in minority situations. For Greeks, Latvians, Poles and Chinese, for example, language is said to be a core value and so, according to Smolicz, this accounts, at least in part, for their relative success in language maintenance. Dutch, in contrast, is not a core-value of the Dutch culture, and hence the rate of language shift within the Dutch community is high. As Smolicz's core value theory claims to have a degree of predictive power concerning maintenance and shift, it has specifically attracted the attention of linguists who have long been interested in these issues. Clyne finds the theory "tempting because of its ready applicability to the explanation and prediction of language maintenance trends" (1991:92). Yet he is quick to point out three problems which the theory does not adequately address: (i) problems in "group definition"; (ii) attitudinal changes such as ethnic revivals; and (iii) multiple group membership (Clyne 1991; Kipp, Clyne and Pauwels 1995). The second of these is most relevant to Baltic Australians.

This particular objection springs from the acknowledgment of social realities such as "ethnic revivals", a notion which has been much discussed since Fishman, Gertner, Lowy and Milan (1985). Does Smolicz's theory allow for a change in attitude towards the value of one's mother tongue? Whether the changes may be attributed to an "ethnic revival", or to more favorable attitudes towards community languages in this country, any theory which claims to be even partially predictive must recognize the dynamic nature of society.

Smolicz, in introducing his study on the core values of Greek, Latvian and Polish groups, acknowledges that his "data are representative only of that particular group of respondents, in that particular time and in that particular situation" (1985:14). Priedkalns, who administered the questionnaire to the Latvian respondents in Smolicz's (1985) study, carried out his own research (Priedkalns 1994) comparing the results of the first group of Latvians (surveyed in 1983) to those of a second similar group seven years later in 1990. Out of twenty-one cultural aspects, it was found that respondents from both groups considered the ability to speak, read and write Latvian as being most vital for the survival of their culture. However, while the 'core value' of the Latvian culture - its language - did not change in its perceived importance from 1983 to

1990, other cultural values did. What would be of great value to examine, therefore, is the impact of the proclamation of Latvia's independence in August 1991 on the cultural core values of Latvian Australians. Now that their Baltic homelands are free from the Soviet occupational regime, do Latvians (and Lithuanians and Estonians) around the world have the same motivation and commitment to maintaining their languages and cultures? Have their priorities changed?

While there are some problems with Smolicz's approach, its great value lies in having provided an instrument for exploring and highlighting cultural features which are considered to be of great importance to a particular community. In this study, Smolicz's instrument for evaluating cultural core values has been used in an abbreviated and adapted form in order to determine the importance of the Latvian language and the maintenance of Latvian to this section of the Latvian community.

3. Methodology

A questionnaire was completed by teachers, parents and students at the Latvian Saturday School as part of a research project conducted in 1996 (see Lloyd-Smith 1996). Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered via the inclusion of closed and open-ended items. The questionnaire included a core value instrument based on that used by Smolicz and Secombe (1985) and Priedkalns (1994); participants were asked to assess the importance of 15 cultural aspects to the survival of the Latvian community in Australia, on a scale from *not important* - *important* - *vitally important*.

Of those who participated in this project - 5 teachers, 27 parents, and 15 *Melburnas Latviešu Vidusskola* students - only four participants were not ethnically Latvian themselves, that is, neither of their parents were of Latvian descent. In these cases, however, the participant was married to a Latvian spouse.

4. Findings - Latvian language maintenance - in theory and in practice

4.1. Latvian cultural core values

Because of the small number of participants in the present study, the results of each of the three groups (teachers, parents, students) for the *vitally important* category have been combined. These are presented in Table 1 alongside results of the two studies carried out in the Latvian community in 1983 and 1990 (Smolicz and

Secombe 1985; Friedkalns 1994³). Participants in both the 1983 and 1990 studies were Latvian Summer School students. Friedkalns claims the two groups are "meaningfully comparable because they represented the same 'population', i.e., they came from Australian Latvian families active in Latvian national affairs and maintaining an active membership of the Latvian cultural community. The students were voluntarily attending activities designed to promote their group's language and culture and to encourage social interaction among young people of the same ethnic background" (1994:30). On this basis it seems reasonable to conclude that the participants of the present study may also be validly compared.

A comparison of the three studies clearly reveals that *language* is still the core value of the Latvian community, even post-independence. But equal with *reading and*

writing skills in the present study, is *having Latvian friends* - something which has moved up in strength since the previous studies (1990 - 3rd place, 1983 - 4th place).

