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**IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION INTO THE MAINSTREAM  
CULTURE IN AUSTRALIA  
(AS REFLECTED IN PERSONAL ADVERTISEMENTS)**

Numerous magazines and newspapers currently contain pages of personal advertisements. Self-advertising in various kinds of media, including the radio and the internet, has become a popular way of meeting prospective partners.

Some studies explain the increase in the popularity of personal advertising by alienation and loneliness which stem from high population density in urban areas. Other studies view personal advertising as “a healthy and innovative adaptation to rapid social change” (Bolig, Stein and McKenry, quoted in Tither) and as “relationally efficient and ‘natural’ response” to the work centred, time-pressured and mass-mediated circumstances of modern life (Coupland in: Tither).

The presented pilot study considered advertisements submitted by immigrants to Australia in current newspapers, i.e. *The Age*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *Weekly Southern Courier*. The aim was to determine how these people align with the values and their linguistic manifestations in advertisements submitted by other Australians. As M. Merleau-Ponty says, “I may speak many languages, but there remains one in which I live”. At stake is their acculturation, i.e. whether they are still in “the ‘permanent immigrant’ state, where one is always able to understand the words but is never completely capable of comprehending all their connotations” (Valdes 1986: 21), or whether they passed beyond that threshold and became virtually ‘native’. The paper discusses only statistically interesting differences between the two groups.

In spite of Australia’s being home to many ethnic groups, Caucasians are in the majority, as recent statistics of 1999 show:

Anglo-Celt	70%
West Europe	7%
South Europe	7%
Asia	6%
East Europe	4%
Middle East	3%
Indigenous	2%
Other	1%

### Strategy

It is known that individuals reveal their social identity in communication. When communicating, people unwittingly demonstrate how they feel about their position in society and how they want to be perceived and viewed by other people.

Personal advertisements are pieces of phatic communication, the main goal of which is to establish social contact (Jakobson 1960). Personal advertisements are habitually limited in space. The advertisers – in the attempt to conform to the established requirements – put in their advertisements things and values they consider most important in life. They attempt to give their devices maximum efficiency, valid for an unlimited number of addressees with a potential focus on a single reader. The writer is preoccupied with the way s/he wants his/her message be decoded by the reader so that not only the meaning but the attitude to what is being conveyed is shared by the reader. This attempt may not be successful because the authors of personal advertisements are not experts in writing and are not always fully aware of the complexity of interplay between mere communication and the expressive, affective and aesthetic connotations.

For the above reasons, the research also considered male and female advertisements separately, as there is a recognised “asymmetrical semantic filter” (Tannen, quoted in Langsdorf 1994: 11). This means that words may be understood differently by men and by women and also bring different associations (e.g. ‘blonde’ may be just a description of ‘fair hair’ but may bring up associations of ‘sex appeal’) (cf. Stolt & Trost 1976).

The usual structure of a personal advertisement consists of two parts, i.e. the writer’s self-description (SD) (attractive, outgoing, sincere...), including self-identification (SI) (guy, gent, male, lady...), a bridging verb (seeking, looking for...) and a partner’s description (PD) (slim, educated...) and identification (PI) (lady, girl, male...). This information is frequently complemented by ‘viewed relationship’, (for friendship, lasting relationship...):

#### Example 1

OUTGOING 24 Aust.guy, 5'8", brown hair, blue eyes, sense of humour, likes outdoor activities, movies, would like to meet slim lady 21–26 years of age for friendship, view relationship if suited.  
(*Daily Telegraph*)

The first part of the advertisement is most important as it should encourage the reader to read on.

### Ethnicity/nationality

Ads submitted by Australian men frequently refer to Australian nationality (in 26%), less in women (6%). This is especially so among the advertisers in Sydney where numerous minorities of non-European descent have settled down. ‘Australian’ may also suggest that the advertiser is a Caucasian born in Australia, as

the nationality reference is frequently accompanied by information on 'blue' / 'green eyes' and 'fair hair'. This indicates that the generally accepted concept of a true Australian is that of a white Australian of Anglo-Saxon background. This study considered only ads in which the nationality/ethnicity was explicitly mentioned, such as in Example 1.