There also seems to be a post-independence reclamation of *Latvian customs and celebrations* (4th place, cf. 8th place in 1990, 6th place in 1983) and the value of maintaining *close family ties* (5th place, cf. 7th place in 1990, 10th place in 1983). While the ranking of *folk music, songs and dances* is the same as in the last study (6th place), it is not as highly ranked as in 1983 (3rd place).

A look at the spread of responses across the three categories for *history and geography* (and also for the remaining cultural aspects for the present study) reveals that the percentage of responses in the *important* category is higher than the categories at either extreme - *not*

Table 1: Latvian cultural core values: Findings of studies conducted in 1996, 1990 and 1983

Cultural Aspect	Assessment of Importance	Rank	N=47 (1996)	Rank	N=60 (1990)	Rank	N=75 (1983)
Speaking and understanding Latvian	Vitally Important Important Not Important	1	85% 15% 0%	1	92% 8% 0%	1	91% 9% 0%
Reading and writing Latvian	VI I NI	2-3	66% 32% 2%	2	83% 17% 0%	2	71% 29% 0%
Having Latvian friends	VI I NI	2-3	66% 32% 2%	3	80% 20% 0%	4	65% 33% 2%
Latvian customs and celebrations	VI I NI	4	60% 36% 4%	8	53% 45% 2%	6	59% 37% 4%
Close family ties	VI I NI	5	57% 32% 11%	7	57% 42% 1%	10	44% 51% 5%
Latvian folk music, songs and dances	VI I NI	6	55% 41% 4%	6	66% 33% 1%	3	66% 33% 1%
Latvian history and geography	VI I NI	7-8	32% 64% 4%	11	45% 53% 2%	11	42% 52% 6%
Traditional Latvian arts and crafts	VI I NI	7-8	32% 60% 8%	14	33% 64% 3%	7	56% 40% 4%
Love of Latvian homeland	VI I NI	9	28% 57% 15%	4	71% 25% 4%	5	61% 31% 8%
Youth activities, eg. scouting	VI I NI	10	26% 57% 17%	5	68% 30% 2%	8	49% 51% 0%
Respect for the aged	VI I NI	11-12	21% 64% 15%*	12	44% 47% 9%	14	26% 60% 14%
Contributing to multicultural Australia	VI I NI	11-12	21% 43% 36%	13	35% 58% 7%	13	31% 53% 16%
Latvian literature	VI I NI	13-14	17% 72% 11%	10	46% 54% 0%	12	34% 58% 8%
Marrying a Latvian	VI I NI	13-14	17% 45% 38%	9	49% 41% 10%	9	47% 37% 16%
Religion (<i>baznīca</i> - 'church')	VI I NI	15	9% 49% 42%	15	15% 56% 29%	15	15% 40% 45%

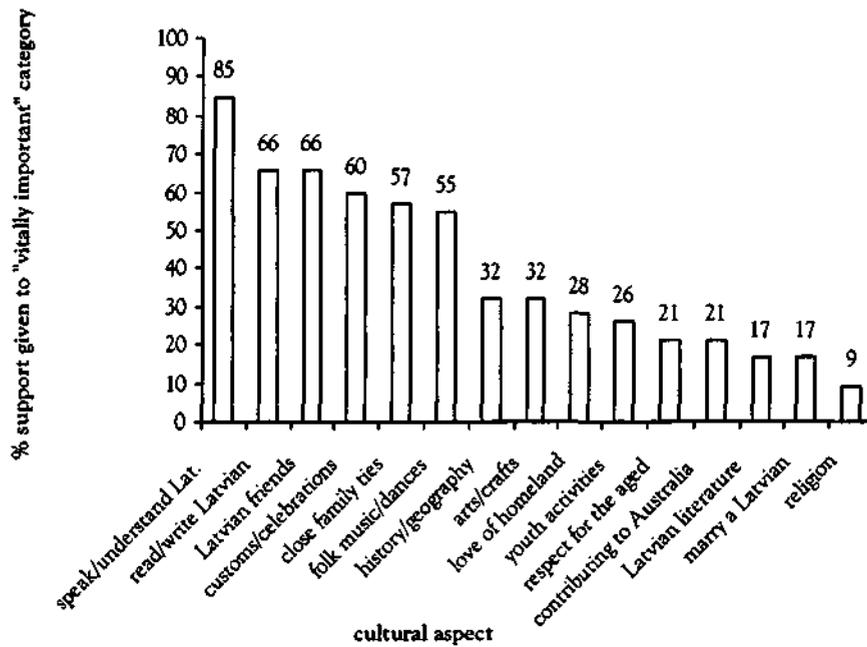


Figure 1: Cultural core values of the Melbourne Latvian community

important and vitaly important. It seems likely that many participants are quite hesitant to use superlatives - or hesitant to commit to a definite response in either direction. This may be the case, for example, for *respect for the aged*, where a far greater percentage of participants ranked it as *important* (64%), than *vitaly important* (21%) or *not important* (15%).

Looking at the spread of responses is important also where cultural aspects are given equal ranking based on percentage support for the highest category. For example, *respect for the aged* and *contributing to multicultural Australia* both received 21% support as being *vitaly important*, but *respect for the aged* had a considerably greater number of participants assessing it as *important* rather than *not important*. Therefore it may be considered a value more positively esteemed overall. On this basis, assigning 11th place to *respect for the aged* and 12th place to *contributing to multicultural Australia* could be quite justified.

What is particularly interesting also - when one compares the results of the three studies - is the drop in ranking of a *love for the Latvian homeland*. Motivation amongst Latvians in this part of the world to maintain ties with the homeland does not appear to be as strong now, after the struggle for Latvia's independence has been won. This would seem to be supported by findings of Lloyd-Smith (1996) in which helping students strengthen ties with

Latvians in Latvia was considered the least important and least successful of the Saturday School's functions.

Marrying a Latvian has also dropped significantly in importance (13th-14th place in 1996; 9th place in 1990 and 1983), as has *Latvian literature* (13th-14th place in 1996; 10th place in 1990, 12th place in 1983). *Religion* has consistently been of least importance to Latvians.

It is interesting that while *contributing to multicultural Australia* has risen slightly in its ranking (11th-12th place in 1996; 13th place in 1990 and 1983) in the present study, the spread of responses overall seems to indicate that this is thought of as less important than in 1990, when responses lay more heavily in the positive direction.

What is not apparent from Table 1 is a sense of how close the rankings are for some of the cultural aspects; ranking cultural aspects on the basis of percentages does take into account large and small differences between those percentages. It would seem that not only is it necessary to look at the "bigger picture" for the *spread* of responses across the different categories to get a more realistic view of what is considered important, but perhaps, as Priedkalns suggests, "the *grouping of ranks* with similar percentage support might be a more realistic representation of rank order" (1994:31).

In Figure 1, the cultural core values for participants in the present study are graphed for this very purpose. It clearly shows the great importance attached to oral-aural skills for participants. Two distinct "levels" of values are then apparent, from *reading and writing Latvian to folk music, songs and dances*, and from *history and geography to marrying a Latvian*. Religion is clearly seen as least important for the survival of the Latvian community in Australia (see Woods (fc) for a discussion of the role of the ethnic church in the Latvian community).

This instrument for assessing the core values of a culture is clearly of worth. It is easily replicated for a longitudinal comparison of findings of the same community at different points in time (as has been done in the present study) or for a latitudinal comparison between different communities' values (as in Smolicz and Secombe 1985). However, assessments of a finite list of cultural values can and should only be used as a *guide* as to what keeps a culture alive. Smolicz circumvents this by asking participants to provide oral or written 'memoirs' of their cultural experiences at home and at school. Participants in the present study were also given additional open-ended questions, but these were not as loosely structured as Smolicz's in order to ascertain participants' attitudes to a more specific set of issues. Firstly, the closed-type core value question was supported by an open-ended question in which participants were asked to *describe the essential characteristics of Latvian identity*.

4.2. Essential characteristics of Latvian identity

Participants' responses fell broadly into a number of different categories. For example, among those who wrote of the uniqueness of the Latvian language and culture was the following statement:

"Latvian language, our culture, traditions, songs, music, poetry, dance and history separate us from others, in fact this is the case for any country. We must be careful not to lose our identity and all merge into one big English speaking mass. This is a threat to all European countries. Our highest priority is to maintain our *language*, for without that we have nothing to identify with that makes us any different from others." (P17F)

This was reiterated by one of the teachers:

"First and foremost is the Latvian language. Being able to speak, read, write fluently is essential in order to feel really part of the community." (T5M)

Latvian identity was expressed by others in more abstract terms, for example:

"To be a Latvian is to feel and know in your heart a patriotism, pride and belonging to Latvia." (P3F).