Reference to nationality can be found only in 14% of men who come from other ethnic backgrounds and 7% of women. To be able to say that a person is 'Australian' seems to be highly desirable when looking for a partner. For this reason, some advertisers from other ethnic backgrounds stress their Australian affiliation:

### **Example 2**

GREEK AUSTRALIAN 55yo, interested in going to movies...  
(*Weekly Southern Courier*)

The following table giving the most frequently wished nationality in the prospective partners (if stated) indicates that Australian partners are preferred by females from other ethnic backgrounds and by Australian women while Australian men prefer Asian partners. Rumours say that it is so because Asian women are less assertive, more obedient and perhaps better homemakers. Men from other ethnic backgrounds look for a European if they themselves come from a European background, usually Greek or Italian.

MAU	Moth. nationality	FAU	Foth. nationality
Asian (26%)	European (16%)	Australian (20%)	Australian (25%)
Australian (10%)	Asian (13%)	British/Anglo-Saxon (20%)	European (12%)
European (3%)	Australian (13%)	European (10%)	American/ Canadian (12%)

MAU = male Australian; Moth. nationality = male other nationality  
FAU = female Australian; Foth. nationality = female other nationality  
'Asian' incl. Chinese, Thai, Japanese

### **Character qualities/ skills**

While there is not much difference between the groups as to the described physical qualities both in self and partner's descriptions, and therefore the issue is not discussed here, the category of character qualities and skills offers a different picture. Females of other nationalities stress their being intelligent, educated and caring, while Australian women prefer having fun and say they are romantic and warm. They value qualities of character rather than intellect. Men do not consider education in their partners as being important, nevertheless, some of them would like their female partner be intelligent, and they also would like their partner have a sense of humour, none of the qualities mentioned by Australian women. Women from other ethnic backgrounds stress education in their partners, most probably because they look for security and protection and consider

an educated partner to have a secure job with reasonable income. The same would apply to a professional. Australian women, on the other hand, stress character qualities which do not have a materialistic overtone.

### Females

FOthSD		FAUSD	
Educated	24%	fun-loving	20%
intelligent	24%	warm(personality)	10%
Caring	20%	active	10%
Loving	8%	romantic	10%
Sense of humour	8%	sense of humour	0

FOthPD		FAUPD	
Educated	24%	genuine	20%
intelligent	20%	sincere	20%
professional	20%	sense of humour	20%
Caring	16%	secure	10%
Honest	16%	educated	0
Sincere	16%	intelligent	0
non-smoker	16%	caring	0

### Males

MOthSD		MAUSD	
non/social smoker	12%	non/social drinker	23%
sense of humour	10%	non/social smoker	23%
professional	7%	caring	17%
Romantic	7%	secure	17%
Caring	0	educated	8%

MOthPD		MAUPD	
Romantic	20%	intelligent	10%
sense of humour	10%	affectionate	7%
intelligent	3%	sincere	7%
affectionate	3%	sense of humour	5%
educated	0	educated	1.5%

(For explanation of abbreviations see above)

### Hobbies/Interests

The advertised hobbies and interests which rank at the top among Australians are given little attention among the 'other nationalities' groups. Apart from travel, which is popular both among Australians and other ethnic groups (MAu 23%, MOth 13%, FAu 20%, FOth 24%), and which may be a code for sufficient means, 'other nationality' groups would rather be engaged in some sort of socializing, such as dining, movie going, dancing, and cooking, than activities connected with Australian open spaces. None of them mentions bush walking, camping or BBQ, i.e. activities which are popular among other Australians.

### Viewed Relationship

Though the purpose of personal advertising is clear to all involved, more than half of the advertisers mention the goal of their looking for a partner; they do so in describing the viewed relationship, whereby friendship and relationship occur most frequently (Au men 79%, MOth 50%, FAu 30%, FOth 60%).

Wierzbicka (1997) includes 'friendship' in her study of key words that are culturally revealing. She looks at collocations with 'friend' and finds that they may be controversial, such as a 'faithful friend' but also a 'false friend', a 'steadfast friend' but also a 'fair weather friend' or a 'summer friend'. 'Friendship' is viewed as something permanent, as reflected in collocations such as 'eternal friendship'. Other collocations included the words 'steady' and 'constant'.