Another participant summed up her thoughts with the statement:

"Ultimately to be a Latvian is a feeling!" (P18F)

Some participants also introduced the question of blood ties as a prerequisite for "Latvianess", for example:

"To be a Latvian you must have some relation that was/is Latvian. You must see yourself as a Latvian and understand and call yourself a Latvian." (S5M)

Younger students in particular emphasized behavioral aspects, such as involvement in community activities:

"To be able to say you are a Latvian, I think by attending MLV and *Daugavas Skola* and appreciating the ethnic background and celebrations as well as customs." (S6F)

Other participants interpreted the question more from the point of view of the personality traits thought to be typical of Latvians:

"This is a tough question! I suppose the old 'work ethic' is one point. The 'young folk' believe singing and drinking to excess is important. Having been raised in a Latvian household - with the customs and language - certainly gives you the identity, but I don't believe there are definable characteristics peculiar to Latvians. We're basically hard-working optimists who like to argue with each other and make up with a drink and a song afterwards." (P22M)

Another participant expressed her view of typical Latvian characteristics in this way:

"Hard-working, respect for the establishment, conservative, likes symmetry/balance, strict with children, very highly esteems education, close family ties. Even though it has always been a burden to be a Latvian (e.g. going to school when your friends go to footy), it has always been rewarding and satisfying in a way Australian society is not". (P8F)

One student felt that his Latvian identity gave him access to something Anglo-Australian peers did not have:

"It means you are unique in that you have something alternative to the majority, a language." (S18M)

Finally, another student made a number of humorously simple, but nonetheless very perceptive comments when he wrote:

"Latvians don't really have any characteristics, they just look normal, maybe they have a sticker on their car [i.e., of a Latvian flag] that's all. It's OK to be a Latvian because it's sort of fun, you can talk it and no one will understand you, personally it's OK." (S14M)

4.3. Being a Latvian without the Latvian language

All participants were also asked for their views on whether a person can be a true Latvian-Australian without speaking Latvian; 44 of the 47 participants supplied responses, which were categorized as being a 'yes', 'no' or an 'undecided' response. These are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: *Can a person be a true Latvian-Australian without speaking Latvian?*

Participants	No	Yes	Undecided
Parents	12	4	8
Students	8	7	-
Teachers	2	3	-
Totals:	22	14	8

While responses for teachers and students were divided, responses for parents were clearly negative, for example:

"No - because the Latvian language is what unites us. Without the language we would not differ from the rest of the English-speaking population.

Latvian culture and its traditions are unique to our language and cannot be translated into English effectively." (P17F)

Laar (1990:250) reports the findings when the equivalent question was asked of fifteen mothers of children attending an Estonian kindergarten in Toronto: thirteen of them felt that a person could not be an Estonian-Canadian or an Estonian (depending on how they classified themselves) without speaking the language. To an extent it is not surprising that parents are the most strict on this issue – it is the parents who (generally speaking) have felt strongly enough about their children being able to speak the community language to enrol them in such a program.

One student indicated his clear rejection of non-Latvian-speaking Latvians with the following statement:

"No, because although they may be of Latvian descent they have chosen to stay Australian and not become bilingual which therefore excludes them as Latvians." (S7F)

On the other hand, some participants expressed a positive view of the situation, and of the contribution that non-Latvian speakers may make:

"Yes, I have friends who have Latvian parents but don't speak the language. The fact is they believe they are Latvian, want to learn and partake in Latvian activities, e.g. festivals, dancing." (S9F)

While some participants commented that a Latvian-Australian should at least attempt to speak the language, others spoke of the need for tolerance and understanding:

"Some people find it very difficult to learn other languages and Latvian is not an easy language to learn. If their interest is otherwise very genuine and sustained, then, yes, this person could still be accepted as a true Latvian-Australian" (T4F)

The following response painted a somewhat grim picture, with a non-Latvian-speaking community viewed as being inevitable:

"Yes - but I think it is difficult. I believe that will basically be the case in Australia in about 30 years

or so. I believe that Latvianism will then be like a hobby - like some Australian Scots who know their tartan and have seen Edinburgh - but that's about all." (T2M)

Other participants spoke of the existence of different "types" of Latvians:

"I suppose there are degrees of Australian 'Latvianness' - along a continuum, e.g., the child of a 'mixed' marriage who neither understands nor speaks Latvian is not as 'true' a Latvian as a child who has Latvian parents and who does speak the language. What is 'true': blood or behaviour? A non-Latvian speaking Latvian ('diluted' or not) does not glean any real benefit/knowledge/satisfaction from their heredity - their 'Latvianness' is only a genetic fact." (P2F)

Clearly, this issue is a difficult one. For it has the potential to alienate certain members of the community - which could ultimately threaten the existence of a community as small as the Latvian one. What motivates participants' responses in either direction here, though, is a concern for the survival of the Latvian language. For this reason, participants were asked for their views on *what should be done to ensure the language is not lost*.

4.4. Ensuring the survival of the Latvian language

Responses to this question were many and varied. Some emphasized the need for greater home-use of the language, for example:

"The Latvian language must be introduced at an early age (from birth) and spoken in the home" (P4F)

The need for greater commitment from parents was also expressed in this way:

"A commitment by parents to ensure that all available knowledge is passed on to the next generation - their children - via avenues such as speaking Latvian at home, Latvian school, attending Latvian cultural events, reading Latvian books and maintaining ties with Latvians in Latvia." (T1F)

Other participants emphasized the role of the Latvian Saturday School in helping the community maintain the language:

"Encouraging more young parents to send their children to a Latvian language school especially if there is a lack of Latvian spoken at home." (P23F)

Encouraging youth also formed a theme through many of the participants' responses. Some participants spoke of the need to present the language itself in a more appealing manner for young people:

"Teach more Latvian slang/street talk to make the language more accessible/current/relevant to the 15-21 year group" (P6M)

Along with this too, came suggestions for better and more relevant resources for the classroom. Other participants suggested establishing/revitalizing new or existing community activities:

"Need a community centre, e.g., bar, squash courts, gym or something similar that will draw young members - a place to meet. Latvian House is an eye sore. I almost feel it is all too late." (P13F)

Other activities suggested required greater involvement with the Latvian homeland, for example:

"Send people whose Latvian is weaker on exchange/cultural visits to Latvia - every Latvian should visit their homeland. Children could be enrolled in some sort of exchange program (but this of course needs funding - but if implemented could be very beneficial)." (P14F)

Another parent suggested the following as an alternative:

"Australia is so isolated from Europe and Latvia - maybe a Latvian child from Latvia could come on exchange and befriend the Australian/Latvian children, e.g., sponsor a child every year to attend the school" (P14F)

Such comments are interesting in the light of earlier discussions concerning the general lack of enthusiasm for maintaining ties with, or a love of, the homeland.

Some participants feel that the survival of Latvian depends on its ability to withstand the inevitable influence of other languages:

"To ensure the survival of the language in Australia, some contact with Latvia must be maintained, or the language will calcify. However, Latvian in Latvia is not entirely healthy. More should be done in Latvia to preserve the language from the onslaught of Anglicisms and Russian constructions that deform meaning in Latvian. This involves Latvians in Latvia regaining their sense of history and pride in it." (T3M)

A similar comment was made by one of the parents:

"Latvians in Latvia are slowly destroying and losing our unique language by using so many English/American words and most publications that come out of Latvia are rife with this cancer. We, outside of Latvia, have always strived to keep our Latvian as pure as possible and it feels as though our efforts all these years are being undermined and eroded." (P17F)

While some participants feel that Latvian is being lost because of the declining number of functions and gatherings at which Latvian is spoken, others take a different approach, for example:

"Enable non-Latvian speaking children to participate in craft, dancing and singing activities and this would encourage the non-speakers to take an interest in the culture and later probably an interest in the language...The community has lost its youth by having firm views about only being a Latvian if you speak the language. These children also have a right to their heritage and they are excluded often because of the decisions made by their parents for a variety of reasons." (S1F)

This feeling was summed up by the statement of another student, who wrote:

"Some snub people who are Latvian and don't speak the language but I believe it could be with the help of these people that the culture will continue." (S9F)

4.5. Language proficiency and practices

In order to gauge the importance of language maintenance to this section of the Latvian community in practice and not just in theory, participants were asked to describe the language use patterns in their own home. This was prefaced by a question which asked participants to assess their own Latvian language skills. Of the 47 participants in this study, only one had no Latvian language skills at all. (This participant was a non-Latvian parent who completed the questionnaire because her Latvian husband was away). While all the teachers were fluent in all four skills areas, other participants' assessments varied, but generally showed strength in comprehension skills.

Responses from participants concerning the languages spoken in their homes revealed that *at least some* Latvian was regularly spoken in the homes of all participants except for an adult VSL/MLV student who lived with friends and who indicated that English only was spoken between them. The findings overall were quite typical in that parents spoke more Latvian to the children than the children spoke to them. If grandparents lived in the family home, as was the case for a small number of participants, *Latvian only* or *Latvian mostly* was used in communication with them. Siblings used more English with each other than Latvian. Husbands and wives, too, often used more English with each other than they used with their children. Latvian is used clearly more *intergenerationally* than *intragenerationally*, thus confirming the findings of Clyne (1991:113) and others (see for example Smolicz and Secombe 1981:78-85).

To sum up, then, the Latvian language is attributed great importance by this section of the Latvian community. It is considered by all groups of participants as being the most vital aspect of the culture. This finding was confirmed by the many definitions of Latvian ethnicity which made reference to the uniqueness of the Latvian language. It was also evidenced by the overall rejection of the proposition that a person could be a true Latvian-Australian without speaking Latvian. Finally, its importance was attested to by the large number and variety of creative suggestions made for keeping the language alive.

Fishman and others have emphasized the fact that positive attitudes towards a language do not of themselves guarantee the survival of that language (Fishman *et al.* 1985; Romaine 1995:43; Clyne 1991:92).

Laar, in her study on Estonian ethnic identity, concluded that "the great importance attributed to the language did not translate itself into actual widespread, exclusive use of the Estonian language at home or in other circumstances and places in which it could have been possible" (Laar 1990:250). While the same must be concluded for the Latvian community based on the overall results of the present study, it is clear that the desire for language maintenance is present and strong. The tangible expression of this desire requires much dedication. The future, it seems, lies heavily with those who show great perseverance and commitment to maintaining the Latvian language and the heritage it bears.

5. Conclusion and directions for further research

The present study has examined a number of issues pertaining to language maintenance amongst the Latvian community of Melbourne. It has become clear, however, that the implications of these findings are of wider-reaching importance.

The Latvian language was found to be the core value of this section of the Latvian community, which supported findings of previous studies in the community. Language maintenance was found overall to be of lesser importance in reality, based on findings concerning language use practices in participants' homes.

These findings point to the deeper and more complex question of motivation for language maintenance: what drives a small community to persevere with language maintenance when all the odds seem stacked against it? Why do the Latvians in Australia continue to keep their schools open despite dwindling numbers, lack of resources and a generally gloomy future? Political and historical motivations were obviously strong enough immediately following immigration - as highlighted earlier- but what about today?

Smolicz's core value theory has illustrated the importance of the Latvian language for Latvians. Language maintenance is therefore an obvious reason for sustaining activities such as the Saturday School. Cultural maintenance, too, is of importance. Yet there seems to be something deeper driving the Latvians - something which might be termed "community maintenance".

Results of the present study seem to point to a more complex understanding of "community" amongst Latvians than simply the concept of the "local" (i.e.

Australia) and the "source" (i.e. Latvia). For Latvians, "community" means the world-wide community of Latvians. While immigrant Latvians largely severed ties with the homeland during the communist regime, there has always existed a very active level of communication and dialogue between Latvians throughout other parts of the world. In this context, the Latvian Saturday School - which is considered so important in helping students develop friendships (see Lloyd-Smith 1996) - may be viewed as one part of a network of activities designed to bring Latvians together. While it is a local activity, it is linked to the global network via extensions such as scouting and guiding, cultural festivals and youth congresses. Latvia's status as the homeland is celebrated, yet Latvians throughout the world see themselves as a united people and seek thus a means of community maintenance. Though sometimes hindered by communication problems between Latvians from Latvia and those outside of it (Priedkalns, pers. comm.), the concept of the "Latvian community" is global in nature and expression.

While such comments take the issue into the realm of sociology and away from sociolinguistics, they highlight immense opportunities for research.