The advertisers in our sample challenge Wierzbicka's claim of "friendship as something permanent" as they do not see 'friendship' as something 'eternal' or 'steady'. 'Friendship' seems to have slipped into the same usage as Wierzbicka describes in 'friend':

...in the old usage of the word friend, people were usually expected to 'love' their friends... (Now) there is a qualitative difference, which roughly speaking, can be linked with the contrast between 'affection' and 'enjoyment'.... In the older English literature, people 'loved' their friends, or felt and thought of them as 'dear' and 'dearest'. By contrast, in contemporary English..., people are more likely to talk about 'friends' in terms of 'enjoyment' 'pleasure' and 'fun'. (Wierzbicka 1997: 51–52)

These terms can be observed in collocations such as 'fun & friendship'. The collocation casual friendship even denies the fundamentals of the traditional concept of 'friendship': casual does not presume 'commitment' and 'faithfulness' to another person.

**Example 3**

CHARMING AUSTRALIAN BUSINESSMAN... seeks casual friendship... (*Weekly Southern Courier*)

Nor do the advertisers who leave friendship unspecified bring any evidence to their understanding of the word in its traditional meaning, as most of them see it as the 'first stage' which may develop into relationship.

**Example 4**

AUSSIE MALE... female 18–20 with similar interests for friendship view permanent relationship. (*Daily Telegraph*)

Relationship thus seems to be understood as involving more commitment, as being lasting or permanent, as a word that substitutes for the 'old fashioned' 'marriage'. And indeed, the most frequent collocate is permanent, i.e. permanent relationship. One can thus presume that 'relationship' may, in some situations replace the traditional 'friendship'. Western culture sometimes denies the existence of lasting friendship between the opposite sexes. This may be the reason why Australian women do not use the word 'friendship'; they only say 'relationship' without any further attribute, i.e. "for r'ship".

There are, however, also examples which contravene the hypothesis of stability and permanency of 'relationship'. Some advertisers do not see 'relationship' be limited in the terms of time and/or commitment as most collocates suggest, but allow it a rather free course even allowing the interpretation of 'an occasional date':

**Example 5**

AUSSIE 40, seeks Aussie or Asian, 30–40, casual to permanent relationship. Sports, beaches... (*Weekly Southern Courier*)

Marriage is almost a 'taboo' word among the viewed relationships, used by only 5% MAu and 3% Moth. and 0% Fau and 12% FOth. 'Marriage' seems to be out of date: its place has been taken over by 'permanent relationship' and 'lasting relationship'. "'Marriage' is a legal union of a man with a woman for life" (*Macquarie Dictionary*). Words suggesting life-long commitment are not popular today in that they suggest the loss of 'personal freedom'. Unlike marriage, one can always walk out of a relationship as there are no documents, no authorities one would be liable to. 'Relationship' is not the final stage. Most (80%) advertisers who mention marriage see it as the culmination of some preceding phase, i.e., of companionship, friendship or relationship:

**Example 6**

ASIAN LADY good looking...well educated,... seeks educated man – preferably businessman 39–46 y/o with similar interests for a long term rel/ship, marriage... (*Daily Telegraph*)

All the females who mention marriage are of foreign origin, usually Asian. We can presume that they are affected by their ethnic culture that is not so open to free cohabitation. Marriage may also ensure permanent residency and some income in case the marriage breaks up. On the other hand, men who advertise for marriage are looking for an Asian or a partner of any nationality. Thus they convey that they respect the traditions of other cultures and that they are ready to make the commitment. Other advertisers mention their Christian religion. The Church does not approve of cohabitation in a 'relationship' without marriage. By saying marriage the advertisers signal they are practising believers.

Friendship –permanent relationship		Relationship
MAu	32%	47%
MOth	10%	40% /marriage 3%/
FOth	20%	40% /permanent/ marriage 12%
FAu		30%

### Conclusion

Advertisements submitted by people from other cultures do not exhibit striking differences in vocabulary or structure. It is rather the offered and required qualities, such as education, intellectual activities, socializing and permanent commitment in relationships which point at the values recognized in their home cultures, thus contrasting with the easy-going, laid back attitudes which can be traced in advertisements submitted by other Australians. Though not "fully in line" with Australians, people from other cultures enrich Australian society with traditional values.

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