Other issues raised by the present study also warrant further discussion. It was found, for example, that the Latvian language is considered most vital for the survival of the Latvian community in Australia. If the community's survival depends on the sustained existence of the language, the language's survival depends in turn on the existence of domains in which it may be used. Lloyd-Smith (1996) found that while Latvian is generally used during class time at the Saturday School, Daugavas Skola students admitted that English is predominantly used in the break with their friends. Smolicz and Secombe found the same phenomenon occurring in Polish schools, and referred to the "subtle way in which the Polish school was basically an English-speaking domain." (1981:80-81). The present study also found that friendships with other Latvians were considered vital to the community's survival - even though research has shown that peers of the same ethnic background still tend to use the language of the majority when they are together (see Clyne 1991:55-61, 116). While some Latvian was used in the homes of all participants involved in the present study, often it was only irregularly spoken. The existence of opportunities in which the language may be spoken are vital for the survival of a language, and so

some consideration needs to be given to whether greater discipline is required within these particular domains. Having looked specifically at Latvians in Australia using Smolicz's core value theory, Priedkalns concluded that the survival of the Latvian culture is essentially linked to the survival of the language, saying that "language maintenance for the Latvians is an effort to preserve their ethnic identity" (1994:30). He concludes by strongly emphasizing the need for Baltic language programs to be adequately supported and protected.

On the other hand, some participants in this study indicated that by being strict about the need to speak Latvian to be truly accepted in the Latvian community, many were being alienated. This also needs to be considered given the increasing rate of exogamy amongst Latvians (see for example, Putniņš 1985) and the increasing lack of importance attributed to marrying a Latvian, as shown in the present study. Research currently being conducted which examines the role of ethnic churches in language maintenance in a range of ethnic communities (Woods, *fc*), also points to the necessity for great wisdom when language maintenance must be appropriately prioritised alongside other pursuits, such as the transmission of faith to future generations.

The issues presented in this paper are pertinent not only to the members of the Latvian community upon which this study was based, but also to other - particularly small - communities whose survival is threatened. The long-term survival of the community depends on the younger generation being committed to maintaining aspects vital to its identity - in the case of Latvian, the Latvian language. It has become clear that many domains - such as the home and the ethnic school - are in an interdependent relationship, and each requires the other to be performing at the optimum level for language maintenance to be successful and stable. Future research is required to determine new ways in which these domains can work together, whilst being maximally sensitive to those on the periphery of ethnic communities: those without adequate community language skills. Given the changing profile of ethnic communities, the future of community languages will indeed "depend on imaginative ways of home language maintenance tapping the resources of language maintenance institutions and taking advantage of support systems" Clyne (1991:111).

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Endnotes

1. The term "Saturday School" is commonly used in Australia to refer to community-based language/culture programs which typically run on a Saturday, however some communities run similar programs on Sunday mornings. In the case of the Latvian community, "Saturday School" is used as an umbrella term for both *Daugavas Skola* (an official "ethnic school") and *Melburnas Latviešu Vidusskola* (part of the VSL).
2. Among the forty languages offered in 1996 were Albanian, Amharic, Farsi, Kurdish, Khmer, Pushto, Sinhala, Ukrainian, as well as Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian. Teaching in all languages and at all levels is based on common course outlines. While the priority of the VSL is to offer language programs to school age students, adult students may attend VSL classes held outside Melbourne, and may enrol in VCE classes where there are vacancies.
3. Priedkalns (1994) makes a comparison of the two earlier studies, and rectifies the ranking errors which exist in Smolicz and Secombe (1985). Data presented in Table 1 is therefore adapted from Priedkalns. It should be noted that the separate categories for *religion* (doctrine, liturgy, laws, etc.)

which appear in Priedkalns (1994) have been collapsed into the one category, as have *history and geography*, and *folk songs and music with folk dances*. Percentages have been adjusted accordingly. *Traditional way of life, helping fellow ethnics* (Priedkalns 1994) and *teaching other ethnics your language* (Smolicz and Secombe 1985) were not included in the instrument as it was used in the present study, and so the percentages for these categories have not been reproduced. These matters are reflected in an adjusted ranking of Priedkalns' data.

4. Thanks are due to Uldis Ozolins, who first suggested this concept during invaluable discussions in 1996.

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A Tribute to Michael Clyne

As Michael's student and research assistant, I have been blessed to have experienced first-hand the passion and patience, the enthusiasm and encouragement, and the generosity and genuine concern for which he is renowned. The depth and breadth of his knowledge is both overwhelming and inspiring, but even more so is the humility with which he conveys this knowledge to others. I have always enjoyed working with him and learning from him, and look forward to our continuing association. Happy birthday Michael.